

Analysis on the Influence of Place Branding Strategies on Rural Tourism : A Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) Approach—A Case Study of Kampung Agong

Sathis Rao Chinniah*

Tengku Fauzan Binti Tengku Anuar**

sathisrao18@gmail.com* & tengkufauzan@umk.edu.my (Corresponding Author)**

Abstract

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of rural tourism development through the lens of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework, applied to the context of place branding strategies. Focused on Kampung Agong as a case study, the research aims to comprehensively evaluate the impact of place branding initiatives, encompassing performance expectation, effort expectation, social influence, and technological factors, on the advancement of tourism in rural locales. Using a quantitative methodology that includes structured questionnaires distributed to 128 stakeholders involved local tourism operators, government representatives, and tourists. The rationale for this selection of participants was to capture a comprehensive view of the factors influencing place branding effectiveness across different stakeholder perspectives. The study reveals the nuanced interplay between these branding strategies and the growth of tourism in Kampung Agong. By unraveling the key determinants of tourists' acceptance and utilization of technological advancements facilitated by Place Branding initiatives, insights into enhancing the sustainable growth of tourism in rural areas are unearthed. Moreover, the study contributes to understanding the dynamics of destination branding and offers insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to enhance tourism development through strategic branding initiatives, thus fostering the socio-economic upliftment of rural communities like Kampung Agong.

Keywords: Place branding, Rural tourism, Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT).

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* Postgraduate at Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16300 Bachok, Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

** Lecturer at Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16300 Bachok, Kota Bharu, Kelantan.



Analisis Strategi Penjenamaan Tempat Terhadap Pelancongan Luar Bandar : Teori Penerimaan Dan Penggunaan Pendekatan Teknologi Bersepadu (UTAUT) - Kajian Kes Kampung Agong

Sathis Rao Chinniah*

Tengku Fauzan Binti Tengku Anuar**

sathisrao18@gmail.com & tengkufauzan@umk.edu.my (Penulis Koresponden)***

Abstrak

Kajian ini menyelidiki dinamika rumit pembangunan pelancongan luar bandar melalui lensa kerangka Teori Penerimaan dan Penggunaan Teknologi Bersepadu (UTAUT), yang digunakan dalam konteks strategi Penjenamaan Tempat. Tertumpu kepada Kampung Agong sebagai kajian kes, penyelidikan ini bertujuan menilai secara menyeluruh impak inisiatif Penjenamaan Tempat, merangkumi Jangkaan Prestasi, Jangkaan Usaha, Pengaruh Sosial dan Faktor Teknologi, terhadap kemajuan pelancongan di kawasan luar bandar. Kajian ini menggunakan metodologi kuantitatif yang merangkumi soal selidik berstruktur yang diedarkan kepada 128 pihak berkepentingan, termasuk pengendali pelancongan tempatan, wakil kerajaan, dan para pelancong. Pemilihan para responden spesifik ini adalah untuk mendapatkan pandangan yang menyeluruh mengenai faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi keberkesanan penjenamaan tempat dari pelbagai perspektif. Kajian itu mendedahkan interaksi bernuansa antara strategi penjenamaan ini dan pertumbuhan pelancongan di Kampung Agong. Dengan merungkai penentu utama penerimaan pelancong dan penggunaan kemajuan teknologi yang difasilitasi oleh inisiatif Penjenamaan Tempat, pandangan untuk meningkatkan pertumbuhan mampan pelancongan di kawasan luar bandar digali. Selain itu, kajian itu menyumbang kepada pemahaman dinamik penjenamaan destinasi dan menawarkan pandangan untuk penggubal dasar dan pengamal yang ingin meningkatkan pembangunan pelancongan melalui inisiatif penjenamaan strategik, sekali gus memupuk peningkatan sosio-ekonomi masyarakat luar bandar seperti Kampung Agong.

Kata Kunci: Penjenamaan Tempat, Pelancongan Luar Bandar, Teori Penerimaan dan Penggunaan Teknologi Bersepadu (UTAUT).

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* Pelajar Pascasiswazah di Fakulti Teknologi Kreatif dan Warisan, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16300 Bachok, Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

** Pensyarah di Fakulti Teknologi Kreatif dan Warisan, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, 16300 Bachok, Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

1.0 Introduction

Place branding is not a novel concept; it has long been a part of historical civic government strategies (Ashworth, 2009). However, the evolution of branding concepts is influenced by various factors and current circumstances. The extent to which a country, region, or locality, regardless of its scale, integrates branding into its image development process is crucial, particularly in light of potential future pandemics impacting tourism performance. In rural settings, villages possess unique cultural, historical, and natural assets that can significantly contribute to tourism growth and economic prosperity. Despite this potential, rural areas often struggle to attract tourists and sustain economic activities. Kampung Agong, situated in Penaga, Penang, serves as a pertinent example of a rural village grappling with the imperative to leverage its inherent potential for tourism (Abdul & Man, 2020; Razali et al., 2019; Mihardja et al., 2020). Despite its distinctive characteristics, the village faces challenges due to the absence of a well-defined place branding strategy, which hampers its ability to effectively communicate its unique offerings to prospective tourists. Applying the UTAUT framework allows us to examine the role of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and technological factors in shaping the adoption and acceptance of branding strategies (Aw et al., 2022), which allows us to recognize the tourists' perceptions of performance expectancy as it directly impacts their decisions to visit. Moreover, addressing effort expectancy, which pertains to the ease of access and overall visitor experience, is imperative, necessitating attention to infrastructure and accessibility challenges (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008; Xiang, Du, Ma, & Fan, 2017). Limited engagement with social networks and community involvement further impedes positive word-of-mouth marketing and potential visitor influence, underscoring the importance of fostering stronger social connections within Kampung Agong apart from crucial in technological utilization.

The incorporation of behavioral intention as a mediating factor within UTAUT enhances the comprehension of the psychological mechanisms at play among visitors. Employing UTAUT within this framework enables us to untangle the intricate relationships between various factors and place branding efforts, shedding light on the determinants impacting tourists' intentions and behaviors within the context of Kampung Agong. Therefore, by embedding the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology within the research framework, this study aims to conduct a thorough and nuanced examination of the hurdles Kampung Agong encounters in implementing place branding strategies. This integration facilitates a more sophisticated exploration of the influences on tourists' decision-making, technology uptake, and the overall efficacy of place branding endeavors in rural settings.

It's crucial to grasp how behavioral intention acts as a mediator between various factors and initiatives in place branding, as it greatly influences tourists' choices to visit and interact with a village. Given these complexities, it is imperative to evaluate the efficacy of place branding strategies in Kampung Agong, Penaga, and Penang. This study seeks to address existing gaps in research and offer practical guidance for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to implement focused interventions that bolster place branding, stimulate tourism, and foster the sustainable economic growth of rural villages.

2.0 Background of Study

2.1 Place Branding

Place branding involves utilizing the unique characteristics and ideas of a region or country to distinguish it from others and enhance its identity or image. It encompasses fundamental principles and reasons for a place's existence, along with its brand essence. Lee and Kim



(2010) describe it as meeting the needs of the target market while ensuring satisfaction among residents, businesses, investors, and visitors. This concept has gained global attention and is crucial for shaping the images of regions and cities, as emphasized by Kavaratzis (2005). Place branding integrates various elements like marketing, infrastructure, policies, and cultural assets to create a distinctive identity. However, effective branding, as Power and Hauge (2008) note, goes beyond slogans and logos, requiring meticulous planning and execution. Governments increasingly recognize the benefits of place branding in enhancing regional image and fostering growth. Well-executed efforts can transform a place's image, spur community development, and attract visitors. In a global context, cultural branding competition affects culture, economy, and politics significantly. Place branding acknowledges the role of history, culture, economic growth, infrastructure, and social development in shaping a place's identity, accepted by residents, visitors, and stakeholders.

Place branding has evolved as a critical aspect of destination management and tourism development. The study explores theoretical perspectives and empirical studies shaping the understanding of place branding, focusing on its effectiveness in Kampung Agong, a rural village in Penang, Malaysia. Kampung Agong faces distinct place branding challenges, including its relatively limited recognition as a tourist destination, lack of cohesive branding strategies, and difficulty in conveying its unique cultural identity to a wider audience. It has been a challenge in generating the number of tourist arrivals and hinder the village's economic growth. Rooted in marketing, place branding strategically manages the perception of a location, as highlighted by Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1993), emphasizing the role of branding in influencing tourist choices. The concept of destination image, defined by Gartner (1993), is fundamental, reflecting individuals' mental images of a destination. In Kampung Agong, the lack of a strong, consistent brand identity results in a fragmented destination image that fails to resonate with potential visitors. Successful location branding involves integrating various components. Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride (2002) propose the Brand Identity Prism, encompassing physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image. Place attachment, essential for understanding emotional connections to a location, influences visitors' perceptions and behaviors (Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005). Rural destinations face distinct challenges in branding, including limited resources and the need to balance preservation with economic development (Getz and Page, 2016; Gursoy, Chi, & Lu, 2010; Everett & Aitchison, 2008).

Technology plays an increasingly vital role in location branding, facilitating the dissemination of destination information through ICTs and social media platforms (Xiang et al., 2017; Gretzel et al., 2000). Incorporating technology into branding strategies requires an understanding of tourists' technology usage patterns (Buhalis, 2000). In Kampung Agong, there has been a slow adoption of digital tools and social media, which limits the effectiveness of its place branding efforts in reaching a broader audience. Place branding involves constructing a unique identity and image to differentiate a place and attract stakeholders. Authenticity, consistency, and relevance are crucial (Spence, 2020). Collaboration among stakeholders is essential for successful branding, ensuring alignment with community interests and values (Yulistiana et al., 2021). In Kampung Agong, there is a lack of coordination among local tourism operators, community leaders, and governmental bodies, further complicating the development of a unified branding strategy. Co-creation plays a role in developing authentic brands (Hao et al., 2021). Communication, especially through digital platforms, is vital for conveying brand messages and engaging audiences.



The perceived personality and image of a destination significantly influence its attractiveness, affecting tourists' perceptions and behaviors (Spence, 2020). Congruence between destination personality and visitor self-concept enhances attractiveness and satisfaction (Yulistiana et al., 2021). Place branding aims to drive economic growth, competitiveness, and quality of life improvements for residents, with tourism contributing to job creation, revenue, and infrastructure (Hao et al., 2021). Social outcomes include enhanced cohesion, cultural preservation, and community pride. In Kampung Agong, the potential for tourism to create jobs and stimulate the local economy is undermined by less effective of place branding strategies and a lack of visitor awareness about the area's offerings.

Successful place branding in rural areas like Kampung Agong must strike a delicate balance between preserving natural and cultural assets while fostering economic growth through tourism. For Kampung Agong, this balance is particularly challenging due to the lack of a cohesive branding strategy, and limited digital engagement. Effective place branding in such contexts requires addressing these issues while maintaining authenticity and cultural integrity. Additionally, the integration of technology plays a critical role in modernizing the branding efforts, ensuring that rural destinations appeal to tourists who seek both cultural immersion and the convenience of digital tools. Ultimately, for Kampung Agong to thrive, a unified, authentic, and technologically supported branding strategy is essential to enhance its attractiveness, increase tourist arrivals, and contribute to the socio-economic upliftment of the community.

3.0 Conceptual Model

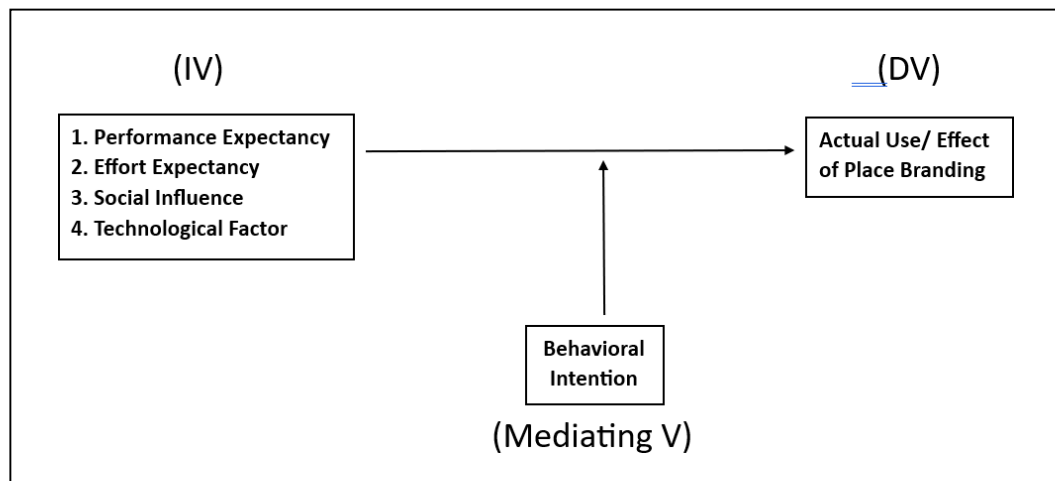


Figure 1: Conceptual Model (Adopted from UTAUT)

The conceptual framework visually illustrates the interconnections among independent variables, a mediator, and a dependent variable, serving as a guide for empirical research. On the left side of the diagram, effort expectancy, performance expectancy, social influence, and technological factors are prominent factors influencing technology adoption. Efforts Expectancy reflects the perceived difficulty of technology usage, while Performance Expectancy indicates anticipated benefits. Social influence encompasses peer and organizational impact, while technological factor considers broader environmental influences. In the center, Behavioral Intention emerges as a vital mediator, representing users' readiness to adopt technology. It acts as a bridge between



independent variables and Actual Use. On the right, Actual Use signifies the tangible application of technology within the National Tourism Hub.

The model suggests that users' perceptions of Efforts Expectancy, Performance Expectancy, Social Influence, and Technological Factor collectively influence Behavioral Intention, thus impacting Actual Use. Efforts Expectancy initiates the model, affecting subsequent attitudes and actions. Users' perceptions of Performance Expectancy are influenced by Efforts Expectancy. Social Influence and Technological Factor emphasize the multifaceted nature of technology adoption. Behavioral Intention serves as the pivotal link between independent and dependent variables. Users' perceptions contribute to its formation, guiding Actual Use behavior. The more favorable users' perceptions, the more positive their Behavioral Intention, leading to increased Actual Use.

This conceptual model provides a comprehensive understanding of technology adoption dynamics within the National Tourism Hub. It guides empirical exploration, offering insights into factors influencing technology adoption in the tourism industry and informing strategies for its integration. Based on the correlated functions with each other variables, it defines the core elements of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), namely Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, and Facilitating Conditions, offer a theoretical framework for examining the acceptance and utilization of technology within the realm of rural tourism and place branding. In the context of rural tourism, Performance Expectancy gains significance as tourists anticipate technology-driven place branding endeavors to furnish valuable destination information. Effort Expectancy assumes a critical role in ensuring that technology does not present undue obstacles to engagement. Social Influence, encompassing recommendations from fellow tourists or virtual communities, shapes tourists' decisions regarding technology utilization for exploring rural locales. Facilitating Conditions, such as dependable internet connectivity, influence tourists' perceptions regarding the practicality of employing technology in this milieu.

The incorporation of Behavioral Intention as an intermediary in the UTAUT model holds particular relevance. Tourists' behavioral intentions serve as a bridge between their perceptions of technology-facilitated place branding tactics and their actual involvement with these strategies. The literature review underscores the adaptability of UTAUT in deciphering the intricacies of technology adoption, rendering it a valuable instrument for dissecting the dynamics of technology acceptance in the distinctive setting of Kampung Agong. Given the research's emphasis on evaluating place branding tactics, the UTAUT framework furnishes a robust basis for evaluating tourists' anticipations, usability, social influence, and facilitating conditions, thereby enriching comprehension of how technology integration shapes the rural tourism encounter in Kampung Agong. The amalgamation of theoretical insights from UTAUT establishes a foundation for empirical inquiries into the efficacy of place branding practices in tourism.

4.0 Approach of UTAUT to Rural Tourism and Place Branding

In the context of examining the efficacy of place branding strategies in a rural village, the UTAUT framework offers a relevant theoretical perspective for comprehending tourists' acceptance and utilization of technology within the rural tourism milieu.

1. Performance Expectancy (PE): Within rural tourism, tourists may anticipate that technology-driven place branding endeavors, like mobile apps or online platforms, offer valuable insights into the destination, cultural encounters, and local attractions. A favorable view of performance expectancy can motivate tourists to engage with such technologies.
2. Effort Expectancy (EE): The perceived simplicity of utilizing technology in rural environments, such as user-friendly interfaces or intuitive applications, can significantly influence tourists'



inclination to embrace these tools. Effort expectancy becomes critical in ensuring that technology does not pose unnecessary barriers to participation.

3. Social Influence (SI): Social factors, such as recommendations from fellow tourists, residents, or online communities, exert a significant influence on tourists' choices regarding technology usage for exploring and experiencing the rural village. Positive social influence can amplify the perceived value of adopting technology.
4. Facilitating Conditions (FC): The presence of supportive infrastructure, such as dependable internet connectivity and accessible technological resources, contributes to facilitating conditions. Sufficient facilitating conditions can enhance tourists' perceptions of the practicality and ease of employing technology in the rural tourism context.

5.0 Integration of Behavioural Intention

In the framework of UTAUT, behavioral intention plays a pivotal role, serving as an intermediary between the independent variables (PE, EE, SI, FC) and the tangible behavior of use. Within the sphere of rural tourism, the behavioral intention of tourists plays a crucial role as a bridge between their perceptions of technology-based place branding strategies and their practical involvement with these endeavors. A favorable behavioral intention indicates the propensity of tourists to actively embrace and employ technology while exploring rural villages.

6.0 Research Methodology

In this study, a developmental design research approach was employed, utilizing quantitative methodology to ensure precise data collection and comprehensive analysis. The process adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines, which included identification, eligibility screening, and inclusion of relevant sources. Various online databases were searched using specific keywords related to branding, creativity, tourism, and rural branding, resulting in the review of over 159 articles. Additionally, reference lists were checked to ensure comprehensive coverage.

For the quantitative survey, the sampling strategy was carefully designed to ensure representation from a diverse range of stakeholders. A stratified random sampling approach was employed, with participants selected from three groups: local tourism operators, government officials, and visitors to Kampung Agong. The total sample size consisted of 128 respondents. This sample size was determined based on power analysis to ensure sufficient statistical power for the analysis. The rationale for the selection of participants was to capture a comprehensive view of the factors influencing place branding effectiveness across different stakeholder perspectives.

The quantitative method was deemed suitable for this study due to its ability to examine the factors influencing user behavior regarding place branding strategies in rural areas. A structured questionnaire was employed to systematically gather data on technology adoption in the tourism industry, aligning with the research objectives and ensuring rigorous statistical analysis. The structured questionnaire served as the primary data collection tool, ensuring consistency and comparability across responses. Carefully crafted questions aimed to uncover nuances in factors impacting technology adoption, such as performance expectations and social influence. This methodological approach enhanced the objectivity and reliability of the study, facilitating the identification of patterns and correlations among variables. By employing statistical analyses such as regression analysis, the research aimed to uncover significant relationships within the data, contributing to a nuanced understanding of technology adoption in the tourism industry. The



consistent administration of questionnaires minimized data inconsistency and bias, enabling a focused inquiry into complex technological variables.

Overall, the research design, grounded in quantitative methodology, aimed to provide accurate, objective, and insightful analysis of technology adoption in the tourism industry. Through this methodological framework, the study sought to reveal significant findings regarding the complexities of technology adoption in rural tourism contexts like Kampung Agong.

7.0 Discussion and Findings

Table 1: Results of Structure Model

Construct Endogenous	Path	Beta	Standard deviation	T statistics	R ²	F2	Q ²	q ²	P values	Results
Place Branding	BI -> AU	-0.863	0.129	6.673	0.500	0.754	0.622	0.000	0.000	Support
	EE -> AU	0.295	0.087	3.381		0.103		0.073	0.001	Support
	PE -> AU	0.337	0.105	3.205		0.168		0.058	0.001	Support
	SI -> AU	-0.157	0.116	3.295		0.039		0.006	0.000	Support
	TF -> AU	0.302	0.123	2.453		0.085		0.041	0.014	Support
Behavioural Intention	TF -> BI	0.434	0.066	6.594	0.493	0.028	0.501	0.000	0.000	Support
	EE -> BI	0.152	0.096	1.594		0.012		0.010	0.111	Not Support
	PE -> BI	0.089	0.079	1.129		0.198		0.001	0.259	Not Support
	SI -> BI	-0.324	0.070	4.630		0.209		0.075	0.000	Support

Table 1 presents a comprehensive analysis of the structural path coefficients and associated statistics in the structural equation model, aiding in the assessment of relationships between dependent (endogenous) and independent (exogenous) constructs. The table clearly highlights the significance and magnitudes of these relationships, illustrating the structural connections within the model.

Notably, "Behavioral Intention" exhibited a strong negative impact on "Place Branding," which was an unexpected result. This finding suggests that, contrary to the theoretical expectations, an increased intention to engage with the tourism destination may not necessarily align with positive perceptions of place branding. One possible explanation for this negative relationship is that high behavioral intention might be associated with a more critical or discerning attitude toward branding strategies. As visitors or stakeholders become more determined to engage with a location, they may place greater emphasis on the authenticity and substance of the place branding efforts, which could lead to dissonance or dissatisfaction if the branding does not meet their heightened expectations. This phenomenon warrants further investigation to better understand the psychological and behavioral dynamics at play when tourists are faced with place branding efforts that do not align with their personal values or anticipated experiences.

In contrast, "Technological Factor" played a pivotal role in determining "Behavioral Intention". The positive influence of technology adoption, in the context of place branding, aligns well with the theoretical framework, suggesting that the integration of technological tools in branding initiatives enhances tourists' engagement and intentions to visit rural destinations.

However, "Efforts Expectancy" and "Performance Expectancy" did not significantly impact "Behavioral Intention" in the model. This lack of significance challenges the traditional expectation that the perceived ease of use (effort expectancy) and perceived usefulness (performance expectancy) of technological tools should strongly influence behavioral intentions. One possible explanation for this is that respondents in this study may have already viewed the use of technology in place branding as either inherently easy or universally applicable, reducing the impact of these



constructs. Additionally, it is possible that other factors, such as the emotional connection to the destination or the perceived authenticity of the branding, may outweigh the perceived utility or ease of the technology. This finding suggests that future research should explore the complex interplay of factors influencing behavioral intention and technological adoption in rural tourism, beyond the traditional constructs of effort and performance expectancy.

Overall, table 1 provides an in-depth exploration of the structural relationships, highlighting the significant influences and their magnitudes, while also raising important questions about the factors shaping behavioral intention and its impact on place branding in rural tourism contexts.

8.0 Conclusion

This study represents a notable advancement in theoretical understanding by applying the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework to rural place branding, a field traditionally overlooked in technology acceptance literature. By integrating UTAUT into rural contexts, the research reveals how technology influences tourist behaviors and perceptions in these areas, bridging a gap in theoretical frameworks tailored to rural destinations. Additionally, the study's practical implications provide actionable guidance for policymakers, emphasizing the importance of leveraging social influence, integrating technology into place branding initiatives, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to promote tourism development in rural areas. Furthermore, policy implications highlight the need for tailored policies, infrastructure development, and digital connectivity investments to support sustainable tourism growth in rural communities like Kampung Agong.

1. Practical Implication

- Leveraging Social Influence and Community Engagement:

Encouraging community involvement can enhance rural destinations' appeal and visibility. Initiatives such as cultural events and eco-tourism activities involving locals can create authentic experiences and boost the destination's reputation.

- Strategic Integration of Technology:

Utilizing digital platforms like websites and social media can broaden the reach of rural destinations. Developing mobile apps or virtual tours can provide immersive experiences for visitors, driving tourism and economic benefits.

- Fostering Collaboration Between Stakeholders:

Promoting partnerships among residents, businesses, and government agencies is crucial for sustainable tourism development. Joint marketing campaigns and inclusive decision-making processes ensure initiatives meet community needs and aspirations.

2. Policy Implication

- Tailored Policies for Rural Destinations:

Customized policies addressing rural challenges like limited infrastructure and environmental preservation are essential. Establishing funds for small-scale tourism projects and implementing regulations to protect natural and cultural heritage sites can stimulate rural entrepreneurship and safeguard local assets.



- Infrastructure Development and Digital Connectivity:

Investing in transportation and digital infrastructure enhances rural accessibility and attractiveness. Projects like broadband expansion and eco-friendly transportation options not only improve tourist mobility but also contribute to environmental sustainability and economic growth in rural areas.

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