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Hexahelix Communication Network Collaboration for Bengkulu Tourism Brand Identity

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the collaboration of the hexahelix communication network in building the brand identity of Bengkulu tourism. The long-term goal of this study is to provide strategic recommendations for stakeholders, including the government, academics, business actors, communities, media, and tourists, in strengthening the image and attractiveness of regional tourism through a collaborative approach based on strategic communication. Specific targets to be achieved include identifying the roles and contributions of each actor in the hexahelix *network*, evaluating the effectiveness of synergy between stakeholders in promoting Bengkulu tourism, and developing innovative and adaptive communication strategies to digital trends and tourism market needs. This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of content analysis, in-depth interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with relevant parties, such as the Tourism Office, academics, tourism business actors, local communities, media, and tourists. The data obtained were analyzed thematically to understand the dynamics of collaboration in the Hexahelix communication network and its implications for strengthening the brand identity of Bengkulu tourism. The results of the study indicate that collaboration between actors is still partial and sporadic, so strong regulations, participatory communication patterns, and ongoing coordination are needed. The research recommendations are expected to be a reference in developing a more collaborative, creative, and sustainable promotional strategy to strengthen the position of Bengkulu tourism at the national and international levels.

Keywords: *Branding, Networking, Collaboration, Hexahelix Communication, Tourism*

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a vital role in the economic development and social life of a region, including Bengkulu Province. Legally, Bengkulu was designated a province under Law Number 9 of 1967, which also designated Bengkulu City as its capital. Located on the island of Sumatra, Bengkulu is located at coordinates 5°40' – 2°0' South Latitude and 40' – 104°0' East Longitude, with an area of 19,788.70 km². Bengkulu Province borders West Sumatra, Lampung, the Indian Ocean, Jambi, and South Sumatra (Novrianda & Shar, 2022a) . With its strategic location, Bengkulu's tourism sector has significant potential to drive economic growth. Its diverse culture and customs, combined with its geographical location

encompassing sea, land, and mountains, further enhance the region's appeal. Bengkulu has the potential to become a promising investment region and a key driver of national economic activity. Furthermore, Bengkulu province has significant potential to develop as a competitive tourist destination compared to other regions in Indonesia (Putri, 2021) .

Tourism as an economic sector plays a crucial role in regional development, not only as a tourist attraction but also as a significant contributor to state revenue. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in 2022, the number of foreign tourist visits to Indonesia reached 16.11 million, an 8.05% increase from the previous year. Indonesia's tourism foreign exchange earnings in 2022 also increased by 6.8% to USD 20.1 billion. This demonstrates tourism's significant potential for boosting the national economy (Novrianda & Shar, 2022b) .

Tourism in Bengkulu is not only a local potential but also has the potential to become a major attraction on par with tourist destinations in other regions in Indonesia. However, despite its significant potential, the reality on the ground shows that Bengkulu's tourism brand identity is still relatively low compared to other popular tourist destinations such as Bali, Yogyakarta, or Lombok. Many tourists, both domestic and international, are still unfamiliar with Bengkulu as a leading tourist destination. The lack of exposure in tourism promotions, both through conventional and digital media, makes Bengkulu less competitive in attracting tourists (Puspita et al., 2018) . Limited supporting infrastructure, such as limited transportation accessibility, underdeveloped accommodation facilities, and a lack of integration in tourist attraction management, also contribute to the hampering the development of the tourism sector in Bengkulu.

One of the main challenges in building Bengkulu's tourism brand identity is the lack of synergy between various stakeholders in tourism communication strategies. Currently, tourism promotion and development efforts are still sporadic and not yet integrated into a systematic and sustainable system. As a result, although Bengkulu boasts many attractive destinations, these attractions have not been packaged into a strong narrative to attract maximum and sustainable tourist flow.

To address these challenges, a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders in the development and promotion of Bengkulu tourism is needed. One strategy that can be implemented is the Hexahelix Communication Network Collaboration , a collaborative model involving six key elements: government, academics, business actors, communities, media, and the public (Toda et al., 2024) . This approach allows for strong synergy between various parties, allowing efforts to strengthen Bengkulu's tourism brand identity in a more strategic and sustainable manner.

The government's role in the Hexahelix model is crucial. The government needs to create policies that support the tourism ecosystem as a whole, from improving infrastructure and facilitating investment in the tourism sector to regulations that encourage sustainable destination management (Rachim et al., 2020) . Furthermore, the government must be active in developing marketing strategies and *branding* for Bengkulu tourism, both nationally and internationally, to further enhance its recognition as an attractive tourist destination. On the other hand, academics also play a crucial role in

contributing research and innovation related to marketing strategies and sustainable tourism destination management. Through academic studies, more effective strategies can be identified for building Bengkulu's tourism narrative and developing attractive tourism packages for various tourist market segments.

Business sector must also be able to provide quality services and distinctive products that reflect local culture. The business sector can spearhead the development of Bengkulu's tourism appeal. Local communities and society also play a crucial role in creating authentic and memorable tourism experiences. Preserving culture, customs, and community-based ecotourism are aspects that can add value to Bengkulu's tourism scene. Meanwhile, both conventional and digital media play a strategic role in disseminating information and building a positive narrative about Bengkulu's tourism. Media can be a key tool in increasing the exposure of Bengkulu's tourism destinations to a wider audience, whether through news coverage, digital content, or social media-based marketing campaigns.

With the synergy in the Hexahelix Communication Network Collaboration, it is hoped that Bengkulu's tourism brand identity can experience a significant increase. More massive and targeted promotions, more effective communication strategies, and the involvement of various parties in managing tourist destinations will have a positive impact on the growth of the tourism sector in Bengkulu. The increase in tourist visits will not only drive the regional economic sector, but also create new jobs, strengthen the competitiveness of local MSMEs, and improve the welfare of the community in general. Based on this background, the author is interested in conducting a study entitled Hexahelix communication network *Collaboration* for Bengkulu Tourism Brand identity. This study aims to analyze the collaboration of the Hexahelix communication network in building and strengthening the Bengkulu tourism brand identity.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. According to Sugiyono (2017), qualitative methods are methods based on post-positivism philosophy to examine objects in real or unstructured conditions, which are then narrated in sentence form. Meanwhile, a case study is a type of research that uses empirical evidence, not laboratory experimental results, to examine whether a theory can be implemented in a given situation. Case studies are also a research strategy that focuses on one or several cases as research objects to explore various aspects and dimensions of the phenomenon being studied and understand the perspectives and experiences of the actors involved.

The case study approach was chosen because it allows researchers to study the collaborative phenomenon of the Hexahelix communication network in building Bengkulu's tourism brand identity in a real and complex context. The case study allows for an in-depth exploration of how various parties within the Hexahelix network interact, the communication strategies implemented, and their impact on strengthening Bengkulu's tourism brand identity. Hexahelix implementation depends heavily on strong synergy and commitment among the parties involved.

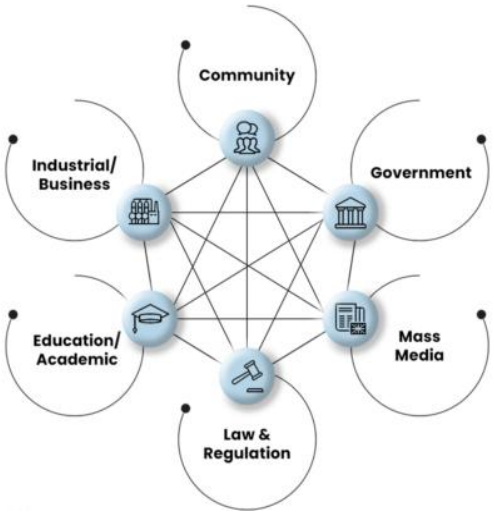


Figure 1. Hexahelix Communication Model (Yudithia et al, 2024)

Hexahelix communication is an innovative communication approach that integrates six communication dimensions to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency. This approach focuses not only on verbal and non-verbal communication but also accommodates other dimensions such as digital, visual, and contextual communication (Rachim et al., 2020) . The Hexahelix *concept* was born in response to the need for a more comprehensive and sustainable strategy in managing projects and development initiatives. Introduced by academics, practitioners, and stakeholders who understand the interconnectedness of economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects, Hexahelix serves as a foundation for more structured communication and decision-making (Toda et al., 2024) .

The Hexahelix model emphasizes the synergy of six key parties in driving development: academia, business, community, government, law and regulation, and the media. Academics act as conceptualizers and innovators through data-based research and mentoring; the business world serves as a strategic partner providing capital, technology, and an innovative ecosystem; communities act as active drivers and implementers according to local needs; the government functions as a regulator and policy facilitator; laws and regulations ensure fairness and program sustainability through rules and oversight; and the media plays a role in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and acting as a social control mechanism to support transparency and community participation (Octavianto et al., 2024; Purba et al., 2024; Adjie, 2024; Yudithia et al., 2024).

Data collection in this study was conducted through *Focus Group Discussions* (FGDs) involving key actors in the Hexahelix model, namely academics, business actors, communities, government, legal/regulatory practitioners, and the media. The selection of FGDs was based on the consideration that this method is able to deeply explore the perceptions, experiences, and views of the parties regarding the form of communication collaboration in building the Bengkulu tourism brand identity. Through group interactions,

researchers can capture the dynamics of communication, common views, and differences in perspectives that arise among participants.

In addition to the focus group discussions (FGDs) as the primary method, this study also utilized supporting instruments to enrich the data. These included observation guidelines for recording discussions, limited interview guidelines for gathering information from key informants, field note sheets, and document and digital media analysis formats related to Bengkulu tourism regulations, publications, and promotional content. The entire data collection process was conducted systematically by the research team, with students acting as field assistants to assist with documentation, observation, and transcription of discussion and interview results.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

The results of this study were obtained through *a Focus Group Discussion* (FGD) involving six key actors in the Hexahelix *communication* model : academics, business actors, communities, government, legal/regulatory practitioners, and the media. The informants involved were individuals and institutional representatives directly involved in Bengkulu tourism issues, thus providing a comprehensive perspective on communication network collaboration in building the regional tourism brand identity.

Academics

The academic informant was Sri Narti, a lecturer in Communication Studies at Dehasen University, Bengkulu. She highlighted the enormous potential and challenges facing Bengkulu's tourism sector. From an academic perspective, Bengkulu boasts a wealth of diverse tourist destinations, ranging from nature and culture to culinary and historical attractions. She believes that the historical tourism sector possesses unique qualities that are rarely found in other regions. In an interview, she stated,

> *"Bengkulu actually has a lot of tourism potential, from natural attractions to cultural attractions to local culinary delights. But when it comes to attractions that can differentiate it, historical tourism is the most prominent. According to Korean tourists who have visited Bengkulu as part of our collaborative program, this historical tourism is considered very marketable." (Interview on September 25, 2025)*

This statement demonstrates that historical tourism can serve as a brand identity for Bengkulu tourism, provided it is developed with the right communication strategy. However, Sri Narti also emphasized that tourism development doesn't just stop at packaging potential, but also requires coordination across actors. According to her, obstacles actually arise from weak coordination and human resource readiness. She added,

> *"If we look at the current situation, communication and coordination between regional and central governments are still not working well. Human resource readiness in the tourism sector is also still limited, with many still lacking*

understanding of how to manage tourism professionally. Furthermore, social media engagement among MSMEs and tourism villages is still lacking, even though social media can be a cheap and effective promotional tool. So, the fact is, even the Pentahelix communication network is not yet optimal, let alone the more complex Hexahelix. This definitely requires greater financial support, manpower, and commitment. I believe that the Pentahelix needs to be improved before discussing Hexahelix, as there is still a significant gap, especially between city and village governments." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

From this quote, it is clear that, according to academics, Hexahelix cannot operate optimally without first strengthening Pentahelix. The coordination gap between the central, provincial, city, and village governments poses a serious obstacle. This situation is further complicated by the limited capacity of tourism human resources and the weak use of social media by local actors. In other words, Bengkulu's tourism branding remains hampered by structural and technical issues.

Businessmen

The business sector informant, S. Fajri Oktario, owner of a culinary MSME and owner of Tjahatja Hati, emphasized the importance of a tourism identity for the sustainability of the local business sector. According to him, Bengkulu still faces fundamental challenges due to the lack of a well-defined tourism identity. This situation means that the impact of tourism on businesses remains minimal and unnoticeable. He stated,

"Bengkulu doesn't have a well-defined identity. What's happening in Bengkulu hasn't had a significant impact on tourism, as the impact is still minimal. Businesses are currently struggling to find creative ideas to strengthen Bengkulu's brand. However, many remain confused and hampered by the lack of a specific attraction that truly serves as a primary destination for visitors to their businesses." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

This statement demonstrates that the lack of a clear brand identity has left businesses operating independently without a unified umbrella. According to Fajri, despite the rapid growth of the business sector, particularly cafes and coffee shops, in Bengkulu, this development has not necessarily strengthened the tourism brand. This is because the products offered do not fully represent Bengkulu's unique characteristics. He cited the following example:

"The growth of cafes and coffee shops in Bengkulu is indeed good, with increasing numbers and a creative atmosphere. But unfortunately, there hasn't been significant progress for businesses offering Bengkulu's signature products. For example, tea from Kabawetan, Kepahiang. This tea is of excellent quality, but it can't be marketed locally because it's tied to processing outside the region. So,

Bengkulu residents find it difficult to open a Bengkulu specialty tea shop. It could be a powerful icon." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

The interviews revealed that businesses face structural barriers in leveraging local potential for branding. A flagship product like Kabawetan tea, which should be an icon, cannot be transformed into a distinctive regional identity due to its reliance on processing systems outside Bengkulu. This situation demonstrates a disconnect between local potential, regulations, and tourism strategies in the value chain. Fajri concluded that Bengkulu tourism has yet to demonstrate a strong commitment to regional branding. Without a clear strategic direction from the government and supportive regulatory support, MSMEs will only operate partially. Therefore, the Hexahelix collaboration is seen as crucial for creating synergy between the government, businesses, communities, media, academics, and legal/regulatory actors to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable Bengkulu brand identity.

Community

Communities are a crucial element in the Hexahelix communication network, primarily due to their close ties to the community and their significant contribution to revitalizing tourism activities. Fijel Luski, a member of Bujang Gadis Bengkulu, represents the community, who is heavily involved in various community-based tourism promotion activities and official government events. He believes that the current state of Bengkulu tourism remains unclear or "grey," meaning its management is unable to provide a comprehensive tourism experience to visitors. He emphasized the importance of implementing the 4A concept (Attractions, Accessibility, Amenities, and Ancillary/Activities) as a basic standard for tourism development. In his interview, Fijel stated,

"I think Bengkulu tourism is still a bit of a grey area. In theory, we know there are four main components that must be maximized: Attractions, Accessibility, Amenities, and Ancillary Services. These four elements must be present and well-developed for a region to become an attractive and satisfying tourist destination. If even one is lacking, the tourist experience will be incomplete. In Bengkulu, the problems are numerous. Accessibility is limited, attractions are underdeveloped, amenities are still rudimentary, and tourist activities are rarely packaged attractively. So, it's difficult for people to truly make Bengkulu their top choice for tourist destinations." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

Fijel also explained how communities are working to fill the gap in tourism promotion. He believes that various tourism ambassador competitions, such as the Bengkulu Bachelor and Girl competition, are an effective way to promote the region's potential, both through social media and at events outside Bengkulu. He said,

"The community has actually been trying to help the government. For example, through the selection of tourism ambassadors like the Bujang Gadis Bengkulu (Bengkulu Boys and Girls). We've been given the role of being active on social

media, creating content, participating in events, and even going outside the region to promote Bengkulu's name. This is a way for us to promote its tourism potential. Hopefully, the government will recognize the community's real role and help disseminate tourism information more widely, not only in Bengkulu but also to the national public." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

These interviews demonstrate that communities are not merely complementary but also key actors in building the tourism ecosystem, particularly in the digital age. However, community contributions often operate independently without adequate structural support from the government or other actors. This situation creates a gap, where community-based creative initiatives are not balanced by regulations, facilities, and integrated communication strategies.

Government

The government's role in tourism development is crucial, as it is a key actor providing regulations, policies, programs, and facilitating cross-sector collaboration. In this study, the government informant was Meki Indo Manna, Head of the Promotion Team of the Bengkulu Provincial Tourism Office. He explained that although Bengkulu has significant tourism potential, the main obstacles still lie in human resources (HR) and the community's mindset, which does not fully reflect the values of the Seven Charms. In his interview, Meki said:

"Bengkulu's tourism sector still faces significant human resource challenges. Yet, in terms of tourism potential, we already have excellent potential. Unfortunately, the tourism mindset in our community is still lacking, meaning they haven't fully embraced the Sapta Pesona (Seven Charms) spirit. This is fundamental to making Bengkulu a welcoming, comfortable, and memorable destination." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

This demonstrates that for the government, tourism development extends beyond infrastructure and attractions, but also to building public awareness as tourism hosts. He cited the example of consistent efforts in Enggano, such as its educational tourism, but other regions have yet to demonstrate similar readiness. Furthermore, Meki mentioned that the Tourism Office's current focus is on the tourism village program. However, he acknowledged that Bengkulu's coastal and maritime tourism sectors remain relatively neglected. In his statement, he said:

"Currently, the agency is more focused on developing tourist villages. We admit that coastal and maritime tourism hasn't been a priority, even though it has enormous potential. Furthermore, if we're talking about global issues, Bengkulu's tourism sector still lags behind in meeting zero-waste, green economy, and sustainable tourism standards. These are significant challenges, but we continue to make efforts in that direction." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

The quote highlights the gap between potential and implementation, particularly in adapting to sustainable tourism trends. However, Meki emphasized that the government is not standing still. Various efforts have been made through collaborations with the Palembang Tourism Polytechnic for tourism education, as well as with travel and hotel associations, the Indonesian Association of Indonesian Travelers (APSI), the Creative Economy Agency (Bekraf), and the Creative Hub. Meki also outlined several future programs, one of which is maintaining the cruise program, where foreign ships stop in Bengkulu for six hours to enjoy cultural attractions and shop for local products. He explained:

> *"Future programs will continue to promote tourism villages, one of which is already well-established in Blitar's Seberang Rejang Lebong Village. Furthermore, we are also maintaining our cruise program. Foreign ships dock in Bengkulu for about six hours, during which they can see our cultural attractions, explore our culinary delights, and even shop for MSME products. This is crucial for international promotion." (Interview on September 25, 2025)*

This statement demonstrates that the government is encouraging digital transformation in tourism while simultaneously preparing integration with major transportation infrastructure such as toll roads. This is a crucial factor in shaping Bengkulu's tourism brand identity, which is modern, tourist-friendly, and connected to other regions. Meki concluded that the government's commitment to developing Bengkulu's tourism sector focuses on three main areas: developing village-based tourism, developing the creative economy, and increasing tourism events. This strategy is expected to strengthen Bengkulu's brand as a destination offering not only natural beauty but also cultural experiences and the creativity of its people.

Laws and Regulations

The role of legal and regulatory actors in tourism development is crucial because they form the foundation of policies that determine the direction and sustainability of tourism branding. In this study, the legal informant was Aan Julianda, an experienced advocate. He emphasized that Bengkulu still faces serious weaknesses in tourism regulations. According to him, there are no regional regulations (Perda) or specific regulations that explicitly regulate and protect Bengkulu's tourism identity. In his interview, Aan stated:

> *"To this day, Bengkulu has no specific tourism regulations. The local government has the political will, but it hasn't been able to determine the specific tourism areas to highlight. For example, if we want to brand natural tourism, it hasn't been well-organized. For example, the conflict over the management of Panjang Beach between the provincial and city tourism offices will only be resolved in 2022. Furthermore, regarding intellectual property rights (IPR) for MSMEs, the guidelines are unclear, the process is difficult, and there's minimal public awareness. As a result, many MSMEs struggle to register their product brands. The same is true for*

halal certification, even though many Bengkulu products could be promoted through this certification. What we currently have is a regional regulation on alcoholic beverages, not tourism." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

This quote reflects the real situation: the lack of specific regulations has weakened the competitiveness and consistency of Bengkulu's tourism branding. Aan believes that regulations should be present as a tool to strengthen tourism identity, not merely administrative rules. For example, if natural tourism is to become Bengkulu's primary focus, the government must be bold in developing priority areas like Panjang Beach. However, the development of these areas has been incomplete, leading to conflicts of authority between institutions.

Aan also highlighted the weak legal protection for local businesses. Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), which should protect MSME products and brands, remain difficult to access. A lack of public awareness and a clear registration mechanism leaves many MSMEs without the legal authority to protect their brands. This situation undoubtedly hampers efforts to build a Bengkulu tourism brand identity, which should be supported by the strength of local products as regional characteristics. A similar situation applies to halal certification. According to Aan, halal certification should add value to Bengkulu culinary products for wider marketing. However, regulations and implementation still do not favor local producers. As a result, opportunities to strengthen Bengkulu's branding through regional specialty products are not being optimally utilized.

Media

The media is a crucial player in the Hexahelix communication model because it plays a strategic role in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and raising public awareness of tourism potential. In this study, the media was represented by Tri Yulianti Imran, a journalist from bengkulueksspress.com. She revealed that local media have been working hard to promote Bengkulu tourism, despite limited support from the government and other stakeholders. In her interview, Tri Yulianti emphasized that the media is not simply waiting for big moments, but rather is actively working to highlight tourism issues:

"Regarding Bengkulu's tourism sector, we in the media have always strived to highlight its impact, including through social media. Journalists should be able to record and write tourism stories without being asked or waiting for specific events. This is because Bengkulu's tourism promotion is still very limited, with even tour package information not widely available. This should be a gateway for tourists who want to visit." (Interview on September 25, 2025)

The quote illustrates that the media actually plays an active role in covering the gaps in official government promotion. However, limited information, particularly regarding tourism packages and event calendars, presents a significant obstacle. Tri Yulianti cited the example of how, although each district has a list of annual events, many are not implemented as planned. This often results in tourism coverage losing traction because the

public doesn't see a match between the promotion and the reality on the ground. She also highlighted the issue of consistent government support for the development of creative spaces and tourism events. This confirms that without consistent and sustainable tourism events, the media will struggle to create a strong narrative to build Bengkulu's image. While the media can present tourism coverage and images, without the support of public spaces, clear regulations, and community participation, these efforts will struggle to have a long-term impact.

DISCUSSION

The Hexahelix communication network collaboration in building Bengkulu's tourism brand identity is still in its infancy. Conceptually, the Hexahelix model emphasizes the involvement of six key actors: academics, businesses, communities, government, law/regulation, and the media, working together in an equal, complementary, and innovation-oriented manner. However, research shows that the relationships between these actors in Bengkulu have not yet formed an integrated, systemic pattern. While each actor has demonstrated a specific role, the interactions are sporadic, sectoral, and not guided by a sustainable collective vision. This indicates a significant gap between Bengkulu's vast tourism potential and its weak branding strategy implementation.

The local government, as a central actor in tourism governance, has initiated various programs, such as the development of tourist villages, cruise tourism routes, and collaborations with the Palembang Tourism Polytechnic and tourism industry associations. These efforts theoretically align with Lekatompessy et al.'s (2023) view that collaborative governance requires government initiative as the initial driver. However, from the perspective of other actors, these steps are considered inconsistent and tend to be partial. One concrete example is the annual calendar of events designed to promote local destinations and festivals, but in practice, many agendas are not implemented as planned. This gap between planning and implementation reduces the credibility of Bengkulu's tourism promotion in the eyes of the public and investors. This confirms that government communication with other stakeholders still does not utilize the principles of transparent, participatory, and inclusive two-way collaboration, as emphasized by Adjie (2024) in his study on collaborative governance.

Academic contributions in the Bengkulu tourism context generally take the form of research and scientific studies that provide policy recommendations. Research on Bengkulu's destination image (Novrianda & Shar, 2022a) and tourist satisfaction (Novrianda & Shar, 2022b) are concrete examples of how universities are trying to support regional tourism development. However, the results of such research often stop at the academic publication stage without entering the decision-making process. The limited participation of academics in policy formulation forums results in the transfer of scientifically based knowledge not being fully integrated into regional tourism management practices. However, as Andri & Gunawan (2023) argue, academic involvement is crucial to ensuring that tourism communication strategies are based on data and local wisdom, thus providing

strong differentiation compared to other regions. In other words, the lack of integration of academic contributions indicates an underutilized potential for innovation.

Communities also play a crucial role in the Hexahelix ecosystem, particularly in building community-based promotional networks. In Bengkulu, communities such as Bujang Gadis Bengkulu and various youth organizations play an active role in disseminating tourism information through social media, tourism ambassador competitions, and organizing local events. The role of communities as grassroots promotional agents aligns with the concept of community-based tourism, which emphasizes community participation as the spearhead. However, communities often operate independently without adequate government support, whether in the form of regulations, facilitation, or funding. Collaboration with the business sector is also limited. However, according to Kusen et al. (2023), community-business integration is crucial because the two can complement each other: communities provide authentic narratives and cultural identities, while businesses provide economic resources that can support the sustainability of tourism activities. Without synergy, community activities tend to be ceremonial, limited to seasonal activities, and difficult to develop into long-term promotional strategies.

Businesses, particularly MSMEs, face more complex challenges. The main challenge lies in the weak differentiation of products that could be firmly embedded as Bengkulu's identity. A concrete example is Kabawetan tea in Kepahiang, which should be a superior commodity but cannot be claimed as a local product because its processing has been controlled by external parties. This demonstrates the weak integration between natural resource potential and tourism branding policies. According to Purba et al. (2024), empowering MSMEs through training, motivational support, and Hexahelix synergy is key to developing locally based entrepreneurship. However, in practice, MSMEs in Bengkulu still operate independently with limited resources and minimal regulatory support. As a result, local products struggle to penetrate national, let alone international, markets, and thus Bengkulu's tourism appeal has not been fully strengthened by its distinctive economic identity.

From a media perspective, both print and digital media play a significant role in highlighting Bengkulu's tourism issues. They routinely broadcast news about destinations, cultural festivals, and culinary specialties, often even initiating tourism coverage without having to wait for government direction. However, the lack of a formal collaborative framework leads to inconsistent media coverage. The event calendar published by the media often differs from the actual events on the ground, leading to confusion among tourists. This situation indicates that the media has not been integrated into a structured tourism communication strategy. Bungin (2017) emphasized that tourism communication will only be effective if there is alignment between media strategy and government agendas. Furthermore, Escobar-Farfán et al. (2024) identified media as a key channel for strengthening a destination's brand identity because it can reach a broad audience and shape collective perceptions.

Legal and regulatory aspects are the most fundamental weakness in the Hexahelix collaboration in Bengkulu. To date, Bengkulu does not have a specific Regional Regulation

regarding tourism. This lack of regulation has resulted in unclear directions for tourism development, both in terms of prioritizing tourism types and destination governance. The conflict over the management of Panjang Beach between the provincial and city governments is a clear example of weak legal certainty. Furthermore, legal protection for MSMEs is very limited, particularly regarding Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and halal certification. Many small businesses struggle to register trademarks due to complicated procedures and minimal public awareness. This situation demonstrates that regulations have not yet served as a solid foundation for the Hexahelix collaboration. However, Rachim et al. (2020) emphasized that clear regulations are essential to reduce overlapping authority and provide consistent direction for tourism destination management.

Conceptually, this situation indicates that the Hexahelix communication network in Bengkulu remains sporadic, partial, and has not yet formed a systemic pattern capable of supporting the strengthening of tourism brand identity. Communication and interaction patterns between actors do exist, but they tend to be temporary, occurring at specific moments, such as during major tourism events, cultural festivals, or visits by national officials. Once these moments end, collaboration often weakens, or even ceases altogether. In other words, the collaboration is more like a short-term project than a planned and sustainable collaborative ecosystem. This contrasts with the essence of the Hexahelix concept, which emphasizes equal collaboration between academics, businesses, communities, government, media, and law/regulation, where each actor is not merely present but actively involved and consistently contributes to the innovation and sustainability of tourism destinations.

Sectoral bias in Bengkulu tourism collaboration is evident when each actor prioritizes the interests of their own institutions or groups. The government, for example, often focuses on achieving annual program targets already included in the work plan, without fully considering the continuity of the role of communities or businesses. Similarly, the media often covers tourism on its own initiative or for content purposes, rather than as part of a communications strategy integrated with the broader destination promotion agenda. As a result, the public often receives conflicting messages: events publicized in the media are not realized on the ground, or superior regional products are not reflected in the official government narrative. This pattern demonstrates weak cross-sectoral coordination and a lack of communication mechanisms capable of unifying visions.

In fact, within the framework of development communication theory, cross-actor collaboration should take place in a transparent, participatory, and equal atmosphere. Transparency is necessary so that each actor understands the shared direction and goals; participation is crucial to ensure that the interests of all parties, especially local communities, are accommodated; and equality is a prerequisite to prevent any one actor from becoming dominant while others merely complement each other. This principle is emphasized in the Hexahelix model, where the success of tourism development is determined not only by the government or large investors, but by the willingness of all actors to build a complementary communication network.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the Hexahelix communication network collaboration in strengthening Bengkulu's tourism brand identity is still in its early stages and is not yet fully optimal. Although each actor in government, academia, business, community, media, and law/regulation has played a role according to their capacity, the interactions formed are still sporadic, partial, and not yet integrated into an inclusive communication system. The government as the central actor tends to implement programs partially without consistent coordination, academics are still limited to providing recommendations, communities act independently with limited support, business actors face obstacles in finding a distinctive regional identity, the media plays a more initiative role without an integrated strategy, while regulations that should serve as a foundation are still weak. These conditions indicate that the ideal collaborative communication ecosystem as per the Hexahelix principles has not been fully established.

Thus, the main challenge to strengthening Bengkulu's tourism brand identity lies not only in a lack of promotion or infrastructure, but also in the lack of synergy and sustainable communication patterns across actors. Without clear regulations, open participation, and consistent coordination, Bengkulu's tourism positioning will struggle to compete nationally and internationally. Developing a more systematic, participatory, and innovation-oriented Hexahelix collaboration ecosystem is a key prerequisite for Bengkulu to strengthen its destination image, maximize the potential of local resources, and make tourism a driver of sustainable regional economic development.

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