

# Towards Branding Kupang City: Local Community Perception

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**Abstract**—This study aims to examine the perception of the local community in terms of branding the city of Kupang in the Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) of Indonesia. The absence of related studies created a gap for this research to be conducted. We used a descriptive qualitative approach to identify and describe peoples' perceptions towards the efforts of city branding in the formation of the city branding of the city of Kupang by employing in-depth interviews conducted with 20 informants consisting of city government officials, community leaders, influencers, and entrepreneurs in the creative economy sector. The results of the study present five indicators related to "KASIH" as the motto of Kupang City representing the vision and missions of the City. "KASIH" encompasses creation, secure, healthy, beautiful, and harmony. Results present the extent to which each indicator making up the "KASIH" motto that is prominent to represent the city, as well as the necessary efforts that are required to be taken in order to improve brand awareness. This research is contended useful and contributes both theoretically and practically in regards to city branding, particularly that of Kupang City in NTT Province.

**Keywords**— *Local community, city branding, Kupang City*

## I. INTRODUCTION

City branding is recognized as a means towards enhancing tourism development. Currently, a number of cities in Indonesia are pursuing to attract more tourists by branding their regions as well as differentiating their cities from others. A place needs to be distinguished from others through city branding in order to realize competitiveness [1]. Branding is not only seen as a way of managing a city but is also seen as a means to convey a positive image that aims to augment the perception

of various stakeholders, where branding cannot "change" a city but can help improve overall competitiveness [2]. After all, image of the destination is also considered critical in building destination competitiveness [3]. City branding is very important for urban planning, combining marketing strategies, and planning to promote the city's competitive advantage [4]. City branding can also attract more visitors, financing, and contribute to enhancing economic, social and individual value [5]. City branding can include a community development agenda, which strengthens local character and increasing citizens' attachment to their own city and perhaps even reducing social exclusion [6].

Kupang City is the capital of the Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) Province which is known as the city of "KASIH" which is an acronym for *Karya* (creation), *Aman* (Safety and Secure), *Sehat* (Healthy), *Indah* (Beautiful) and *Harmonis* (Harmony), derived from the regional government's mid-term development plan in 2017. Since the beginning of the establishment of this motto, there has been no studies into assessing the extent to which the motto can be set as a reference in the formation of city branding. Kupang City has a lot of potential that can be developed, especially in the tourism sector. Additionally, the study of [7] presents Kupang City as one of the most competitive regions in NTT. Utilization of tourism potential that is packaged optimally through tourism activities is expected to have a double effect, namely maintaining the preservation of local potential that is owned and increasing people's income from tourism activities.

Currently, almost all cities in Indonesia have branding related to their city identity so as to attract tourist visits to the city. The city of Kupang has superior tourism potential but it is unfortunate

that until now the city of Kupang has not developed her brand that can be pushed to represent the characteristics and uniqueness to be known by the public both nationally and internationally. A city should have a city branding or what is known as the formation of a city identity [8].

The role of the local community is also an important dimension in the formation of a place's brand. The local community is used as a cornerstone to evaluate a place's brand and as a differentiating factor [9]. Many cities build the concept of branding but it becomes ineffective and efficient because it does not get enough positive perceptions from the Public [10]. Basically city branding is not only about attractiveness but also about local community identification which is a prerequisite [11].

Drawing from the above, this study aims to examine the perception of the local community in order to set a foundation for efforts of branding Kupang City. City branding is a benchmark for the "existence" of the city which plays an important role in the formation of the brand in order to attract more tourist visits [12]. Accordingly, this research is considered important and expected to contribute both theoretically and practically in terms of city branding, especially in Kupang City.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 City Branding

In general terms, the concept of branding is created with the aim of developing a product. Albeit, city branding is a strategy to market the city with the aim of strengthening relationships and building a good image of the city in the eyes of visitors [13]. The extent to which a person can identify a place that is different from other places, produces an image in people's minds even though they have never seen or experienced it yet [14]. City branding has three main attributes, namely image, uniqueness and authenticity. Almost every city has city branding in its agenda to develop its image [15].

City branding aims to create a place that can "talk" or "explain" to the public so that it has a direct impact on the image of the city and visits by tourists [16]. In addition, city branding is also understood as a means to achieve competitive advantage in order to increase investment from tourism and also as an achievement of community development. Moreover, it contributes to strengthening local identity of citizens with their city and activating all social circles in order to avoid exclusion and social unrest [8]. Urban planning is to be situated with various efforts to build differentiation and strengthening the identity

of the city in order to be able to compete with other cities [17]. If a city wants to "work" to be efficient, it needs economic prosperity and an attractive image. Therefore, city branding must pay attention to "how culture and history, economic growth and social progress, infrastructure and architecture, landscapes and the environment, among others, which can be incorporated into a market identity that is suitable for everyone" [12].

### 2.2 Community

The role of community involvement in city branding is for supporting tourism development, regional imagery, economic improvement and increasing tourist intention to visit [18]. The role of the community in branding strengthening activities is an inevitable part because the community is one of the resources in development programs [19]. The greater the authority and flexibility given to the community to run the program independently but still supervised, the higher the level or degree of participation is achieved [20].

Developing city branding does not only form a jargon, it also requires an active role from all aspects of the city, including individuals and the society [21]. There are four roles of local residents in the city branding process, firstly, residents as the target group. Second, residents as an integrated part of a place brand, where they are an integrated part of a place brand. Third, residents serve as ambassadors for place brands, where residents indirectly participate in helping to spread information about their city by word of mouth, and fourth, residents are citizens, where the implementation of a brand in a place requires a balance between the city brand and the support of the local community [9]. Prioritization of local perspective involving local residents, entrepreneurs and business people is imperative in developing and delivering the brand [6]. In the context of city branding, internal stakeholders are those who live in the city [22], where community participation in the formation of city branding consists of participation in tourism development, improving the image of the region, improving the economy, and in attracting tourists to visit [19].

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs the the descriptive qualitative approach to describe people's perceptions in the formation of city branding in the city of Kupang, one which emphasizes the depiction of developing phenomena based on existing realities. In this study, the researcher is the conducts data collection and analysis, and in the

end the researcher administers the research results. This research was conducted in the city of Kupang in the NTT Province of Indonesia, directed towards the local community. The target respondents are 20 people consisting of people in the government sector, community leaders, academics, influencers, and entrepreneurs in the creative economy.

The respondent selection criteria used in this study were based on experience and expertise in tourism, which was sampled through the snowball sampling technique. The data collection technique used is through in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

Data analysis techniques are carried out by:

- a. Data reduction, where the obtained data was summarized based on the important information only, thus researchers will get a clearer picture so as to facilitate further analysis.
- b. Presentation of data, in this stage the presentation of data is carried out in the form of a short description that is narrative in nature so that an in-depth analysis can be carried out.
- c. Conclusion drawing and verification, where conclusions supported by valid and consistent evidence are credible conclusions.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study managed to collect expert opinion from a total of 20 people from the local community in Kota Kupang which consisted of 5 senior government officials, 8 public figures and influencers, 3 academicians specializing in the field of regional tourism, and 4 local businessmen/women in the creative economy sector.

In regards to City Branding, Kupang City has been seeing the ongoing motto of “Kupang Kota KASIH”, which is clearly stated in the *Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Daerah Kota Kupang* or Medium-Term Regional Development Plan of Kota Kupang (2017). “Kupang Kota KASIH” is recognized as the ideal state in which the vision and mission of Kupang City should realize. “KASIH” is an abbreviation, which is broken down as (1) *Karya* or Creation, (2) *Aman* or Secure, (3) *Sehat* or Healthy, (4) *Indah* or Beautiful, and (5) *Harmonis* or Harmony. Accordingly, all efforts of regional development in

Kupang City revolves around “KASIH”, which has been the City’s motto evident in display in the centre and corners of Kupang City.

Based upon in-depth interviews with our experts, we assessed the perceptions of related city branding stakeholders concerning the “KASIH” brand, emphasizing on the current state and expectations relating to each element of “KASIH”

##### (1) *Karya* or Creation.

This particular element refers to products produced by the city. Our experts suggest that Kupang City offers several renowned goods that are commonly popular among tourists and the local community. Products that are frequently mentioned were kain tenun, ikan bakar, jagung bese, and daging se'i. It is clear that stakeholders put forward that which generally fall into the culinary category as the main products. However, daging se'i was the dominant product agreed upon by the experts that could represent the city as to offer a unique product which could create the differing image apart from others cities or regions in Indonesia. It is evident that the se'i culinary has seen a widespread development in recent years in corners of the city, which contributes to possibly presenting strong awareness among tourists when perceiving Kupang City as a destination. To underline the significance of se'i in connection with the branding of Kupang City, the underlying popular dish was recently selected as the winner in 2020's *Anugerah Pesona Indonesia* from the traditional food category [23]. Such achievement should create a strong foundation upon building the city brand image through se'i. Likewise, the food and city brand association has seen a strong history in other cities in Indonesia such as *Gudeg* and Yogyakarta City, and *Pecel* and Madiun City. In literature, studies such as [24] show strong correlation between food image of a place and intention to visit the place. Moreover, [25] underlines the important role of food and cuisine in the formation of destination brand image. As recent studies underline a growing trend of gastronomic tourism [26].

Accordingly Kupang City may capitalize on the momentum for enhancing its brand image.

(2) *Aman* or Safety and Secure

According to our experts, Kupang City in general is perceived as a safe and secure place for the local community and tourists. The safety and secure element is predominantly associated with a crime free environment surrounding all aspects of the city living. Experts expressed assurance when spending the evening roaming around the city streets. Improved street lighting and the increasing number of shops opening late into the night are recognized to contribute to the factor. Relative to other cities in the Eastern regions of Indonesia such as Makassar, Jayapura, and Ambon, Kupang ranks fairly better in terms of crime rates [27], indicating that the city is generally secure in comparison with similar destinations. Furthermore, studies that highlight the critical importance of safety and security influencing travelling decisions are found in [28], [29], and [30]. During the COVID-19 pandemic, protocols of safety and security have indeed played a vital role in restructuring the way destination promote their tourism products. Concerning Kupang City, our government official experts underlined that the cleanliness, healthy, safety, and environment (CHSE) certifications have begun obliging destinations and related sectors such as restaurants and hotels to push for the preconditioned environment for tourism recovery in the “new normal era”. Therefore, the safe and secure element can be put forwards by the regional tourism stakeholders to promote the destination brand image of Kupang City.

(3) *Sehat* or Healthy

The healthy element of “KASIH” encompasses the natural and preconditioned environment including air and water. Experts particularly expressed somewhat discontent regarding this element as they believe it to be the weak spot of the Kupang City image. Among others, household waste is not properly managed with the lack of public waste bins and landfills hence the noticeably

scattered trash, particularly plastic waste, in various corners of the city. The culture of burning household waste still prevalent among the local people also contributes to the bad picture. Moreover, lacking provisions of clean water is still recognized to be a major problem in the city. According to Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan [31], Kupang City is ranked among the top five dirtiest cities in Indonesia, which does not help in creating that desired destination brand image. Albeit, literature suggests that tourists hold good sanitary conditions and well-preserved natural environments as predecessors for a suitable place to visit [32]. As many destinations around the world are trying to focus on generating successful health and well-being tourist experiences as part of their strategies of tourist product development [33], which is accordingly magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic, Kupang City should therefore set proper reinforcements to address the critical issue.

(4) *Indah* or Beautiful/Picturesque

This particular aspect of the Kupang brand is strongly related to the picturesque dimension of a desired city to spend time at and travel to. Acknowledged by our experts, the regional government of Kupang City has recently been prioritizing on enhancing the aesthetics of a modern city especially in terms of developing various playgrounds and parks such as *Taman Boulevard*, *Kupang Square*, *Taman Perdamaian*, *Taman Revolusi Mental*, *Taman Tagantong*, *Taman Tagepe*, and *Taman Tiroso*. Our experts strongly agree that such development has significantly enhanced the picturesque aspect of the destination which recently is recognized as an important element in travel, particularly in fulfilling millennial tourists’ needs in terms of sharing picturesque images on social media [34], [35]. As presented in literature, the exciting and picturesque element is considered significant to promote a desirable brand image of a place [36]. Moreover, particular cities are recognizable for the picturesque man-made attractions [37].

##### (5) *Harmonis* or Harmony

The harmony element relates to the day-to-day living dynamics among the people of Kupang City. Considering the place is home to various multi-ethnic backgrounds in terms of tribes, religion, and race, our experts strongly confirm the harmony amongst the people which has been long preserved to be put forward as a positive message and image towards visitors from other regions in Indonesia. Issues of intolerance dissecting various groups, especially that of religious ones, in other regions in Indonesia are a reoccurring phenomenon which in turn deteriorates the place image. Studies such as [38] show how place conflict may influence security, which consequently affects the number of tourist visits [39] and destination image [40]. Referring to the fact that Kupang City is notable for its tolerance, evident as to be among the top 9 tolerant cities in Indonesia awarded by Indeks Toleran Award [41], the harmony dimension can properly serve as a particular strength towards building the city image of Kupang.

## V. CONCLUSION

From the results of this study, it can be identified the extent to which the community as a critical stakeholder in city branding, perceives the foundation of branding Kupang City, which is quintessential towards future efforts in building and enhancing city branding in Kupang. “KASIH” as the motto of Kupang City presents the 5 indicators in creation, secure, healthy, beautiful, and harmony in which the local government may capitalize on to strengthening the identity of Kupang City which in turn will push for enhanced tourism competitiveness and hence the welfare of the local community.

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