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Communicating Resilience: Narrating Transit-to-Destination Transformation through Culinary Identity and Coastal Tourism in Brebes

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how resilience is communicated through narrative practices in a corridor-based tourism destination, using Brebes Regency, Indonesia, as a case study. While tourism recovery is often approached through infrastructure and economic strategies, this research argues that recovery is fundamentally a communicative process involving the construction and negotiation of destination meanings. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight stakeholders, document analysis, and field observations across four tourism clusters: coastal tourism, mangrove ecotourism, Pantura corridor stopover nodes, and culinary MSMEs. The findings reveal four key communicative pillars shaping Brebes' tourism resilience: narrative repositioning, culinary storytelling, stakeholder communication networks, and environmental communication. The study identifies a persistent "transit narrative" that constrains destination development, alongside fragmented stakeholder communication and a digital storytelling gap among MSMEs. However, innovative practices such as mangrove-based ecotourism and culinary identity development offer strong narrative resources for transformation. This study proposes a Communication-Based Sustainable Recovery Model, emphasizing grand narrative construction, storytelling capacity-building, stakeholder coordination, and integration of environmental communication into tourism experiences. The findings contribute to tourism resilience literature by highlighting communication as a central mechanism for transforming transit regions into sustainable destinations.

Keywords: *tourism resilience, destination branding, storytelling, communication networks, sustainable tourism, MSMEs*

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is among the most vulnerable industries to crisis, shocks, and uncertainty. Unlike manufacturing sectors, tourism depends strongly on mobility, safety perception, service interaction, and consumer confidence—all of which are fundamentally shaped by communication [1]. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how travel restrictions could rapidly halt tourism flows, disrupt employment, and weaken local economic ecosystems [2]. Yet beyond the immediate health crisis, the pandemic also exposed a deeper vulnerability: the fragility of destination images and narratives that have been constructed over decades [3].

In the post-pandemic period, tourism recovery has become a major policy and research agenda, particularly in countries such as Indonesia, where domestic tourism rebounded faster than international tourism but structural challenges remain [4]. However, recovery should not be reduced to returning to pre-crisis visitor numbers. Instead, destinations must build resilience, adapt to uncertainty, and pursue sustainable development pathways. Resilience refers to the capacity of a tourism system to absorb disturbances, reorganize, and continue functioning while maintaining core identity and ecological integrity [5]. Innovation and entrepreneurship are frequently identified as key drivers of resilience because they enable destinations to create new products, diversify markets, redesign services, and strengthen local economic participation [6].

What is often overlooked, however, is that resilience must be communicated. A destination may possess physical infrastructure, natural beauty, and entrepreneurial energy, but without strategic communication that narrates these assets, constructs compelling place identities, and coordinates stakeholder messages, recovery efforts remain fragmented and ineffective [7]. Tourism recovery is therefore not merely

an economic or infrastructural challenge—it is fundamentally a communicative challenge.

1.1. Brebes: A Laboratory for Communicating Resilience

Brebes Regency, located in western Central Java, provides a relevant and compelling case for studying the communication of tourism resilience. Brebes is nationally recognized for Telur Asin Brebes (salted eggs) and Bawang Merah Brebes (shallots), and it lies along the northern Java corridor (Pantura), connecting West Java and Central Java. The significance of Brebes' culinary identity is evident in recent data: during the 2025 Lebaran mudik season, one producer in Brebes increased production from 10,000 to 30,000 eggs per day, with telur asin bakar (roasted salted egg) becoming the most popular variant among travelers [8]. Another UMKM entrepreneur, Susi Angelia Wati, has successfully developed kerupuk telur asin (salted egg crackers) since 2019, now serving six souvenir stores in Jakarta and Bali and managing dozens of resellers across Indonesia [9]. These examples demonstrate the strong place-based identity that Brebes' culinary products carry.

Beyond its agro-economic identity, Brebes has tourism resources including coastal attractions (Randusanga Indah Beach), mangrove ecosystems (Kaliwlingi), culinary tourism, and rural landscapes supporting agritourism. Recent statistics from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) show promising developments: in October 2025, domestic tourist trips to Brebes reached 304,000 perjalanan, with a hotel occupancy rate (TPK) of 24.64 percent and an average length of stay (RLM) of 1.21 nights [10]. Furthermore, Brebes has ranked among the top 10 regencies in Central Java with the highest number of tourist visits, surpassing Banjarnegara [11]. These figures indicate growing tourism activity and corridor readiness.

Yet despite these assets and positive trends, Brebes tourism remains under-recognized and is often perceived as a transit region rather than a destination. The "transit narrative" positions Brebes as a place to pass through, not a place to stay, explore, or return to. This perception is reflected in visitor behavior: as one producer noted, travelers mostly stop briefly to purchase telur asin before continuing their journey [8], [12]. The challenge of converting transit flows into longer stays is evident in the relatively low average length of stay (1.21 nights) [10].

1.2. Research Objectives

This study addresses three research objectives, each reframed through a communication lens:

1. To analyze the **communicative vulnerabilities and constraints** in Brebes' tourism recovery—particularly how the "transit narrative" is constructed and maintained, and how stakeholder communication patterns enable or constrain coordinated action.
2. To identify **innovation and entrepreneurship practices from a communication perspective**—focusing on how culinary MSMEs engage (or fail to engage) in storytelling, digital communication, and experiential branding, as exemplified by emerging entrepreneurs like Susi who have expanded market reach through product innovation [9].
3. To propose a **communication-based sustainable recovery model** for Brebes—one that integrates narrative repositioning, stakeholder communication forums, storytelling capacity-building, and environmental communication.

By addressing these objectives, this study demonstrates that tourism recovery is fundamentally a communicative process: requiring not only physical infrastructure but also the deliberate construction and negotiation of new place meanings that can transform Brebes from a transit zone into a destination.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Tourism Resilience and Post-Crisis Recovery

Tourism resilience has emerged as a critical conceptual framework for understanding how destinations respond to shocks such as pandemics, natural disasters, and economic crises. Resilience in the tourism context refers to the capacity of a tourism system to absorb disturbances, reorganize, and continue functioning while maintaining core identity and ecological integrity [1]. Traditional crisis recovery models, such as Faulkner's Tourism Disaster Management Framework, have proven inadequate in addressing multi-crisis environments where overlapping crises require continuous adaptation rather than linear recovery pathways [12]. The evolution towards dynamic, resilience-based approaches acknowledges that destinations must develop adaptive capacity through stakeholder collaboration, demographic-driven strategies, and continuous innovation [12]. This is particularly relevant for emerging destinations that lack the institutional memory and established recovery protocols of major tourism hubs. Recent scholarship emphasizes that resilience is not merely about "bouncing back" to pre-crisis conditions but rather "bouncing forward" through learning and transformation that strengthens destination systems for future challenges [1].

The post-COVID-19 recovery period has intensified scholarly attention on how destinations rebuild tourist confidence and reshape their offerings in response to changed traveler preferences. Research demonstrates that post-pandemic tourism demand shows a marked preference for open-air recreation, short-distance travel, and authentic local experiences [2]. These shifts create both challenges and opportunities for

destinations like Brebes that possess coastal and rural assets but struggle with image perception. Effective recovery strategies must integrate safety protocols, marketing communications that rebuild trust, and product reconfiguration aligned with evolving tourist preferences [4]. However, a persistent gap in the literature is the relative inattention to how communication functions as a resilience mechanism. While governance capacity, infrastructure, and social capital are frequently cited as determinants of tourism resilience [1], the symbolic and discursive dimensions of recovery—how destinations reconstruct their images and narrate their transformation—remain underexplored [3]. This study addresses this gap by examining resilience as fundamentally a communicative process.

2.2. Sustainable Tourism and Local Value Capture

Sustainable tourism development requires balancing economic benefits, socio-cultural integrity, and environmental protection. The concept emphasizes participatory governance, responsible resource management, and equitable distribution of tourism benefits among local communities [6]. For emerging destinations, sustainability can function as a competitive advantage as tourists increasingly seek authentic and environmentally responsible experiences. Local value capture is particularly essential because it ensures that tourism income remains within local communities through MSMEs, local supply chains, and community participation [13]. However, regency-level destinations often struggle to achieve this due to limited governance capacity, fragmented planning, and weak entrepreneurial ecosystems [12]. The challenge is not merely economic but communicative: destinations must credibly communicate their sustainability commitments to attract conscious travelers while ensuring that local stakeholders understand and participate in sustainable practices.

Destination branding theory offers important insights into how places construct and communicate their identity to potential visitors. A destination's brand image comprises cognitive evaluations (beliefs about destination attributes), affective evaluations (feelings towards the destination), and unique image components that differentiate it from competitors [14]. The unique image is particularly critical for emerging destinations that must establish distinctiveness in crowded tourism markets. Qu et al. argue that overall destination image mediates the relationship between these brand associations and tourists' future behaviors, including intentions to revisit and recommend [14]. This framework has significant implications for Brebes, which possesses nationally recognized culinary assets (Telur Asin and Bawang Merah) that could function as unique image components. However, the literature has paid insufficient attention to how local stakeholders—particularly MSME owners—participate in constructing and communicating these brand associations. This study extends destination branding theory by examining culinary storytelling as a grassroots branding practice that shapes destination image from the bottom up.

2.3. Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Tourism

Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in the hospitality and tourism industry by contributing to the social and economic development of local communities while driving innovation to meet the dynamic demands of tourists [15]. The tourism industry is characterized by low entry barriers, low start-up costs, and diverse business opportunities, making it particularly conducive to entrepreneurial activity [15]. Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) dominate tourism economies and act as key drivers of innovation due to their flexibility, local embeddedness, and capacity for personalized service delivery [3]. However, tourism entrepreneurship is also defined by elevated levels of uncertainty and risk, requiring skillful navigation of ever-changing customer demands, seasonality, technological advancements, and economic fluctuations [15]. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the importance of resilience, adaptability, and entrepreneurial behavior in encountering these challenges [15].

Recent scholarship has identified several emerging themes in tourism entrepreneurship research, including digital entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism entrepreneurship, and the role of entrepreneurial ecosystems in supporting local development [15]. Of particular relevance to this study is the concept of culinary entrepreneurship as a vehicle for place-based identity and local value capture. Culinary products carry strong place associations and serve as narrative resources for destination branding, yet the literature reveals that many culinary MSMEs engage in predominantly transactional communication rather than experiential storytelling [16]. This represents a missed opportunity for value creation, as tourism scholarship emphasizes that culinary experiences are enhanced when visitors engage with stories of origin, tradition, and authenticity [16]. The entrepreneurial practices of MSME owners thus encompass not only product innovation and market development but also communicative practices that construct and convey place meaning. This study examines how culinary entrepreneurs in Brebes engage—or fail to engage—in storytelling as an entrepreneurial practice, and how this shapes the destination's resilience narrative.

2.4. Research Gap

The literature reviewed above reveals a significant gap at the intersection of tourism resilience, destination branding, and entrepreneurship research. While each stream has developed substantial theoretical and empirical contributions, few studies have examined how these dimensions interact in the context of regency-level emerging destinations recovering from crisis. Existing tourism recovery research is heavily concentrated on major tourism hubs and tends to prioritize infrastructural and economic dimensions over communicative and discursive aspects [1], [4]. Empirical studies on Indonesian regency-level destinations remain limited,

particularly regarding how narratives and communication practices shape corridor-based tourism and stopover conversion strategies. Brebes offers a distinctive case where mobility infrastructure (Pantura) intersects with nationally recognized culinary identity and coastal sustainability challenges. This paper fills the gap by examining how resilience is communicated through the narrative practices of diverse stakeholders, and how culinary entrepreneurship functions as both an economic and communicative mechanism for destination transformation. By integrating insights from destination branding theory [14] and tourism entrepreneurship research [15], this study develops a communication-based framework for understanding how corridor-based destinations can "bounce forward" through strategic narrative repositioning and local stakeholder empowerment.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how resilience is communicated through narrative practices among tourism stakeholders in Brebes Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The case study approach is particularly appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena within their real-world contexts, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident [27]. A case study design enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena in depth while retaining holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events [27]. This aligns with the study's objective to understand the communicative processes through which resilience narratives are constructed, negotiated, and disseminated among diverse stakeholders in a specific destination context.

The unit of analysis is the destination communication system of Brebes, operationalized through four interconnected tourism clusters that represent the dominant recovery pathways identified in preliminary observation: (1) coastal tourism (Randusanga Indah Beach), (2) mangrove ecotourism (Mangrove Kaliwlingi), (3) Pantura corridor stopover nodes, and (4) culinary and agro-based MSMEs (Telur Asin and Bawang Merah product ecosystem). This multi-cluster approach allows for triangulation across different tourism subsectors while maintaining focus on the overarching communication dynamics shaping destination resilience [11].

The research philosophy underlying this design is interpretivist, recognizing that social reality is constructed through shared meanings, language, and interactions [28]. This epistemological position is appropriate for a study focused on narratives, storytelling, and stakeholder communication, as it acknowledges that resilience is not an objective state but a phenomenon that is discursively constructed and communicated. The interpretivist approach allows the researcher to access the subjective meanings that stakeholders attach to their experiences, practices, and aspirations regarding tourism development in Brebes.

3.2 Study Area and Case Selection

Brebes Regency was purposively selected as the research location due to its distinctive characteristics as a corridor-based destination facing the communicative challenge of transforming its image from a transit zone into a tourist destination. Three specific criteria guided case selection [27]. First, Brebes possesses a nationally recognized culinary-agro identity (Telur Asin and Bawang Merah) that provides rich narrative resources for destination branding, as evidenced by recent media coverage of increased production during the 2025 Lebaran season [8] and successful UMKM innovations reaching markets in Jakarta and Bali [9]. Second, Brebes is strategically located along the Pantura mobility corridor, creating constant visitor flow that presents both opportunity and challenge for stopover tourism conversion. Third, recent statistical data indicates growing tourism activity, with domestic tourist trips reaching 304,000 in October 2025 and hotel occupancy at 24.64 percent [7], suggesting that the destination is at a critical juncture where communication interventions could significantly impact recovery trajectories.

Within Brebes Regency, four specific clusters were selected for in-depth investigation based on their representation of different tourism subsectors and their potential to illuminate various dimensions of resilience communication. Randusanga Indah Beach represents the coastal tourism asset that has benefited from post-pandemic preferences for open-air recreation [2]. Mangrove Kaliwlingi represents community-based ecotourism and coastal resilience initiatives. Pantura stopover nodes, including rest areas and roadside MSME clusters, represent the critical interface where transit flows could potentially be converted into tourism experiences. Culinary and agro-based MSMEs, particularly those producing Telur Asin and Bawang Merah products, represent the entrepreneurial dimension of resilience and the potential for storytelling-based value creation.

3.3 Data Sources and Collection Procedures

Data were collected using three complementary techniques to ensure methodological triangulation and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon [27]: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field observations. This multi-method approach enables cross-validation of findings and captures both the explicit and tacit dimensions of communication practices [28].

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 purposively selected informants representing key stakeholder groups in Brebes' tourism ecosystem. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that informants possessed direct experience and knowledge

relevant to the research objectives [28]. The sample composition was designed to capture diverse perspectives on resilience communication:

Table 1. The Informans

Stakeholder Group	Number of Informants	Selection Criteria
Local government tourism officials	1	Direct involvement in tourism policy and planning
Pokdarwis (tourism awareness group) members	2	Community-level tourism management and visitor interaction
Culinary and MSME owners	4	Direct engagement with tourists through product sales
Youth digital promotion actor	1	Experience with social media promotion of Brebes tourism

Informants were identified through initial contact with the Brebes Tourism Office and subsequent snowball sampling, where early informants recommended other potential participants with relevant knowledge and experience [27]. Interview protocols were developed based on the study's theoretical framework, with questions designed to explore: (1) perceptions of Brebes' tourism identity and the "transit narrative"; (2) communication practices with visitors, including storytelling and information sharing; (3) patterns of communication and coordination among stakeholders; (4) innovation and entrepreneurship practices, particularly in digital and experiential dimensions; and (5) awareness and communication of environmental sustainability issues. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia between January and March 2025, with each interview lasting approximately 45-90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with informants' informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.3.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis was employed to complement interview data and provide contextual understanding of formal policies, programs, and representations of Brebes tourism [28]. Documents analyzed included:

- Local tourism development plans and strategic documents from Brebes Regency government
- Promotional materials (brochures, websites, social media content) produced by Dinas Pariwisata and Pokdarwis
- MSME program reports and training materials
- Official statistics from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) Kabupaten Brebes, including *Kecamatan Brebes Dalam Angka 2025* and the October 2025 tourism press release [7], [10]
- Local news articles reporting on Brebes tourism and UMKM development during the 2024-2025 period [8], [9], [11]

Document analysis served to triangulate interview findings by providing evidence of official narratives and representations that could be compared with stakeholder accounts of communication practices. It also provided empirical support for claims about infrastructure readiness and tourism trends.

3.3.3 Field Observations

Field observations were conducted at each of the four tourism clusters to observe actual communication practices, visitor flows, service standards, and environmental conditions. Observation sites included Randusanga Indah Beach, Mangrove Kaliwlingi, culinary centers and MSME sales points along the Pantura corridor, and Pantura-based rest areas. Observations were conducted at different times and days to capture variations in visitor activity and stakeholder practices.

Observational data were recorded through field notes and photographs (with permission where appropriate), providing rich contextual information to complement interview accounts [28].

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data [29]. The analysis proceeded through six phases as outlined by Braun and Clarke, while remaining flexible and iterative to accommodate the interpretive nature of the research [29].

Throughout the analysis process, analytical categories were informed by the theoretical framework, including concepts of adaptive capacity [1], destination image components [14], entrepreneurial practices [15], and narrative construction [16].

3.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness in qualitative research was ensured through several strategies aligned with criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba [30]. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation across data sources (interviews, documents, observations) and stakeholder groups (government, Pokdarwis, MSMEs, site managers), ensuring that findings were supported by multiple perspectives. Member checking was conducted by sharing summarized findings with selected informants to confirm interpretive accuracy and allow participants to clarify or elaborate on their contributions [28].

Transferability was addressed through thick description of the research context, participants, and findings, enabling readers to assess the applicability of

findings to other corridor-based emerging destinations [30]. Dependability and confirmability were supported through maintaining a detailed audit trail of research decisions, coding processes, and analytical memos, allowing the research process to be tracked and scrutinized [28].

Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, and anonymization of interview identities. Data were reported in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual respondents and to ensure confidentiality

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings from semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders in Brebes Regency, including the Head of the Culture and Tourism Office (Dinbudpar), Pokdarwis members from Randusanga Indah Beach and Mangrove Kaliwlingi, four culinary MSME owners, and a local content creator. The findings are organized around four discursive pillars structuring Brebes' resilience narrative: (1) narrative repositioning, (2) culinary storytelling, (3) stakeholder communication networks, and (4) environmental communication.

4.1. Narrative Repositioning: From Transit Zone to Stopover Destination

All respondent groups confirmed that Brebes is predominantly perceived as a transit zone. A culinary MSME owner articulated this persistent perception: *"Orang langsung teringat: Telur asin, Bawang merah, Jalur Pantura"* (R6-UMKM-TA1). This triad of associations constitutes narrative lock-in, where dominant discourses about place become self-reinforcing and resistant to change [30]. Another MSME owner confirmed: *"Orang luar memandang Brebes karena terkenal dengan Telur Asin dan Bawang Gorengnya"* (R5-UMKM-BM2). The Mangrove Kaliwlingi Pokdarwis offered a more critical assessment: *"Tempat Transit, hal tersebut dikarenakan tidak adanya keseriusan dari Dinas Pariwisata dan Pemda Brebes untuk mengembangkan dan memajukan sektor Pariwisata"* (R3-PKD2). This reveals frustration with perceived lack of governmental commitment, suggesting narrative repositioning requires tangible policy support [31].

Despite criticisms, the Culture and Tourism Office has developed explicit strategies to counter the transit narrative. The Head of Dinbudpar outlined: *"Re-Branding: 'Brebes Bukan Cuma Telur Asin & Bawang'. Mengubah narasi dari 'Kota Bawang' menjadi destinasi wisata alam dan budaya"* (R1-DISPAR). The official tagline "Brebes Beres: Wisata Asik, Hati Tenang" attempts to construct emotional associations positioning Brebes as worthy of stopover. A key innovation is converting transit flows into tourism value: *"Singgah Sejenak, Wisata Seharian: Membuat paket wisata cepat (one-day trip) yang menarik bagi pengguna jalan tol agar mereka meluangkan waktu 3-4 jam di Brebes"* (R1-DISPAR). This stopover tourism conversion strategy pragmatically acknowledges Brebes' corridor reality while transforming it into opportunity [32].

Despite persistent transit perception, there are indications of gradual narrative change. The Randusanga Pokdarwis observed: *"Belakangan ini mulai ada perubahan persepsi. Dengan semakin banyaknya konten digital* tentang *wisata Brebes, orang mulai sadar bahwa Brebes punya tempat wisata yang layak dikunjungi"* (R2-PKD1). A content creator noted: *"perlahan stereotipnya mulai ada perubahan, persepsi audiens ada perubahan namun belum solid"* (R8-CREATOR). The phrase "belum solid" indicates narrative change remains fragmented, supporting the need for a grand storytelling framework integrating diverse place narratives into cohesive destination identity [33].

The content creator proposed an innovative narrative concept: *"*Menurut saya keunikan Brebes ada di Identitasnya. Bawang Merah terbesar di Indonesia, kuliner khas dan legendaris, jalur strategis pantura, pintu masuk jawa tengah, potensi alam. Yang paling menjual adalah kombinasi semua potensi tersebut, antara pertanian dan daerah pesisir, agro maritim story itu jarang dimiliki daerah lain" (R8-CREATOR). This "agro maritim story" offers a potential grand narrative synthesizing agricultural identity with coastal-maritime assets, unifying the four discursive pillars into coherent destination narrative.

4.2. Culinary Storytelling: From Transactional Exchange to Experiential Encounter

Analysis of MSME interviews reveals three distinct storytelling practices. Type A: Rich Storytelling. A telur asin producer demonstrated sophisticated narrative abilities: *"Biasanya saya menjelaskan bahwa telur asin kami dibuat dari telur bebek pilihan, diasinkan dengan metode tradisional menggunakan campuran abu gosok dan garam, selama 12-14 hari agar menghasilkan rasa yang pas dan kuning telur yang berminyak (masir). Usaha ini awalnya saya rintis dari modal kecil dan belajar dari orang tua yang dulu juga membuat telur asin secara tradisional"* (R6-UMKM-TA1). This narrative contains specificity (12-14 days), tradition (belajar dari orang tua), quality differentiation (telur bebek pilihan), and personal journey (modal kecil), transforming commodity into cultural experience [23].

Type B: Functional Storytelling. A bawang goreng producer explained: "Cerita khusus yang kadang kita sampaikan untuk menambah kepercayaan bahwa produk Bawang Goreng RAVI pernah Kerjasama dengan PT. Indo Supply Chain di Jakarta yang dipasarkan sampai ke Bali, Surabaya, Semarang, Bandung, Bogor" (R5-UMKM-BM2). This leverages social proof and market reach to build consumer trust.

Type C: Transactional Only. One respondent revealed resistance based on privacy: "tidak" (menjelaskan proses), "karena privasi kita sebagai pelaku

produksi" (R4-UMKM-BM1). This reflects misunderstanding of storytelling's value, viewing transparency as risk rather than opportunity [16].

Multiple respondents confirmed storytelling positively influences engagement and loyalty. The bawang goreng producer noted: "Biasanya pembeli tertarik mendengar ceritanya dan kalau tau kualitas produknya jadi repeat order kemudian" (R5-UMKM-BM2). The telur asin producer added nuance: "Sebagian tertarik, terutama wisatawan luar kota. Biasanya kalau rombongan keluarga, mereka lebih suka mendengar cerita" (R6-UMKM-TA1). This suggests storytelling effectiveness varies by visitor type [25].

Despite demonstrated value, MSMEs face challenges extending narratives through digital channels. Obstacles included: "Tidak terlalu paham teknologi" (R6-UMKM-TA1); "Konsisten membuat konten" (R4, R6); "SDM kurang bisa memahami promosi online" (R7-UMKM-TA2); "Promosi online belum pecah telur, harus ada yang professional mengelola akun medsos" (R5-UMKM-BM2). These reflect a digital storytelling gap—inability to translate face-to-face storytelling into compelling online content, significant given digital content's role in shifting perceptions [34].

The content creator recommended: "Pelatihan short video untuk pelaku UMKM dengan storytelling. Infrastruktur Brebes Merdeka Internet di spot strategis. Dukungan berbagai pihak (CSR, akademisi, praktisi, pemda, NGO). Apresiasi tahunan untuk konten kreator" (R8-CREATOR). This addresses training, infrastructure, collaboration, and incentives, requiring ecosystem-level intervention [35].

The Head of Dinbudpar confirmed storytelling capacity-building is government agenda: "Dinas aktif mengadakan pelatihan dan pendampingan untuk pelaku UMKM, mencakup teknik pemasaran, branding, dan pengemasan produk agar lebih bercerita (storytelling)" (R1-DISPAR). However, MSME responses indicate trainings have not translated into consistent practice. The telur asin producer noted: "Kadang ada sosialisasi, namun koordinasi rutin dengan Pokdarwis masih belum intens" (R6-UMKM-TA1), revealing an implementation gap between programs and practice [18].

4.3. Stakeholder Communication Networks: Fragmentation and Absence of Shared Vision

The Head of Dinbudpar described collaborative, inclusive communication: "Pola komunikasi dan koordinasi Dinas dengan pemangku kepentingan dilakukan secara kolaboratif, inklusif, dan partisipatif" (R1-DISPAR). Multiple mechanisms exist including FGDs, coordination meetings, WhatsApp groups, and field visits [36]. However, effectiveness varies significantly.

The Randusanga Pokdarwis confirmed channels exist but acknowledged limitations: "Komunikasi berjalan melalui rapat koordinasi periodik, kunjungan lapangan, grup WhatsApp, fasilitasi pelatihan. Namun, kadang komunikasi masih belum optimal karena keterbatasan waktu dan sumber daya" (R2-PKD1). This reveals structural challenge: even when mechanisms exist, effectiveness is constrained by stakeholders' limited time, many having primary occupations outside tourism [37].

A concerning finding is stark inequality in access across Pokdarwis groups. While Randusanga reported occasional cross-Pokdarwis meetings, Mangrove Kaliwlingi stated: "Untuk sampai dengan saat ini tidak ada" (pertemuan rutin dengan Pokdarwis lokasi lain) (R3-PKD2). This isolation from horizontal communication networks deprives Mangrove Kaliwlingi of learning opportunities and prevents coordinated promotion strategies benefiting multiple destinations [38].

The Randusanga Pokdarwis explicitly identified need for structured forums: "Forum ini belum rutin, kadang hanya saat ada program khusus. Kami berharap ada forum lebih terstruktur dan berkelanjutan agar kami bisa saling belajar dan bersinergi" (R2-PKD1). This aspiration for structured, sustainable communication platforms recognizes episodic coordination insufficient for building collaborative relationships [39].

Fragmentation extends to MSMEs, with three of four reporting minimal or no communication with government or Pokdarwis: "Belum ada komunikasi" (R5, R7, R4). Only one reported occasional contact: "Kadang ada sosialisasi dari dinas, namun koordinasi rutin dengan Pokdarwis masih belum intens" (R6-UMKM-TA1). This reveals disconnect between tourism sector and culinary sector, problematic given culinary products are Brebes' strongest tourism asset, preventing integrated experiences combining destination visits with culinary engagement [24].

The Randusanga Pokdarwis acknowledged: "Koordinasi dengan UMKM masih belum seintensif yang diharapkan. Kadang mereka lebih fokus pada urusan jualan sehari-hari. Kami berharap ada forum bersama lebih terstruktur antara Pokdarwis, pemerintah, dan pelaku UMKM" (R2-PKD1).

The Head of Dinbudpar candidly identified greatest challenge: "Tantangan paling besar adalah kurangnya koordinasi dan sinergi antara aktor-aktor yang terlibat, disebabkan egosentrisme sektoral, perbedaan kepentingan, dan minimnya pemahaman bersama mengenai arah pengembangan pariwisata" (R1-DISPAR). This diagnosis—sectoral egoism, divergent interests, absence of shared understanding—directly confirms stakeholder communication fragmentation constrains coordinated destination branding [14], [40].

The Randusanga Pokdarwis elaborated: "Keterbatasan waktu dan sumber daya; Kurangnya konsistensi; Perbedaan prioritas; Ego sektoral: masih ada sekat antara pemerintah desa, dinas, dan pihak lain" (R2-PKD1). Mangrove Kaliwlingi offered different perspective: "Tantangan terbesar adalah bagaimana

Produk-produk UMKM dapat menjadi sektor ekonomi utama, bukan sektor sampingan" (R3-PKD2), suggesting communication is means to achieve tangible livelihood improvements [13].

Underlying fragmentation is absence of coherent, shared vision. The content creator highlighted: "Dari sisi Narasi, perlu dibuatkan grand storytelling yang mampu menarik pengunjung, dan mudah ditularkan turun temurun" (R8-CREATOR). Lack of grand narrative means each stakeholder communicates partial story without cohering into unified destination brand. Fragmentation is exacerbated by government data management challenges: "Konten creator juga diberikan akses data (kadang dinas juga kacau datanya, gak uptodate, asal laporan beres)" (R8-CREATOR). When official data is unreliable, foundation for consistent destination communication is compromised [22].

4.4. Environmental Communication: Integrating Coastal Resilience into Tourism Narratives

Both Randusanga and Mangrove Kaliwlingi face similar environmental threats. The Randusanga Pokdarwis described severity: "Abrasi: Ini masalah serius. Pantai kami sering mengalami abrasi menggerus garis pantai. Banjir rob: Air laut pasang merendam area parkir. Sampah: dari laut dan pengunjung. Kerusakan ekosistem mangrove: Mangrove sempat rusak parah, padahal fungsinya penting menahan abrasi" (R2-PKD1). Mangrove Pokdarwis confirmed same triple threat (R3-PKD2). These shared vulnerabilities constitute environmental common ground—basis for collective action uniting coastal destinations in communicating resilience [41].

The two destinations developed distinct approaches. Randusanga employs multiple channels: "Papan imbauan larangan buang sampah; Sosialisasi langsung petugas; Aksi bersih pantai libatkan pengunjung; Kerja sama sekolah; Penanaman mangrove libatkan wisatawan" (R2-PKD1). This combines regulatory communication, interpersonal persuasion, participatory events, and experiential education. However, Pokdarwis acknowledged: "Upaya ini masih perlu ditingkatkan. Harapan kami, ada program edukasi lebih terstruktur dan berkelanjutan."

Mangrove Kaliwlingi developed systematic responses: "Abrasi: rutin melakukan penanaman mangrove melalui paket wisata. Rob: pembuatan talud dibelakang pemukiman. Sampah: pembangunan TPS3R untuk mengubah nilai ekonomi sampah" (R3-PKD2). Notably, Mangrove Kaliwlingi integrated environmental action into tourism products—mangrove planting offered as tourism package, transforming conservation into experiential attraction [42].

Integration of conservation activities into tourism experiences represents significant innovation. Mangrove Kaliwlingi successfully packaged mangrove planting as educational attraction: "Kegiatan paket penanaman diminati oleh anak sekolah dan akademisi dan mereka sangat bangga karena menjadi sosok pahlawan lingkungan yang membantu menghijaukan bumi menyelamatkan alam" (R3-PKD2). The emotional response—"bangga menjadi pahlawan lingkungan"—illustrates powerful affective outcomes from well-designed environmental communication. Visitors are enabled to participate in environmental solutions, creating memorable experiences aligning with "bounce forward" resilience [5], [43].

Randusanga also involves visitors, though less systematically: "Penanaman mangrove yang kadang melibatkan wisatawan" (R2-PKD1), noting positive responses suggesting potential for further development.

The Head of Dinbudpar articulated strategic vision integrating sustainability: "Dinas memandang ekowisata mangrove sebagai aset strategis yang mengintegrasikan konservasi lingkungan dengan pengembangan ekonomi berbasis pariwisata berkelanjutan" (R1-DISPAR). Government implemented programs including "Mageri Segoro" mangrove planting and Batik Mangrove Brebesan [7], providing institutional support for grassroots conservation efforts.

The Mangrove Kaliwlingi origin story offers compelling resilience narrative: *"Awal mula ekowisata dari kekhawatiran Masyarakat dukuh pandansari terhadap abrasi besar-besaran tahun 1980an... pak Rusjan selaku kepala desa menghimbau Masyarakat menanam mangrove secara massal sejak 2004"* (R3-PKD2). This contains classic narrative elements: crisis, collective response, leadership, and transformation—valuable assets for destination branding conveying authenticity and community engagement [16], [44].

The content creator's "agro maritim story" concept could integrate this environmental narrative with culinary and agricultural stories, creating cohesive destination narrative positioning Brebes where communities thrive at intersection of land and sea.

4.5. Synthesizing Findings: Toward a Communication-Based Resilience Framework

The four pillars are interconnected. Narrative repositioning provides overarching framework—transit-to-destination narrative creates rationale for developing culinary storytelling, strengthening stakeholder communication, and integrating environmental messages. Without coherent repositioning narrative, communication efforts remain fragmented [45].

Culinary storytelling serves as primary vehicle for experiential value creation but depends on narrative resources and communication channels. Digital storytelling gap limits reach, while weak integration with Pokdarwis networks prevents culinary stories from being woven into destination experiences.

Stakeholder communication networks enable or constrain message alignment. Fragmentation means compelling individual stories are not coordinated into

coherent destination brand. Absence of shared vision directly undermines narrative repositioning.

Environmental communication offers distinctive narrative resources differentiating Brebes from competitors. Mangrove origin story exemplifies transforming environmental challenges into compelling resilience narratives, though potential remains unrealized due to limited integration with culinary storytelling and weak stakeholder coordination.

This study proposes communication-based resilience framework with four interconnected strategies:

Strategy 1: Develop and disseminate grand narrative. The "agro maritim story" concept offers promising framework integrating diverse assets, acknowledging corridor reality while reframing as opportunity, incorporating resilience stories, simple enough for consistent communication yet rich for diverse storytelling [33].

Strategy 2: Build storytelling capacity across tourism ecosystem. Closing digital storytelling gap requires multi-level intervention: ongoing mentorship programs, improved internet connectivity ("Brebes Merdeka Internet"), annual awards, curated platforms aggregating stakeholder stories [46].

Strategy 3: Establish structured, inclusive stakeholder communication forums. Overcoming fragmentation requires institutionalized platforms including all groups, meeting regularly, sharing reliable data, coordinating messages to present unified destination brand [39], [47].

Strategy 4: Integrate environmental communication into experiential tourism products. Building on Mangrove Kaliwlingi's model: package conservation activities as tourism experiences, train guides to tell origin stories, connect environmental experiences with culinary offerings, communicate commitments consistently to build credibility with environmentally conscious travelers [17].

Underlying this framework is "bounce forward" principle [5], [43]—not merely returning to pre-crisis numbers but transforming destination through learning from crisis, leveraging unique assets, building adaptive capacity, and creating shared value [6].

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how resilience is communicated through narrative practices among tourism stakeholders in Brebes Regency, a corridor-based destination in Central Java. Through a qualitative case study involving interviews with the Head of the Culture and Tourism Office, Pokdarwis members, culinary MSME owners, and a content creator, four discursive pillars structuring Brebes' resilience narrative were identified: narrative repositioning, culinary storytelling, stakeholder communication networks, and environmental communication. Findings reveal that while the government has developed strategies to counter the persistent transit narrative, implementation remains uneven, with significant fragmentation in stakeholder communication networks and a digital storytelling gap limiting the reach of culinary narratives. Environmental communication at Mangrove Kaliwlingi demonstrates innovative integration of conservation into tourism experiences, providing valuable narrative resources for destination branding through the proposed "agro maritim story" concept. Thus, this study has successfully analyzed the communicative vulnerabilities and constraints in Brebes' tourism recovery, identified innovation and entrepreneurship practices from a communication perspective, and formulated a communication-based recovery model integrating narrative repositioning, storytelling capacity-building, stakeholder communication forums, and environmental communication. For corridor-based destinations like Brebes, "bouncing forward" depends on the ability to narrate transformation, empower local storytellers as co-narrators of place identity, and communicate resilience consistently across stakeholder networks, thereby converting transit flows into sustainable tourism value through authentic, experience-based offerings reflecting the destination's unique identity.

To strengthen the analytical contribution, this study proposes a conceptual model termed the **Communication-Based Sustainable Recovery Model**. The model positions communication as the central mechanism that integrates four interrelated pillars: (1) narrative repositioning, which reframes Brebes from a transit zone into a destination; (2) culinary storytelling, which transforms local products into experiential value; (3) stakeholder communication networks, which enable alignment and coordination; and (4) environmental communication, which embeds sustainability into tourism narratives.

These four pillars are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Narrative repositioning provides the overarching meaning framework, while storytelling operationalizes value creation at the micro level. Stakeholder networks function as the coordination infrastructure, and environmental communication ensures long-term sustainability and differentiation. The model illustrates that tourism recovery is not linear but communicative, requiring continuous negotiation of meanings among stakeholders.

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