Bubung Awa, Character Licensing Strategies for City Branding: Harnessing Technology to Promote Bengkulu’s Tourism Potential

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Abstract. This study aims to develop a city branding strategy incorporating character design, merchandising, and digital media platforms for Bengkulu's tourism potential. We surveyed 35 respondents to assess their familiarity with Bengkulu's distinctive cultural and natural elements and tourism potential. This strategy utilizes social media as a promotional tool to market Bengkulu's tourism potential. The findings suggest that implementing a comprehensive city branding system could increase Bengkulu's tourism appeal and economic growth. Therefore, the author intends to design a business strategy for a character-licensed base intellectual property that can elevate Bengkulu's culture, nature, and tourism with the function of city branding with a tourism approach.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the world's economy. One of the sectors that is affected is the trade and tourism sector. Whereas tourism is the primary source of income through foreign exchange and boosts the national economy, tourism can also have a significant impact on residents and community productivity. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, Indonesia is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, with an average of approximately 10.5 million foreign visitors per year (from 2016 to 2021).

Bengkulu became one of the newly inaugurated provinces in 1968 after the Bengkulu province merged with the South Sumatra province. With abundant natural wealth, Bengkulu should be able to become one of the famous natural and cultural tourism objects in Indonesia. However, due to needing more marketing and public knowledge about Bengkulu province, people prefer to vacation in more popular places like Bali or Lombok. Therefore, a business model, marketing strategy, and commercialization of Bengkulu tourism are needed to increase the value of Bengkulu culture and tourism to the general public. With this, the team of authors intends to introduce Bengkulu tourism and culture to the general public by designing intellectual property characters.

Intellectual Property (IP) is one of the most enormous business forces. Not only in terms of business and copyright, but Intellectual Property is also slowly starting to penetrate in terms of design and animation. Walt Disney Studio is one of the world's largest Intellectual Property business holding companies. In 2021, the Walt Disney Company earned a profit of $54B and was ranked first as a 2021 Global Licensor. Many enthusiasts for animation works increasingly support the high number of intellectual property assets, both in terms of branding, merchandise, and even other aspects such as games and movies.

Behind the success of the Intellectual Property business, which strengthens the monetization opportunities of each character and design, an Intellectual Property License protects the copyright of work. It helps the creator to develop the work. In addition to protecting copyright, Intellectual Property can introduce work or brand more broadly and effectively because it can bring the realm of business into a work of art.

From a business perspective, Character Licensing will play its role if the IP character has a selling point in the eyes of the audience. In this modern era, a business strategy that utilizes communication technology, such as various social media platforms, can be used to develop an IP-character business.

Because of social media, IP-character businesses can directly interact with the audience can form a community with the potential to become customers. Therefore, with this research, the author and the team intend to design a character license to elevate Bengkulu culture, nature, and tourism with a city branding function and a tourism approach. In the end, we can use the character license as Intellectual Property.

2 Literature Review

Bengkulu has excellent tourism potential, with its diverse natural and cultural attractions. However, tourism's contribution to the economy could be higher,
with low numbers of domestic and foreign tourists and short average stays. This dependence on nature and culture has led to problems in tourism management and a perception that tourism causes environmental degradation, cultural shifts, and socio-economic disparities. Indonesia aims to boost tourism by exempting visitor visas for 169 countries and improving transportation infrastructure. However, the low competitiveness index hinders its GDP and foreign exchange supply contribution. The need for promotional activities and tourism information, along with insufficient development of destinations, cleanliness, and tourism service infrastructure, impedes the country’s potential for tourism growth. That is why, effective marketing strategies, such as character licensing, may be implemented to boost the tourism industry in Bengkulu.

As seen in a study which suggests that digital marketing through advertising and publicity on platforms such as Instagram can significantly increase interest in visiting Bengkulu tourism objects within and outside of Bengkulu. With this particular issue, city branding is a good approach to take. City branding is a strategy used to promote and introduce a particular city or area's image to attract the interest of visitors, investors, and residents. Branding a city is the process of promoting its image and identity to specific audiences, such as tourists, investors, and residents. Branding a city increases the city's economic development by enticing residents and visitors. Emotional attachment is essential to city branding because it fosters a sense of loyalty and emotional connection between individuals and a location. A strong emotional attachment to a city can result in positive outcomes such as resident loyalty, increased tourism, and increased investment capital. Therefore, effective city branding should concentrate on creating an image that evokes a strong emotional connection in the target audience. This requires an understanding of their motivations and expectations as well as the development of interactive, active communication. Overall, effective city branding and a strong emotional connection can create value for both the city and the target audience. In this instance, licensing the Bubung Awa character can serve as a form of city branding for Bengkulu. The personality of Bubung Awa can serve as a distinctive identifier for the city of Bengkulu, raise the awareness and interest of tourists to visit the city and enhance the residents' sense of ownership and pride in their city. In addition, character licensing can add value and distinction to the Bengkulu tourism industry.

The Bubung Awa character can be incorporated into various merchandise products, including dolls, t-shirts, hats, mugs, and other items that can become typical Bengkulu souvenirs and serve as souvenirs for tourists. In contrast, using the Bubung Awa character in promotional media such as television advertisements, brochures, posters, and social media can help raise awareness and popularity of Bengkulu as an attractive and distinctive tourist destination.

As Kumamoto Prefecture did in Japan with the Kumamon character, character licensing as a marketing strategy in the tourism industry has also proven effective in various regions worldwide. Kumamoto Prefecture increased the number of tourists and foreign exchange by 92 billion yen in 2015 by utilizing the Kumamon character. Using the Geopark character as a tourist icon, Garut Regency in Indonesia had previously used character licensing as a marketing strategy to increase the number of tourist visits.

In the context of Bengkulu, licensing the Bubung Awa character as a form of city branding and marketing strategy can increase the number of tourist visits and strengthen the local tourism industry. In addition, character licensing can provide a tourist destination with added value and distinction. With engaging characters and a compelling backstory, licensing characters can attract tourists, especially the younger generation, who are more receptive to novel ideas.

3 Methods

This study used a mixed-methods approach that included qualitative and quantitative techniques. In ordToct qualitative data, we extract facts about IP in Asia and Indonesia from books, archives, magazines, journals, and other published materials, specifically character licenses designed for city branding, like Kumamon, to learn more about the Japanese government's strategy. In-depth interviews with Mr. Meki Indomanna, Head of Promotion for the Bengkulu Provincial Tourism Office, are used to collect primary data to learn more about the culture and conditions of the tourism sector. Mr. Wendy Purnama Tarigan to inquire about the tourism perspective on intellectual property or regional mascots. Mr. Andrian Wikayanto, a researcher at the Community and Culture Research Center - BRIN, discusses the type of business model that should be developed for character licensing in the context of city branding from a tourism perspective. In addition, for the quantitative method, we surveyed 35 individuals regarding their understanding of Bengkulu, the most frequently visited social media, and the most preferred merchandise. As an outcome, we used it to design the "Bubung Awa" character license, part of the city's branding strategy, particularly concerning tourism. Once we collect sufficient and credible data, we create a business model canvas, character design, and merchandise.

4 Results and Discussions

This research concludes that Bengkulu has considerable tourism potential but does not receive the attention it deserves. The quantitative analysis indicates that most respondents know Bengkulu's general and distinctive resources but are unaware of the tourist destinations. Our team adopted a tourism-based approach to city branding to increase awareness of Bengkulu's tourist destinations.

After conducting brand research, the author decided to design a brand based on Bengkulu's distinctive culture and solid historical value. The brand is called "Bubung Awa". "Bubung" is the first word of the name of a traditional Bengkulu traditional house, "Bubung
Where etymologically, Bubung means roof. The author uses the phrase bubung because it follows our character IP brand strategy, namely with the goal of local and non-local tourists feeling comfortable when traveling and having a relaxing and homey brand personality. Awa is the name of the main character of our mascot, which represents the rafflesia flower, a typical Bengkulu flower. "Awa" is a word taken from Fatmawati's name. Because in Bengkulu, Fatmawati's history is part of a solid historical background for the local community. We designed the brand's essence to be cute, playful, and comfortable, yet entertaining at the same time, and to function as a travel tool that can accompany the trip while traveling, as well as introduce Bengkulu's culture and become a travel buddy. Moreover, other than that, the IP character must be a pride for local people and the tourists who use our products. Thus, it makes our brand unique and lively. To run the character license-based intellectual property business, the author and team decided to do a TOWS analysis to recognize the perception of external aspects first, then pay attention to internal objectives. According to the BMC of The Character Licensed Based Intellectual Property "Bubung Awa," the threats hold the most critical aspect. According to the author's case study on the mascot of the Osi & Ji area and other local mascots, creating an Indonesian IP-based regional mascot market with a city branding function is unfamiliar. Using mascots for city branding and regional marketing, adapted from the Japanese way, has created a new market for the IP business. Moreover, in addition to that, there is a possibility that the IP, which acts as the regional mascot, is not accepted by the local community. So far, the author and team have not held a direct FGD with the local Bengkulu community. The author and team are limited to conducting case studies and research on the existence of local and Asian IP businesses, as well as conducting interviews and sharing with resource persons from LIPI and the Bengkulu Province Tourism Office. Based on the author's research, the opportunity is that no IP character raises the value of tourism, culture, flora, and fauna of Bengkulu Province explicitly also for city branding. Usually, the Indonesian mascot character IP tends to be used for an event only, not for sustainable city branding. Since the purpose of this IP project will be to contact government authorities, the weakness is that we face a situation where the government structure has many layers of management, which causes the need for many adjustments between our business IP and the government. From the internal aspect, the government is that we have designed and developed the character license based on folklore from Bengkulu.

Therefore, it has become our strength in terms of local cultural and historical values; it is already strong. Like the weaknesses and theories described previously, the writing team used a pull marketing strategy approach during the initial creation and development of the "Bubung Awa" intellectual property.

Because we designed our character IP license to elevate the cultural and tourism values of the Bengkulu area, we can conclude from the analysis of the existing study of Kumamon and Osi & Ji that the local government is a government supporter of the mascot in successfully promoting it to the public by building a sense of community ownership of the IP character or mascot created. However, to create an economic cycle, community participation is needed where the economic cycle will increase the tourism and cultural value of the area.

Fig. 1. Brand logo of "Bubung Awa" license character

Fig. 2. Business Ecosystem "Bubung Awa" license character.

The Business Pattern used to develop the IP character "Bubung Awa" is a Multi-Sided Platform. A business model with two first customer segments usually uses the Multi Sided-Platform business pattern. Therefore, the author decided that our character IP business model has two primary customers: tourists and local governments. After conducting case study research on several Asian IPs and local IPs made in Indonesia, merchandise is the result that holds the most critical role as they are the ones that will mainly rotate the economic cycle. Especially when the target of local and international domestic tourists. We anticipated merchandise sales to
generate the primary and most significant revenue. Because it functions as a promotional tool that the audience can directly own, merchandise can also be a souvenir in tourism.

In addition to collaborating with local government programs and merch production with MSMEs, the author's team also creates merchandise-harnessing technologies that are accessible, like Teespring, Printful, or Tees.

![BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS](image)

**Fig. 3.** Business model canvas "Bubung Awa" license character.

![Bubung Awa merchandise sold in Teespring Marketplace.](image)

**Fig. 4.** Bubung Awa merchandise sold in Teespring Marketplace.

It later can be sold as an example of the application of the character IP and the "Bubung Awa" brand in the form of merchandise. With this business model and strategy, our brand becomes a promotional tool.

According to the author's quantitative research, most respondents have social media. That is why content creation and audience interaction play an essential role in creating an interactive atmosphere for the audience to maintain the brand's customer relationship. Additionally, digital marketing will run using SEO, SEM, and SMO tools. In addition, we can actively use social media ads to create promotions and campaigns.

![Bubung Awa social media shows merchandise.](image)

**Fig. 5.** Bubung Awa social media shows merchandise.

![Another marketplace that connected with Bubung Awa is introducing the beauty of Bengkulu.](image)
5 Conclusions

In regional tourism, mascots and branding are essential in introducing regional tourism to local and international tourists. Branding and mascots are part of the visual language that can make it easier for tourists to get to know the area. The author's research study revealed that countries in Asia frequently incorporate mascots and branding into their promotional activities. Therefore, the author and team designed the Intellectual Property of Bubung Awa. Where "Bubung Awa" is a brand for a collection of mascots with a plant and animal theme that aims to represent Bengkulu. The author conducted research through interviews, observations, literature studies, and case studies over four months to find strategies and a business ecosystem that can help turn the economy around by determining the IP business and marketing strategy focused on City Branding with a tourism perspective. The community and increase regional foreign exchange with the tourism aspect. With this research, Intellectual Property "Bubung Awa" is expected to be a tool for promoting tourism in the Bengkulu area to become one of the tourist destinations of choice for tourists and the local community's pride. The author realizes that the research carried out still has shortcomings and limitations in abilities and insights that can be broader. The author's suggestions for working on the advanced project of making Intellectual Property "Bubung Awa" are to maintain the pipeline and time synchronization even further to continue the "Bubung Awa" project to a higher level. In addition, the author also hopes to further materialize the "Bubung Awa" Business IP project beyond just writing or design. With this, the author's next suggestion is to do further research and develop merchandise to be more innovative. The authors would like to thank the financial support from Bina Nusantara University for this research.

References


