

## CULTURAL TOURISM MARKETING STRATEGY: INTEGRATING TRI HITA KARANA VALUES FOR RURAL TOURISM DESTINATION BRANDING DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Culture-oriented tourism plays a vital role in empowering rural economies and safeguarding local wisdom. However, marketing practices in this sector frequently prioritise commercial appeal rather than embodying cultural values. This research explores how cultural tourism marketing strategies influence the branding of rural tourism destinations, with the Tri Hita Karana (THK) philosophy serving as a mediating variable. Data were gathered through a Likert-scale survey involving 121 participants from Jatiluwih Tourism Village and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results reveal that cultural tourism marketing strategies have a significant positive impact on destination branding, while THK values mediate and reinforce this relationship. These findings highlight the importance of integrating cultural principles into destination marketing to promote authenticity and sustainable tourism development.

**Key words:** Marketing Strategy; Cultural Tourism; Tri Hita Karana; Destination Branding

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a crucial role in shaping local economies and cultural identity, particularly in developing regions where it drives community empowerment and sustainability. As the tourism landscape evolves, cultural tourism marketing has become increasingly important in promoting authentic cultural experiences while maintaining community identity (Pike & Page, 2014a). Within this framework, the *Tri Hita Karana* (THK) philosophy—rooted in Balinese culture—offers a holistic foundation for achieving harmony between humans (*Pawongan*), nature (*Palemahan*), and the divine (*Parhyangan*). As a guiding principle of social and spiritual balance, THK aligns closely with global concepts of sustainable tourism and responsible destination management (Astuti et al., 2021). Despite its philosophical relevance, the integration of THK into destination marketing strategies remains limited. Current promotional efforts in many rural tourism areas, including Jatiluwih Village—a UNESCO-recognized cultural landscape—tend to emphasize scenic beauty rather than deeper cultural and spiritual meanings. This misalignment suggests a gap between local cultural heritage and modern marketing practices, which may weaken destination authenticity and brand sustainability (Ardani et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of cultural tourism marketing strategies on rural destination branding, with *Tri Hita Karana* values serving as a mediating variable. Specifically, it seeks to demonstrate how incorporating local wisdom into marketing strategies can strengthen destination authenticity, competitiveness, and sustainable brand identity in Jatiluwih Village. Tourism plays a crucial role in shaping local economies and cultural identity, particularly in developing regions where it serves as a driver of community empowerment and sustainability. This shift highlights the growing importance of cultural tourism marketing, which focuses on promoting authentic cultural experiences while preserving the identity of the host community (Pike & Page, 2014a). The Tri Hita Karana (THK) philosophy—rooted in Balinese culture—provides a holistic framework for maintaining harmony between humans (Pawongan), nature (Palemahan), and the divine (Parhyangan). As a core principle of community life and spiritual balance, THK aligns with global concepts of sustainable development and responsible tourism management (Astuti et al., 2021). Integrating THK into marketing strategies may create a more authentic and value-oriented destination identity, connecting local cultural wisdom with modern marketing approaches. This study aims to analyze the influence of cultural tourism marketing strategies on rural destination branding, with Tri Hita Karana values serving as a mediating variable. The choice of Jatiluwih Village—a UNESCO-designated cultural landscape in Bali—is particularly relevant, as it represents the living practice of THK philosophy through its subak irrigation system and harmonious relationship between humans and nature (Ardani et al., 2025). However, current destination branding in Jatiluwih remains focused largely on scenic attractions rather than deeper spiritual and cultural values, creating a gap in aligning cultural heritage with marketing strategy.

The primary aim of this study is to explore the influence of cultural tourism marketing strategies on rural destination branding by incorporating the philosophical values of Tri Hita Karana as an integral mediating concept. This research seeks to understand how local wisdom can bridge modern marketing practices with sustainable brand identity, emphasizing authenticity and cultural integrity. Furthermore, it provides empirical insights into how the integration of indigenous cultural values can enhance both the competitiveness and distinctiveness of rural tourism destinations. Ultimately, the study aspires to construct a comprehensive conceptual and managerial framework for

destination marketing that harmonizes global sustainability standards with the essence of local cultural traditions. In summary, this research bridges the gap between modern marketing strategy and indigenous cultural philosophy, demonstrating integration of THK values can serve as a foundation for sustainable rural destination branding and tourism resilience in Bali.

## METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative research design employing the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach to examine the causal relationship between marketing strategy (X), Tri Hita Karana (Z), and destination branding (Y). The PLS-SEM technique was chosen due to its suitability for complex models and moderate sample sizes, as well as its ability to assess latent constructs with reflective indicators (Hair et al., 2021). The research follows an explanatory design, aiming to measure both direct and indirect effects among the variables. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0 software, which allows simultaneous assessment of both measurement (outer) and structural (inner) models to ensure validity and reliability. The study was conducted in Jatiluwih Village, Tabanan Regency, Bali, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its Subak irrigation system and cultural tourism practices grounded in the Tri Hita Karana (THK) philosophy.

The population of this study consisted of local stakeholders involved in tourism management — including homestay owners, cultural site managers, local tourism committees, and community leaders. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, targeting individuals directly involved in tourism operations and marketing practices. A total of 121 valid responses were obtained, recommended for PLS-SEM (ten times the maximum number of indicators in the model). Respondents represented a balance between operational managers and community members, ensuring comprehensive perspectives on marketing practices and the integration of local wisdom in destination development. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, using both online (Google Forms) and offline distribution methods. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument items were adapted and modified from prior validated scales in marketing, destination branding, and cultural tourism studies (Chin et al., 2020; Pike & Page, 2014; Richards, 2018).

The methods section explains the types of research/research designs. This section explains the number of subjects and the characteristics of the subject demographic data collection (Azwar, 2007). In quantitative research, if the research uses specific measuring instruments, it is necessary to convey the name of the measuring instrument, the number of items, the reliability coefficient, and the data analysis method used. In qualitative research, qualitative perspectives are used, and methods of data collection and analysis are discussed (Willig, 2008). To ensure measurement reliability and validity, all construct indicators were pre-tested for internal consistency and content relevance. Convergent validity was established with indicator loadings exceeding 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, indicating that the indicators shared a significant proportion of variance with their corresponding latent construct. Composite reliability (CR) values were also greater than 0.70, confirming internal consistency. Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), both meeting recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2021).

## RESULTS

### Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis proceeded through two main stages: Measurement Model Evaluation — to test indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using SmartPLS 4.0. Structural Model Evaluation — to assess path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values using the bootstrapping procedure (5,000 subsamples). Mediation testing followed (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to confirm indirect effects of Tri Hita Karana between marketing strategy and destination branding. The results indicated that all path coefficients were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), confirming the hypothesised relationships. The mediation effect of Tri Hita Karana was found to be partial, strengthening the link between marketing strategy and destination branding.

### Reporting Research Result

#### Measurement model (Outer model)

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure reliability and validity of the constructs. All outer loadings exceeded 0.70, (CR) values were above 0.80, and AVE exceeded 0.50. Discriminant validity was confirmed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio ( $< 0.85$ ). These results demonstrate that the indicators accurately represent their respective latent constructs, confirming strong convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2021). The convergent validity test shows that all indicators have an *outer loading* value above 0.70, so they are declared to be convergently valid. Each construct records an AVE value exceeding 0.50, suggesting that its observed indicators capture and explain over fifty percent of the variance associated with the underlying latent variable.

**Table 1. Outer Model Measurement**

Constructs	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Information
Marketing Strategy (X)	0.766	0.924	0.926	Reliable & Valid
Tri Hita Karana (Z)	0.693	0.889	0.892	Reliable & Valid
Destination Branding (Y)	0.628	0.881	0.884	Reliable & Valid

The entire construct has a Cronbach's Alpha > value of 0.70 and a Composite Reliability > 0.80, which means it meets the internal reliability criteria (Hair et al., 2021). An AVE value > 0.50 indicates that the model meets convergent validity.

**Measurement Model (Inner Model)**

*Evaluation of Structural Models (Inner Model)*

The second stage aims to assess the strength of the relationship between latent variables and test the hypothesis. The results of the structural model test can be seen in the following:

**Table 2. Inner Model Measurement**

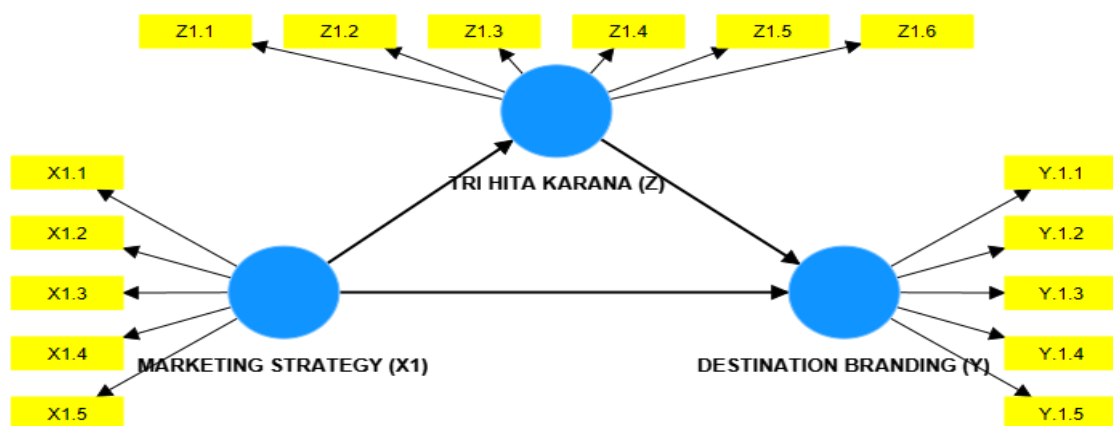
Intervariable Relationships	Path Coefficients (β)	T-Statistics	p-value	Information
Marketing Strategy (X) → Destination Branding (Y)	0.276	2.477	< 0.001	Significant
Tri Hita Karana (Z) → Destination Branding (Y)	0.585	5.616	< 0.001	Significant
Marketing Strategy (X) → Tri Hita Karana (Z)	0.791	21.479	< 0.001	Significant
Mediasi X → Z → Y (Indirect Effect)	0.463	5.247	< 0.01	Significant

The R<sup>2</sup> value = 0.67 indicates that the marketing strategy and values of Tri Hita Karana can explain 67% of the variation in destination branding. A value of Q<sup>2</sup> = 0.48 indicates strong predictive relevance, while an SRMR value = 0.06 indicates a good model fit. The results of the bootstrapping analysis show that Tri Hita Karana's values play a significant mediator in the relationship between marketing strategy and destination branding. This indicates that implementing cultural tourism marketing strategies becomes more effective when spiritual, social, and environmental values are internalized in destination management practices.

**SEM Structural Model**

The structural model of the PLS-SEM analysis can be seen in Figure 1. Path Model

SEM Structural Model: Integration of THK Values in Cultural Tourism Marketing Strategy



**Figure 1. Structural Model**

Figure 1 presents the structural equation model illustrating the relationship between Marketing Strategy (X), Tri Hita Karana (Z), and Destination Branding (Y) within the context of culture-based tourism in rural destinations. The framework reflects how cultural tourism marketing strategies influence destination branding, both directly and indirectly, through the mediating role of Tri Hita Karana values. The exogenous latent construct, Marketing Strategy (X), is measured by five reflective indicators (X1.1–X1.5), which describe essential marketing dimensions such as strategic planning, segmentation and targeting, promotional initiatives, product innovation, and stakeholder

collaboration. The mediating construct, *Tri Hita Karana* ( $Z$ ), comprises six reflective indicators ( $Z1.1$ – $Z1.6$ ), representing three harmonized relationships: *parahyangan*, *pawongan*, and *palemahan*. Meanwhile, the endogenous construct, *Destination Branding* ( $Y$ ), is measured through five reflective indicators ( $Y1.1$ – $Y1.5$ ), emphasizing key aspects of brand identity such as brand image, authenticity, visitor satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived uniqueness.

The directional arrows in the model represent the hypothesized causal paths: (1) from *Marketing Strategy* to *Tri Hita Karana* ( $X \rightarrow Z$ ), indicating the influence of cultural marketing practices on the internalization of traditional values; (2) from *Tri Hita Karana* to *Destination Branding* ( $Z \rightarrow Y$ ), illustrating the contribution of cultural harmony to building a strong and sustainable brand identity; and (3) from *Marketing Strategy* directly to *Destination Branding* ( $X \rightarrow Y$ ), signifying the strategic impact of marketing efforts on destination perception and brand strength. This model underlines the mediating role of *Tri Hita Karana* as an integrative cultural mechanism that connects marketing strategy with sustainable branding outcomes. It highlights that effective tourism marketing should not only aim for commercial appeal but also embody local cultural values to reinforce authenticity, sustainability, and community well-being.

## DISCUSSION

This study provides empirical evidence that cultural tourism marketing strategies have a positive and significant effect on the **branding** of rural tourist destinations. These findings are consistent with the literature that confirms that culture-based marketing strategies can strengthen perceptions of authenticity and increase traveler loyalty (Pike & Page, 2014; Richards, 2018). Furthermore, integrating **Tri Hita Karana values** has proven to be an important role in strengthening the relationship between marketing and *branding* strategies. This philosophy allows for the creation of a balance between the spiritual (*Parhyangan*), social (*Pawongan*), and ecological (*Palemahan*) dimensions, so that destinations are not only perceived as tourist attractions, but also as spaces for meaningful cultural experiences (Fox, 2015). A significant mediation role suggests that marketing strategies executed without considering local values tend to produce a superficial image. On the other hand, when the value of THK is internalized in the process of communication, products, and services, the image of the destination becomes stronger, more consistent, and trusted by tourists (Escobar-Farfán et al., 2024). These results expand the theory of destination marketing by showing that local cultural values are not only an element of identity, but also a strategic mechanism in creating a destination's competitive advantage. Tourism village managers can implement these results through promotional strategies highlighting spirituality, social harmony, and nature preservation as the core message of destination communication.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study carry both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research extends the literature on culture-based tourism marketing by confirming the mediating role of *Tri Hita Karana* (THK) values in strengthening the relationship between marketing strategies and destination branding. This contributes to a deeper understanding of how indigenous philosophies can serve as a strategic framework for sustainable tourism development in rural areas. Practically, the study provides valuable insights for destination managers and policymakers, suggesting that marketing initiatives should integrate local wisdom, community engagement, and spiritual balance to enhance the authenticity and resilience of destination brands. For future research, several directions can be explored. First, longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine the long-term influence of cultural marketing on brand loyalty and visitor satisfaction. Second, comparative analyses between rural and urban destinations may reveal contextual differences in the application of cultural values. Third, incorporating qualitative approaches such as interviews or ethnographic studies could provide richer insights into how stakeholders internalise THK values. Finally, integrating digital marketing variables—such as social media engagement and virtual storytelling—would further expand the practical framework for sustainable cultural tourism marketing.

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