

CITY TOURISM BRANDING RESILIENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA

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The New Normal Era needs future adaptation, in order to ensure cities still have competitiveness and resilience in the tourism sector during the pandemic. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the implementation of the Smart Tourism Branding concept in Bantul city, Indonesia, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a quantitative study, using the random sampling method to obtain data from 230 respondents through a questionnaire, which was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). During the initial stage, a statistical test on each question's validity and reliability in the questionnaire was conducted, after which data analysis was carried out. Before performing multiple linear regression analysis, several assumptions were fulfilled, including data normality and multicollinearity. The results showed that the evaluation of smart tourism branding provides an overview of people's understanding and satisfaction level with regard to tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Jelajah Bantul application, which is a smart tourism branding instrument, supports Bantul City's ability to compete in attracting tourists and investment globally. In addition, the city's tourism management and branding identity can be facilitated and strengthened when the synergy strategy of the community and city stakeholders is appropriately regulated.

Key words: smart branding, tourism, competitiveness, resilience, community perception.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, cities are competing to become the global community's choice in investment, trade, tourism, and partnerships. In this shift in trend, a liveable, innovative, and sustainable residential environment is needed by cities, with the availability of comfortable, safe, healthy, and accessible public facilities for residents. Currently, the lifestyle of city residents and the future of cities are influenced by trends in information technology developments, since they are one of the solutions to the problems and challenges faced in a city. Indonesia has been in the process of building competitive

smart cities in terms of planning, governance, information technology, and business development for the last three years. Information technology is needed in order to collect and analyze data useful for the government, community, and business actors. Building a smart city offers bureaucratic efficiency using information technology and also builds the community.

This study examines the implementation of smart tourism branding in Bantul City, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in accordance with the New Normal era resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, all tourist destinations in Yogyakarta were temporarily closed to visitors due to the emergence of the coronavirus. However, in October 2020, some destinations reopened and have received limited visitors by implementing health protocols. Therefore, in

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entering the New Normal era resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, Bantul's smart city concept, especially its smart tourism branding, needs to be evaluated. Furthermore, cities need competitiveness and resilience for future adaptation of the concept. This study seeks to contribute to the novelty value of urban studies research in the new normal era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

City branding is a strategic instrument used to publicize the competitive advantages, history, quality of place, lifestyle, culture, and capital accumulation of a city in a competitive environment (Langer, 2001; Morgan *et al.*, 2002; Berci *et al.*, 2002; Evans, 2003). Apart from giving competitive advantage, being a smart city also highlights its functional and non-functional qualities, such as appearance, history, cultural attractions, demographics, economics, governance, experience, and perception (Zhang *et al.*, 2009). According to Lucarelli and Olof Berg (2011), city branding is the purposeful symbolic embodiment of all information connected to a city, in order to create surrounding associations. At the theoretical level, the concept of branding is typically developed in response to changes in the status and role of tourism in the global environment. City tourism branding competition and the latest developments show that successful city branding does not need to be limited to communication and marketing; instead, it needs to reach city planning, culture, trade, and investment (Herget *et al.*, 2015).

The direct and indirect experiences people have with their city environment produce representations and perceptions. Therefore, there is a physical and symbolic city built in their minds. This relationship helps explain the differences in city forms, such as buildings, streets, parks, etc., containing diverse social, cultural, historical, and political meanings (Castillo-Villar, 2016). There are two main factors associated with the city branding process. Firstly, it is an instrument for socializing the city's identity, and secondly, it is an instrument for increasing the competitive capacity. Strong city competitiveness and identity are not paradoxical concepts. However, exploring the synergy and identity of cities opens up opportunities for sustainable development. Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) stated that there are two significant gaps in the understanding of brand formation. Firstly, it is unclear which types of elements are associated with place attachment, based on personal preferences. Secondly, it is not clear how these associations operate collectively and how they link with each other to form a brand.

Kavaratzis and Kalandides (2015) further stated that it is important to take a close look at the elements that constitute a place, and they address some of the tensions within that framework. They also reported that these ongoing and multiple place brand formation processes are similar and interconnected with the synthesizing method. This allows people to make sense of places, and it is a process of interactions between the associations. The perception of a city affects its attractiveness to tourists, foreign investors, and potential students. Currently, marketing experts are trying to brand or re-brand cities in order to create a community where people are willing to live that is attractive to visitors (Herget, 2015; Young, 2012).

Branding is a deliberate process of selecting and associating various attributes capable of adding value to the basic product or service (Knox and Bickerton, 2003). The worldwide competition between cities due to the increase in economic and cultural globalization has been a stimulus for the development of place branding techniques (Sameh *et al.*, 2018). Several studies indicate that branding is one of the most important tools in city marketing. Therefore, when properly implemented, it helps to attract the target market and satisfy stakeholders, thereby increasing various aspects of city competitiveness (Purwanti and Genoveva, 2017). A place needs to be differentiated by means of its unique brand identity, assuming it is recognized as existing, and perceived in the minds of customers as possessing superior qualities, and consumed according to the place's objectives (Kavaratzis *et al.*, 2005). Branding of cities contributes to urban development and serves as a tool to enhance their position. Sameh *et al.* (2018) stated that city branding is a central activity within city management, and one of the most debatable topics among marketers.

According to Kankhuni (2020), destination branding is executed by combining the efforts of the supply (destination) and demand (traveller) due to the successful outcomes achieved by both sides. A standard approach to city branding is typically associated with promoting competitive assets and often dictated by public-private partnerships without significant community involvement (Joo and Seo, 2018). This issue relating to place branding is a fairly new and dynamic development, which can be facilitated by a deeper understanding. Furthermore, this is obtained with the interaction of multiple stakeholders, in order to create value that brands a place, which is inextricably linked to place identity and a sense of place (Hereźniak, 2017).

The creation of a city brand is connected with a set of events aimed at forming a bright and large image that is able to accommodate all of the positive characteristics of the city, emphasizing uniqueness and authenticity, and making it attractive and memorable for tourists (Karakova *et al.*, 2020). A city's image as a tourist destination includes a number of associations (memories), expectations, and other emotions. A strong brand is used to raise awareness of a place's existence (Uskokovic, 2020). At this stage of globalization, it is imperative to determine the urban selling point of a city's competitiveness, which gives a city its image by public design, so as to acquire the right identity based on a cultural understanding (Young, 2012). Cities tend to compete globally to attract tourism and investment. Therefore, city branding concepts and strategies are increasingly being adopted and applied to development.

City branding is the process of diversifying local tourist organizations, cultural and arts facilities, museums and historic preservation groups, as well as constructing a place for images, thus helping to develop tourist sites to attract consumers and investment in a particular local area (Jojic, 2018). According to Mohammadifar *et al.* (2018), city branding is a predictor variable for creating an ideal image that satisfies residents and significantly impacts the level of audience satisfaction, including that of tourists.

The transition from city marketing to branding is facilitated

by the extensive use and success of product branding and the recent and rapidly developed concept of corporate branding (Balmer, 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2003). Gnoth (2002) reported that the power of tourism is a determinant of how the image of a country is perceived, with a theoretical approach in developing a leveraging model capable of facilitating the tourism experience brand across different industries. The synergy between public and private, when properly regulated, facilitates the management and maintenance of strategic areas of the city, reinforces the image and branding identity, and opens alternative ways of attracting new businesses, commercial investors, consumers, and tourists (Rossini and Nervino, 2019).

RESEARCH METHOD

This is quantitative research with primary data randomly obtained from 230 respondents, using a questionnaire consisting of a list of questions on demographic data, responses, statements, and answers. Respondents to the questionnaire included city residents, via Google Form media. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part contained the respondent's age and background identity, while the second and third contained their knowledge of smart tourism branding in Bantul and the Jelajah Bantul application. Respondents were required to complete the questionnaire by selecting and filling in the fields provided. Following this, multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to determine the respondents' characteristics, such as age, residence location, and their knowledge of smart branding and the Jelajah Bantul application. All data in this study were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In the initial stage, a statistical test on each question's validity and reliability was conducted to determine their validity based on the value of $r_{count} > r_{table}$ and Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.6$. Before performing multiple linear regression analysis, several assumptions were fulfilled, such as data normality and multicollinearity.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Bantul City is located in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, as shown in Figure 1. According to 2019 data obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics, Bantul City is the second favorite tourist destination in Indonesia, after Bali Island.

According to the data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2020), Bantul has a population of 951,344 and a density of 1,877 people/km². Tourist attractions in this city are natural (Parangtritis beach, Depok beach, Parangkusumo dunes, Mangunan pine forest), cultural (traditional ceremonies), and artificial (handicraft centers) (Regional Development Planning Agency, 2015).

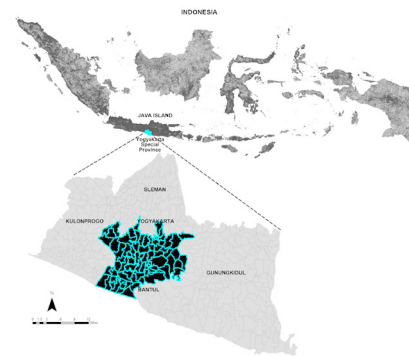


Figure 1. Bantul City, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
(Source: Author, 2021)

The cumulative number of foreign tourist visits to Indonesia in 2019 was 13.62 million (2.85 percent increment), compared to 13.25 million visitors in 2018 (Central Bureau of Statistic, 2021). However, in 2020, the cumulative number of foreign tourist visits decreased by 72.35%, with a total of 3.72 million visits due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In

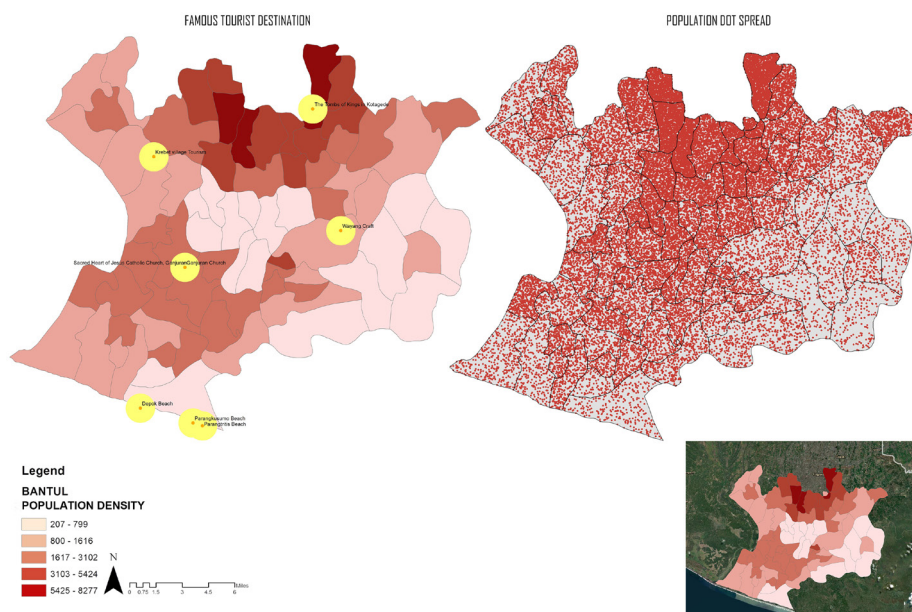


Figure 2. Potential map of Bantul city, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
(Source: drawn by authors using Bantul Central Bureau of statistics data 2020)

order to facilitate the delivery of information on regional potential, the Bantul Smart City Master Plan, consisting of six dimensions, namely smart governance, branding, the economy, living, community, and the environment, was established in 2017. Smart branding is one of the dimensions in the Bantul City masterplan that aims to develop the competitiveness of superior commodities based on regional potential sustainably and build infrastructure and market tourism with a go-digital strategy, in the form of the Jelajah Bantul application (Starjogja information channel, 2020). This application contains information on various tourist destinations in Bantul City. Through this application, prospective tourists wanting to visit tourist destinations in Bantul are able to obtain prior information on location choices and types of tourist destinations, accommodation, culinary spots, and local transportation.

However, after running for three years, there has not yet been an evaluation to determine the extent of the community's understanding of the smart tourism branding, or any thoughts shared on tourism during the pandemic. Furthermore, there has been no evaluation of available applications and their contents that would respond to interest in tourism during the pandemic and understand the development of support facilities.

Therefore, in response to this lack, the community's opinions on smart tourism branding and the Jelajah Bantul application during the COVID-19 pandemic were collected through questionnaires, in which the respondents could share their opinions regarding:

- Smart tourism branding in Bantul, Yogyakarta;
- Tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- The content expected to be available in the Jelajah Bantul application to help tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Innovation in developing tourism support facilities.

The questionnaire was distributed to 300 respondents from various categories of age and educational background. A total of 230 respondents filled out the questionnaire. However, only 207 were analyzed because the remaining 23 had data errors due to incomplete answers and redundancy. The processing results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the questionnaire has a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.6. This means that each question and answer item was reliable. The value of r_{count} for all questions and answers was greater than r_{table} . Therefore, it can be concluded that the results were valid and reliable, based on the results of statistical validity and reliability tests. The analysis process consisted of several unfulfilled assumptions, namely the community opinion on post-pandemic/New Normal touring, the expected applications and available content, especially to reveal tourism during the pandemic, and the level of understanding on the use of the application for developing tourism support facilities in Bantul.

The unfulfilled assumptions were the assumption of normality and multicollinearity for each component, thereby making it impossible to continue the regression analysis. Multiple linear regression analysis was only performed on

variables that met several assumptions, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates the existence of a mutual relationship between the t-table and t-count. A significant value greater than each variable is obtained when the alpha value is 0.05, therefore, there is a relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Thus, it can be concluded that the respondents' characteristics, such as gender, higher (university), and secondary education levels (senior high school/equivalent/others), and an age of 15-29 or above 30 years do not influence the knowledge level of smart tourism branding. The residence location factor in Yogyakarta influenced the level of knowledge on smart tourism branding, since the questionnaire was also applied to respondents located outside Yogyakarta.

In the component regarding the understanding level of users of the Jelajah Bantul application, the significance value was greater than the alpha value (0.05), without any effect of gender, education, age or location of residence.

A descriptive analysis of the questionnaire is as follows:

- Knowledge of the Components of smart tourism branding

Respondents were given several statements to measure their understanding of the components of smart tourism branding, such as "I often visit tourist destinations", "Supporting factors for tourism such as transportation, accommodation, hotels, restaurants, souvenir places are in good condition", "There are supporting facilities at tourist destinations used for superior marketing products based on regional/local potential". The respondents' answers show that 62% were neutral, 27% agreed, 9% disagreed, 1% strongly agreed, and 1% strongly disagreed, as shown in Figure 3.

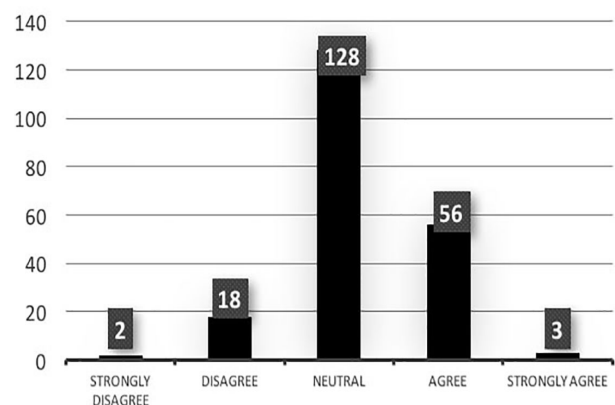


Figure 3. Community Knowledge on the Components of Smart Tourism Branding

- Opinions on tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic

On the community understanding of tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents provided several statements, such as "I still have fewer tourist activities, especially with general visitors that arrived due to the pandemic", "Touring after a pandemic is very necessary to refresh the mind", "Tour activities are allowed while implementing the health protocol". The respondents'

Table 1. The Community Opinion on Smart Tourism Branding (Cronbach's Alpha, N = 207)

Opinions on Smart Tourism Branding ($\alpha = .798$)
<p>I often visit tourist destinations. When I visited tourist destinations, there were no obstacles. I often visit natural tourist destinations. Apart from natural tourist destinations, I visited handicrafts, culture, arts, and history tourism destinations. Supporting facilities such as transportation, accommodation, restaurants, and gift shops are in good condition. The Tourism Office properly conducts tourism management and marketing. In each tourist destination, there are marketing facilities for superior products based on regional/local potential. There is signage on the road to tourist destinations. Affordable admission prices. There are various choices of tourist destinations.</p>
Opinions on tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic ($\alpha = .782$)
<p>I have reduced my tourism activities, especially in crowded places. Tourism activities during a pandemic are needed to refresh the mind. The number of visitors to each tourist destination needs to be limited It is essential to choose a safe tourist destination because of the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus and government regulations. Tourism activities are permitted in compliance with health protocols. Making a digital application to monitor visitors' numbers at each tourist destination in real-time is recommended. A digital application is needed to provide information on the COVID-19 zone in each tourist destination.</p>
Opinions about digital applications and content that supports tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic ($\alpha = .929$)
<p>The content on the home page presents the implementation of security and cleanliness at each tourist destination. There is a zoning map on the spread of the virus in each tourist destination, and information on health protocols. The app contains the number of COVID-19 cases in the local area, information on the availability of health facilities (hospitals), and recommended accommodation. There are COVID-19 news updates in areas where tourist destinations are located. There is added news regarding COVID-19 in real time. There is information on the number of visitors and health check standards at each tourist destination. There is a need for a digital application containing detailed tourism procedures in accordance with health protocols. The content includes updating information on visiting times and the number of visitors allowed, thereby enabling the community to manage their tourism time. There is content on accommodation facilities, local transport, maps, mileage, culinary spots, and tour guides. There is alternative information on other tourist destinations when the visitor capacity limit is reached.</p>
The opinion of Jelajah Bantul users about the application's innovation ($\alpha = .967$)
<p>I use the Jelajah Bantul application to choose tourist destinations. The Jelajah Bantul application helps in providing access to tourist destinations. The Jelajah Bantul application provides information on tourist destinations. The frequency of my visits to tourist destinations has increased after using the Jelajah Bantul application. The Jelajah Bantul application helps to provide recommendations on various tourist destinations. There is a poor internet connection that needs to be improved. I do not face any problems in using the application. I am satisfied with the application. Promotion needs to be carried out to educate the community on the use of the Jelajah Bantul application. Content on the available touring schemes is needed (half-day, one-day, two-day tours).</p>
The opinion of the non-Jelajah Bantul users about the application's innovation ($\alpha = .824$)
<p>I have never known or used the Jelajah Bantul application when choosing tourist destinations. Promotion needs to be performed to educate the community on the Jelajah Bantul application. It has impressive content for travel packages and events for families I need information regarding the COVID-19 distribution map, safe travel, and health protocols. I need information regarding accommodation and local transportation. I need culinary information. I need information on tourist destination places favored by the community. I need entrance ticket price information. I use information technology assistance, such as Google Maps and websites to locate tourist destinations. I use the help of travel guidebooks and information from friends that have visited the areas.</p>

answers, showed that 68% agreed, 21% strongly agreed, 10% were neutral, and 1% disagreed. The option "strongly disagree" had no responses with regard to community opinion on post-pandemic tourism (Figure 4).

- Applications and content needed for post-COVID-19 pandemic tourism
 In terms of the applications and content available

to support tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents provided several statements such as the need for "Zoning maps of the pandemic spread", "Information on health protocols", "Information related to alternative choices, when the destination has reached its visitor capacity", "Information on the number of visitors to a destination and standard health checks", "News updates on the pandemic, especially

on the tourist destinations areas". Therefore, based on the respondents' answers, 50% agreed, 41% strongly agreed, and 9% were neutral (Figure 5).

- User understanding of the Jelajah Bantul application

Respondents provided various answers to questions associated with determining how well users of the Jelajah Bantul application understood it with regard

Table 2. Regression Analysis

	Knowledge on the Components of Smart Tourism Branding in Bantul.		The level of understanding of the Jelajah Bantul application and its innovation (User of Jelajah Bantul application).	
	B	Sig	B	Sig
Gender	.112	.870	-4.664	.484
Higher Education Level	-1.001	.315	-5.261	.572
Secondary Education Level	.986	.319	4.943	.585
Aged 15-29 years	-.341	.626	-6.727	.329
Aged >30 years	.359	.603	5.455	.452
Inside Yogyakarta	1.586	.033	-2.209	.760
Outside Yogyakarta	-1.575	.032	4.664	.623

Description:
 $\alpha (0.005) > p =$ Influencing; $p =$ significance value

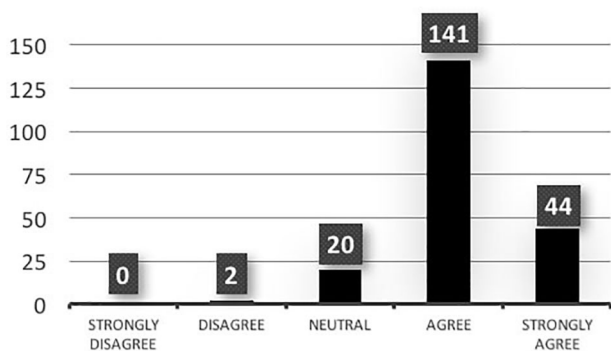


Figure 4. Community Opinions on Tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic

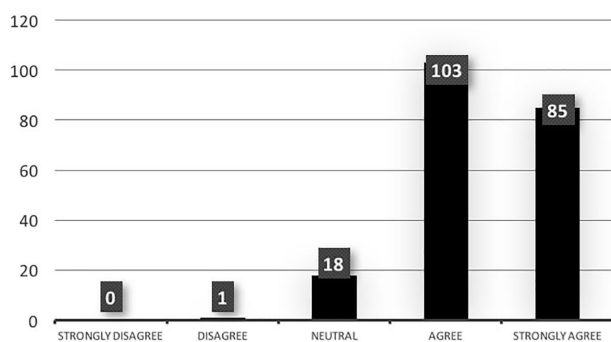


Figure 5. Community Opinion on Application and Content

to the development of tourism support facilities. The responses included "I use the Jelajah Bantul application to choose a tourist destination", "The frequency of my visits to tourist destinations has increased after using the Jelajah Bantul application", "I am currently satisfied with the Jelajah Bantul application", "I have not faced any problems when using the application". 50% of respondents were neutral, 36% agreed, and 7% strongly disagreed. Meanwhile, the option of "strongly agree" did not get any responses for this questionnaire component (Figure 6).

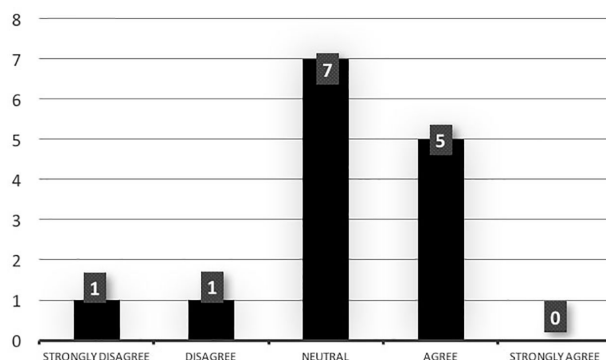


Figure 6. User understanding of the Jelajah Bantul application

- Non-user understanding of the Jelajah Bantul application.

In the questionnaire regarding how well users understand the Jelajah Bantul application in relation to the development of tourism support facilities, respondents provided several statements such as the need for "Information related to the zoning map of COVID-19 spread", "safe tourism", "a health protocol", "Information regarding accommodation and transportation", "Use of information technology such as Google Maps, tourist websites to identify tourist destinations". It was also said that "Promotion and marketing have to be performed to provide the community with knowledge regarding the Jelajah Bantul application". The respondents' answers, show that 73% agreed, 15% were neutral, 11% strongly agreed, and 1% disagreed (Figure 7).

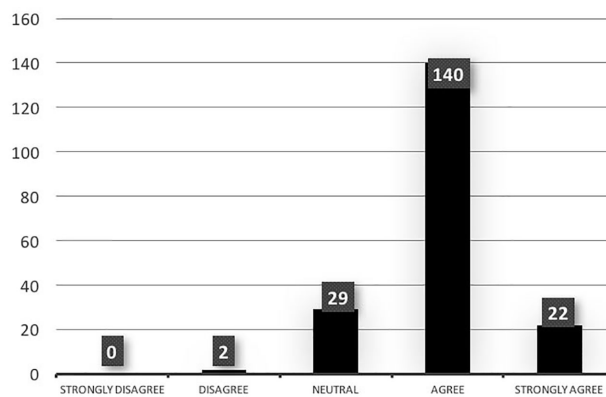


Figure 7. Non-Users' Understanding of the Jelajah Bantul application

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the respondents' characteristics, such as gender, higher and secondary education levels, and age (15-29 and above 30 years), did not influence the level of knowledge with regard to smart tourism branding. The residence location factor (living in or outside Yogyakarta) influenced the level of knowledge on smart tourism branding. Furthermore, most respondents were neutral towards the development of tourism support facilities. The majority of non-users of the Jelajah Bantul application agreed on the development of tourism support facilities.

In terms of the community understanding of tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority agreed to the implementation of a health protocol. Therefore, this evaluation of smart tourism branding in Bantul city has created an overview of the community understanding and satisfaction level with regard to tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The community perception shows that Bantul needs to strengthen its unique tourism branding identity so that it possesses high competitiveness and resilience, which are considered superior qualities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Smart tourism branding in Bantul is a strategic instrument used to publicize a competitive tourist advantage. Meanwhile, the Jelajah Bantul application is a vital tourism branding tool, used to attract the target market (tourists), satisfy stakeholders, and increase the city's competitiveness. As a smart tourism branding instrument, this application enables Bantul to compete globally in attracting tourists and tourism investment.

Therefore, the proper occurrence of a synergy strategy between the community and city stakeholders facilitates the management of tourism and strengthens the city's branding identity.

Tourism branding is expected to be safe, comfortable, and meet health protocols in order to be able to restore public trust. Forms of mass tourism involving large numbers of people are not in line with health protocols. Conversely, individualized tourism with a limited number of visitors is expected to consider environmental sustainability and prioritize health in order to be able to restore economic resilience. This branding is a sign of entering a New Normal.

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