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From Nothing to Something: Study on How Local Government Transformed Oil and Gas Area into Ecotourism Village in Indonesia through Branding Strategy

PRAYUDI

Department of Communication Science
Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Yogyakarta, Indonesia
prayudi@upnyk.ac.id

ARDHANARISWARI, KARTIKA AYU

Department of Communication Science
Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Yogyakarta, Indonesia
ardhanariswari_ayu@yahoo.com

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze how Bojonegoro District Government in Indonesia applied branding strategy for oil and gas area in Wonocolo Village. This village has a unique atmosphere of traditional petroleum mining. Government, villagers, and state oil company discussed on how to change and add value to this village through branding strategy. Branding strategy involves creating, developing, implementing and managing brands continuously until the brand becomes strong. This study used a qualitative research method to describe how the steps are undertaken in the village that formerly was full of old oil wells, into a new tourist area that has economic value. The result of the research shows that there were three stages done in branding Wonocolo as an ecotourism village. They include identification of village uniqueness, the creation of brand identity and brand message. The biggest challenge in this branding strategy was to change the mindset of Wonocolo villagers that turning the old oil wells village into an ecotourism destination can provide economic benefit.

Keywords: branding; ecotourism village; uniqueness; brand identity; brand message.

JEL Classification: Z32

Introduction

The phenomena of oil and gas mining have often seized the attention of Indonesian society in areas which are rich of natural resources in the form of a variety of minerals (Brata 2014). They cannot enjoy the natural resources that lie in their land. This situation sometimes leads to a conflict between people who are dealing with the company and state officials. In some cases, this has led to illegal mining activities that result in soil damage.

Illegal mining activities in old oil and gas areas are occurring in several locations in Indonesia. What concerns the government is how people mine these wells in a way that gives little attention to the safety of people and the preservation of the natural environment. The government planned to convert the old well into tourism area to reduce the impact of mining activities,. To that end, the government revised the Regulation of the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Number 1 the Year 2008 on Guidelines for the Exploitation of Old Wells. From the data recorded by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, there are 13,824 old wells in Indonesia. The most significant number located in southern Sumatra with 3,623 wells, followed by East Kalimantan with 3,143 wells, Central Java-East Java-Madura with 2,496 wells, northern Sumatra with 2,392 wells, central Sumatra with 1,633 wells, Seram with 229 wells, Papua with 208 wells and South Kalimantan with 100 wells (Wicaksono 2016).

Several studies focus on tourism villages in Indonesia, such as Amerta (2017), Sesotyaningtyas (2015), and Sugandini et al. (2018). None has focused on the branding of tourism village. Branding strategy is a process to build the value or perception in the mind of the consumer before a product is promoted to sell. Hence, this research elaborates how local government played its role in developing a branding strategy for a tourism village.

Principally, illegal mining activities can endanger local people. Low levels of knowledge of safety and security often lead to workplace accidents. The government is also looking for ways to reduce these illegal mining activities. The government then came with the idea to turn the old well into tourism area. The government hoped that the conversion of the old oil wells into tourism areas would improve the welfare of the surrounding community.

There are several challenges faced in the development of oil and gas areas into a tourism destination. First is to change the mindset of villagers. Second is packaging the old district of an old well into a tourism destination as if it is a product. In this case, the biggest challenge is to identify the uniqueness of the oil and gas area that can be used as the focus of tourism activities to offer. Thus, how did the government of Bojonegoro District transform oil and gas area into ecotourism village through branding strategy?

1. Literature Review

Ecotourism. Budowski (1976) first introduced the integration of tourism with conservation in an article entitled '*Tourism and conservation: conflict, coexistence or symbioses.*' While the use of the term 'ecotourism' can be traced only as far back as the late 1980s (Orams 1995), the most recent definition of ecotourism according to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) is *responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education* (TIES 2015). Novelty (state of the art) of this definition is the inclusion of aspects of interpretation and education. It is essential that all stakeholders relate to ecotourism have a thorough understanding of the areas visited. Visitors, for example, must not only look but also learn something about the areas visited, good natural conditions, local communities, as well as cultivation produced. Meanwhile, the management of tourism village focuses on developing programs that preserve the natural environment and traditional values.

Ecotourism is a form of travel that is managed with conservation approaches. It is a management of natural and cultural communities to ensure their sustainability and well-being, while conservation is an effort to sustain the use of natural resources for present and future time. At a basic level, the overall goal of management strategies designed to control the interaction between tourists and the natural environment is twofold: first, to protect the environment from detrimental impacts and, second, to provide for and promote enjoyable tourist experiences (Orams 1995). Ecotourism has been widely recognized as a form of nature tourism which is expected to contribute to both conservation and development (Ross & Wall 1999).

Ecotourism is often claimed to be the most expanding sector in the tourism industry. Timothy and White (1999) identified that the emergence of the concept of ecotourism is due to adverse environmental impacts created by traditions of mass tourism and undifferentiated marketing. Consequently, concerned stakeholders like tourism agencies, government, and researchers have begun to advocate sustainable tourism, which later known as ecotourism.

In Indonesia, the goals of ecotourism are to (1) achieve the implementation of responsible tourism, which supports the efforts of environmental preservation of natural, historical and cultural heritage; (2) increase the participation of community and provide economic benefits to local communities; (3) being a model for other tourism development, through the application of ecotourism principles (Yoeti 2015).

Branding. Creating a coherent perception of an organization in the minds of multiple stakeholders is a challenge faced by many organizations. In the context of this research, the effort to make Wonocolo Village in Bojonegoro District as an ecotourism destination always in the minds of internal and external stakeholders (government, tourists and business actors) is a challenge in itself.

Tom Duncan (2005) defines a brand as "a perception resulting from experience, or information about, a company or product." According to Interbrand, one of the world's leading brand consulting firms, a brand is "a combination of tangible and intangible attributes, symbolized in trademarks, which if managed well, can create influence and generate value" (Clifton & Maughan 2000). A more recent definition of a brand is "brand can be expressed as a name or symbol that defines goods and services reaching to the consumer and distinguishes itself from others" (Serdar & Kaplan 2018).

Corporate communication or public relations division is usually responsible for developing and managing the brand in many organizations (Bahtiar & Bakar 2018). However, organizations can only successfully communicate if organizational behavior allows it and if the product, service, financial, work environment, vision and leadership, and social responsibility enable positive messages to be sent to stakeholders (Einwiller & Will, 2002). As Regis McKenna said, "a successful brand is nothing more than a special relationship" (Duncan 2005). Brand success depends on how to maintain public trust.

Concerning this research, branding can be said as how to develop the perception of a new tourism village, exciting and memorable by many people. Eventually, people will come to visit the tourism village. Furthermore, Wonocolo as an ecotourism destination will always be in the top of mind of society as a place that is always interesting to visit. This will be possible if the government can build awareness and curiosity of the community towards the tourism village and ecotourism. To achieve this, the government needs a branding strategy that synergies between internal and external factors.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method. According to Flick, "qualitative research is oriented towards analyzing concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity and starting from people's expressions and activities in their local contexts" (2018, p.13). In general terms, McGill Qualitative Health Research Group (2018) states that the goals of qualitative research consist of an investigation that:

- seeks to build an understanding of phenomena (i.e., human behavior, cultural or social organization);
- often focused on meaning (i.e., how do people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their understanding of the world?);
- may be descriptive: the research describes complex phenomena such as social or cultural dynamics, individual perception.

Qualitative research shares these characteristics. This type of research will be able to capture a wide range of qualitative information with thorough descriptions and full of nuances that are more valuable than just a statement of the amount or frequency in numerical terms.

Data collection methods used were as follows:

- In-depth interview conducted by asking the informant-based interview guide that had been prepared. In particular, I carried out the interview out toward the head and staff of Bojonegoro Tourism Agency and villagers whose location would experience transformation into ecotourism village.
- Library Study, researchers used a wide variety of data and theories collected through books, journals, newspapers, papers, seminars and online information such as research support policies in the field of higher education and other written materials as the basis of writing.
- A participatory observation was used for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviors in their usual contexts. In particular, I used this technique to identify village potentials for ecotourism.

The goal of the research was to obtain a complete description and deep understanding of how local government in Indonesia transformed former oil and gas area into ecotourism village. As for the subject of research was Wonocolo Village which has an area of 11.37 Km and is 5.5 Km from the subdistrict capital of Kedewan, Bojonegoro District. This village has a land area of 4 Ha and a dry land area of 1.133 Ha. While the object of research was the branding strategy of Wonocolo Village. This strategy appears as the government's efforts to transform Wonocolo Village from the old oil well mining village to an ecotourism village.

3. Result and Discussion

Wonocolo: Branding Strategy of an Ecotourism Village. Creating a coherent perception of an organization in the minds of multiple stakeholders is a challenge facing many organizations. In the context of this research, efforts to make Wonocolo Village, Kedewan Sub-district, Bojonegoro District as an ecotourism destination are always in the minds of internal and external stakeholders (government, tourists, management of ecotourism village and business actors) is a challenge in itself.

The implementation of a branding strategy is not limited to merchandise, such as cars, homes, and other consumer products. A tourism destination, such as a village, can also adopt branding strategy. Tourism destination areas are a combination of many products and services that can be difficult to put together. Why is this complex product trying to compare itself as if it were a consumer product? Because a strong brand protects itself from the threat of competition by reducing many choices. In a market with many of the same tourist destination options, product differentiation is one way to stay ahead.

Some critical questions may arise. What motivates tourists to visit one particular destination compared to another? Why should a tourist go to such a tourist destination? What is on offer? One tip is how this tourism destination can build an emotional connection with tourists. Thus, branding proposes the principle of generating emotions and feelings about the product. A good branding strategy should be able to grow the 'experience' or 'emotional connection' of tourists to the tourist destination.

Within the context of the development of Wonocolo as an ecotourism village, the related parties (Bojonegoro Tourism Agency, Pertamina State Oil Company, and Oil and Gas Taskforce) identified the following issues:

- A need to change the mindset of villagers to support the realization of ecotourism village.

- Planning the transformation of the old well area into ecotourism village and mapping the tourism potentials.
- The development of facilities and infrastructure of ecotourism Village.
- Management of ecotourism village.

The following section discusses the branding strategy of Wonocolo Tourism Village, Kedewan District, Bojonegoro District.

The Uniqueness of Bojonegoro and Wonocolo. Bojonegoro is one of the districts in East Java Province in Indonesia that has changed its mindset to be proud of what it has. This district is slowly starting to move on towards a more certain psychic state. The local government of Bojonegoro believes that what they have is a blessing of grace that should be preserved and developed. This district is wealthy in natural resources that are difficult to find in other areas. One of them is abundant oil and gas wealth. In the past, the Dutch who used to colonize Indonesia appreciated this great potential. There are hundreds of old wells located in Kedewan district that have been explored since the colonial period.

According to Jatmiko Setiawan, a geologist from the University of Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Yogyakarta, the oil-rich texture of Bojonegoro’s earth layers is the real example of geoheritage. What is geoheritage? “Geoheritage” is a generic but descriptive term applied to sites or areas of geologic features with significant scientific, educational, cultural, and aesthetic value. Newsome and Golding (2018) consider geoheritage as pertaining to the occurrence of landforms (e.g., Grand Canyon, USA), rocks (e.g., Wave Rock, Australia), soils (e.g., Chamarel Seven Coloured Earths, Mauritius), minerals (e.g., Cueva de los Cristales, Mexico) and fossils (e.g., Korean Cretaceous Dinosaur Coast, South Korea), and it may include active geological processes such as glacial (e.g., Franz Josef Glacier, New Zealand) and volcanic activity (e.g., Krakatau, Indonesia). Scientifically and educationally significant geo-heritage sites include those with textbook geologic features and landscapes, distinctive rock or mineral types, unique or unusual fossils, or other geologic characteristics that are significant to education and research. Culturally significant geoheritage sites are places where geologic features or landscapes played a role in cultural or historical events. Aesthetically significant geoheritage locations include landscapes that are visually appealing because of their geologic features or processes. Many geoheritage places are tourist destinations that provide local and regional economic benefits (Geological Society of America 2012).

A rare and different atmosphere exists in Wonocolo Village located at the northern District of Bojonegoro. At the village, the geological structure is unique and is transformable into geological nature tourism if developed properly. Another thing is the atmosphere of traditional oil mining. Very few people know that Bojonegoro has conventional oil refineries. Some old oil wells are located in the forest. Woods constructed to stand as a buffer for traditional petroleum timbers surrounded each oil well.

In Wonocolo, the process of taking oil from the bowels of the earth through the old wells take place in two ways, modern and traditional. In a contemporary style, a former well search becomes the responsibility of Pertamina Oil State Company, while community adopts conventional oil way mining. Pertamina has modern mining equipment. Pertamina’s wells do not need more labor to draw oil from the wells.



Figure 1 - Location of old oil wells Wonocolo



Figure 2 - Lifted oil is poured into jerry cans.

The traditional form of mining is so characteristic that with substantial wooden stakes marked with a puff of smoke from the burning furnace, the processing, and extraction of the oil is also done very simply. The way people do the mining is where 5 to 8 people pull the rope associated with the lead from the well oil. At the top of the hill, five miners pull the iron pipe tied with wire rope. They then run down the hill while pulling the wire rope, until the iron pipe filled with crude oil in the well is lifted upward. Slowly, crude oil filled the shelter drum. Drawing zinc bins was the way to mine old oil wells.

The present condition shows the phenomenon that many old oil wells are not producing, thus affecting people's incomes. One phenomenon from the legacy of traditional oil wells is wooden pillars positioned as a tower of hoists to draw oil wells from hundreds of meters deep into the surface of the earth. On the one hand, these

old oil wells may have been unproductive again. On the other hand, if the old wells and surrounding areas in Wonocolo village become a new tourism destination, then this becomes a unique breakthrough. In fact, it could be the first in the world.

The Government of Bojonegoro District explores this potential by developing Wonoloco as an ecotourism destination village. Here, visitors can take pictures with the scenery background of traditional mining activities. In addition, the provision of some facilities that enable visitors to explore the area is crucial. The natural conditions of the village can remind people of the scenes in the Wild West movie, Texas, United States. To realize this program, the government cooperates with relevant stakeholders such as Pertamina Oil State Company and the traditional oil miners themselves.

What is interesting about the effort to develop Wonocolo as an ecotourism village is the involvement of Pertamina State Oil Company. Its knowledge and experience in developing CSR program contributed significantly to the development of Wonocolo ecotourism village. At some point, Pertamina also provided the fund for the necessary programs and facilities. Meanwhile, Special Unit for Upstream Oil and Gas Activities, as a task force for the activities of upstream oil and gas business activities, also gives full attention in transforming this oil mining area into ecotourism village. According to this unit, several tourism potentials, as well as uniqueness, can be differentiation factors in the Wonocolo village. These potentials include oil and gas educational museum, adventure jeep, country bike, trail motorcycle, outbound and photo spot, and marketing of the local product. These potentials, combined with interesting natural geological structure, create exciting tourist attraction for visitors. For this to be possible, Bojonegoro Tourism Agency developed a roadmap for the development of Wonocolo Ecotourism Village.

One basic step in the development process is to change the mindset of villagers who used to work as old oil well miners. Facilitated by Pertamina, they traveled to Yogyakarta for comparative study. Two central locations became the destination. They were Lava Merapi Tour and cave tubing Goa Pindul Gunung Kidul. The chosen of these locations because the management of these two tourism destinations were purely from the community themselves. Even Lava Merapi Tour evolved after the village at the slope of Mount Merapi buried during the 2010 eruption of Merapi. It shows how villagers at the slopes of Mount Merapi did not let themselves drown in sadness. The disaster that befell their village had become the impetus for the development of tourism village after the eruption of Mount Merapi.

Thus, this visit also aimed to build the spirit of the villagers of Wonocolo to develop their village into a tourism destination. The depletion of oil reserves in traditional wells did not mean the economy should also stop. For two days, they involved in designated programs in both locations. There was a meeting after the tour on each destination to give the opportunity of dialogue between management of Lava Tour Merapi and Goa Pindul with villagers of Wonocolo. The ultimate goal was to change the mindset of the villagers of Wonocolo and to convince them that they can also turn their village into an ecotourism village. Moreover, they also got support from the government of Bojonegoro District and Pertamina State Oil Company.

Brand Identity of Wonocolo Village. Elikan and Pigneur (2018) state that brand Identity is of paramount importance for organizations today. Brand identity has a greater meaning than a logo. It is a different visual appearance but associated with the company. Brand identity concerns organization as wholes; its strategy usually involves different people. It is dynamic and evolves during an organization's lifetime (Da Silveira, Lages, & Simões 2013). Brand identity refers to the visual aspect that is part of the overall brand. It has several essential elements that must be united to fit the company and aims to make the brand identity becomes stronger than just a logo.

Brand identity is a set of unique brand association created by brand strategists. These associations reflect the position of a brand and are a promise to customers. Brand identity helps to establish the relationship between brands and customers through value propositions that involve functional benefits, emotional benefits or self-expression (Kotler & Keller 2006, p.261). When brand identity works, you should be able to recognize the brand even if you do not see a logo. Many people have heard of the importance of using a logo consistently. However, there must also be consistency of other elements than just a logo.

In the process of brand creation, there are at least two things to do. They are the creation of the brand name and brand symbol. The goal of having a brand name and brand symbol is to make it easy for people to remember your product and to differ from another similar product. Some things to consider include brands should be easy to remember, easy to say, use unique words, and customize the name with the logo you want to use.

Within the context of developing Wonocolo Ecotourism Village, the uniqueness and benefits offered in the tourism village became the determination of brand identity. As Wonocolo Village used to be oil-mining location, the selection of brand identity strongly relates this aspect. Based on the agreement among stakeholders involved such as Bojonegoro Tourism Agency, Pertamina State Oil Company, and villagers of Wonocolo, Wonocolo Ecotourism Village was named *The Little Teksas Wonocolo*. This brand name adopted a bit of territory in America named Texas that is rich in oil resources and a reserve of US oil. The slightly hot climatic condition of the region also considered having similarities.

Bojonegoro Tourism Agency developed a variety of tourism activities by the geographical conditions of the Wonocolo Village. The development of these activities became the uniqueness of Wonocolo Village. Besides, this brand name also has a philosophy to assure that the name "Wonocolo" always be remembered by those who want to visit (prospect) and who have been to Wonocolo Ecotourism Village (consumer). The next question that arises was why Teksas instead of Texas? This is because the name derived from the word "*Tekadnya Selalu Aman dan Sejahtera*" (Always Safe and Prosperous).



Figure 3 - The nameplate *The Little Teksas Wonocolo* installed on the slopes of Wonocolo village

The Little Teksas Wonocolo is the only tourism destination associated with oil wells in Indonesia. Thus, the program to teach school students of how the process of taking oil traditionally was also worth to introduce. This program was made possible through engagement programs developed by the CSR division of Pertamina. Management of tourism village can offer the program with the emphasis on the uniqueness.

As the first step, the creation of the brand name became the primary concern of brand identity. The development of a unique logo as part of brand identity was still not the primary concern. This was due to the development of Wonocolo Ecotourism Village was still in the early stages. Therefore, to assure that management and villagers of Wonocolo can accept this transformation, Bojonegoro Tourism Agency employed the branding strategy one step at a time. The tourism agency focused more on developing facilities needed to support tourism activities. Pertamina played a significant role in this process as part of its CSR program.

Brand Message Creation. Once Bojonegoro Tourism Agency had been able to create brand identity, the next step in branding strategy was the creation of a brand message. Brand messages are all information and experience that has an impact on how the public values a brand. Brand messages can come from a variety of aspects: from the behavior of the villagers, physical facilities, village layout, culture, what is said or written about the tourism village. Chang (2018) emphasized the importance of consistency in brand message. Message consistency involves maintaining a clear positioning across all communication tools, such as advertising and publicity. Therefore, it became a challenge for Bojonegoro Tourism Agency to be able to create a brand message for Wonocolo Ecotourism Village.

In this case, the uniqueness of Wonocolo as an ecotourism village of old oil and gas area became superior and focus of the brand message itself. Also, this transformation effort of Wonocolo Ecotourism Village gained support from the Head of Bojonegoro District, Kang Yoto. He revealed that Wonocolo oil and gas ecotourism village was a unique model and the only one in the world. The land in Wonocolo that situated in the Kendeng mountain cluster area was rich in oil. Students or researchers may learn the outcrop of the soil layer in this region.

News published on Bojonegoro online news media showed that the message conveyed was Wonocolo Ecotourism Village as a unique and new alternative tourism in the world. The focus of uniqueness was on the old oil and gas region and the extraordinary geological wealth.

Why is the creation of this brand message important? Because through the nature of the brand message, the brand of tourism village well embedded in the public mind. The Bojonegoro Tourism Agency employed some communication media either above the line, below the line and between the line media. The use of above the line media, for example, in the form of advertising in local newspapers such as *Tribun Jatim*, the installation of

billboards in strategic areas such as provincial roads, and news coverage in several local and online media such as *detik.com*.

While the use of below the line media included the procurement of several tourism events by collaborating with companies such as Pertamina. Another strategy was by inviting guests of government agencies that conducted comparative studies to Bojonegoro, to visit the location of Wonocolo Ecotourism Village. Bojonegoro Tourism Agency also used social media to promote the village. Facebook fan page administered by the Government of Bojonegoro District, for example, contained a variety of tours for tourists to enjoy.

In the end, the beneficiaries of these tourism activities at Wonocolo Ecotourism Village were the villagers. Since they were no longer able to exploit oil wells, the efforts of Bojonegoro Tourism Agency to transform their village into a new tourism destination was worth appreciating. For the Government of Bojonegoro District, the spirit of making Wonocolo as an ecotourism village was also a manifestation of the spirit of regional development based on community.

In the context of branding strategy, there are still some improvements to do if the Government of Bojonegoro District and Pertamina State Oil Company want to develop another ecotourism village in Bojonegoro District. The planning for the development of ecotourism village must consider local values and be arranged from the beginning. It should not be sporadic, and each stakeholder has its role. Thus, it will be easy to develop branding strategy.

Conclusion

Branding is the process of forming a brand image that engages customers' heart and mind for the brand to be embedded in the mind of customers. Brand distinguishes a product from another product. Branding is the process of forming a brand image that involves two essential elements of the human (heart & mind, heart=conscience, mind = logic) so that customers can automatically see the superiority of the product of the brand compared to other similar brands. Eventually, customers choose to trust the brand.

The development of branding strategy includes three aspects, namely the identification of product uniqueness and target market, the creation of brand identity, and the creation of the brand message. An attempt to brand an ecotourism village should focus on aspects of uniqueness as an element of distinguishing the village. And Wonoloco Tourism Village, Bojonegoro District has that uniqueness. As an area of old oil wells and has a unique geological texture, the development of Wonocolo Village as an ecotourism area became an appropriate branding strategy.

It is noteworthy that in the development of a tourism village, supports from various parties is needed. As stated in the regional autonomy law, the process of development becomes the responsibility of government, society and private sector. Future study is necessary to look at how visitors of Wonocolo ecotourism village has perceived the brand that Bojonegoro Tourism Agency attempted to form for the village.

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