



Digital Government Communication For Smart Branding: Evidence From Indonesian Local Government

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology has transformed local government communication governance from static one-way models into interactive smart branding. This study analyzes the implementation of smart branding as a digital government communication strategy and evaluates its communication effectiveness. Utilizing a qualitative approach with a comparative case study of two local governments in Indonesia, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, digital media observations, and document analysis. Communication effectiveness was evaluated hierarchically using the AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework, encompassing output, outtake, outcome, and impact dimensions. Findings show that Banjarmasin developed a city-system and service-integrated smart branding approach anchored in the “City of a Thousand Rivers” identity, while Mojokerto developed a heritage-led and experiential approach anchored in the “Full of Majapahit Greatness” identity; both cases progressed from output toward outtake and outcome, but the direct contribution of communication to strategic impact (tourism, investment, regional competitiveness) could not be established causally. Effectiveness of smart branding as digital government communication therefore depends on identity consistency, institutional integration, stakeholder engagement, and the quality of public experience, rather than digital communication intensity alone.

Keywords: *Digital Government Communication, AMEC Evaluation, Place Branding. Smart Branding*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has significantly transformed patterns of public communication, including the governance of government communication. Governments, as policymakers, are required to adapt by leveraging digital platforms so that the delivery of information is no longer one-directional but two-way, interactive, transparent, and participatory. In this context, *digital government communication* has become an important instrument for driving public engagement and improving service quality. The urgency of this transformation is reinforced by *We Are Social* (2026) data showing that Indonesian society spends an average of 21 hours and 50 minutes per week in digital space, underscoring the dominance of digital media in public social life today.

Digital government communication can be understood as local governments' use of internet-based and social media channels to disseminate public policy. Its development reflects a shift from the *e-government* model, which tends to be static and one-directional, toward communication that is more open, fast, and interactive (Kingsley et al., 2011). Features such as *like*, *comment*, and *share* enable *government–public interaction* and broaden *stakeholder engagement* (Kent, 2013). Digital government communication thus no longer functions merely as an administrative instrument but can also become part of *strategic communication* for shaping a region's perceptions, identity, and reputation. Open and responsive public interaction can also represent modern, accountable, and transparent bureaucratic governance while supporting government efforts to build a positive regional image.

This context makes *smart branding* a relevant perspective for understanding how local governments construct and communicate regional identity and appeal through digital technology and communication. As one dimension of the Smart City concept, *smart branding* is directed at increasing regional competitiveness through the development of three elements: tourism, business, and city appearance (Subkhan et al., 2017). Its implementation relates not only to promoting local potential but also to involving various *stakeholders* in building a region's identity, appeal, and *brand value*. The use of information technology then extends this practice through digital communication that allows governments to introduce regional potential while building *digital brand awareness* and *digital brand image* in the eyes of the public (Sofie et al., 2024; Sofie & Rachmawati, 2024; Asshagab, 2024). *Smart branding* is thus understood not only as a regional marketing activity, but also as part of local governments' communication strategy for articulating regional identity, potential, and advantages in an integrated manner.

However, digital *branding* activity does not automatically produce effective communication. A high volume of uploads does not guarantee that the public understands the regional *brand*; a wide *reach* does not automatically produce a change in perception; and high *engagement* does not necessarily indicate meaningful public participation. Findings by Nuroniah et al. (2026) show that message reach and *view* counts in government agencies' digital communication can still stop at the cognitive level without generating emotional engagement, interactive dialogue, or behavioral change. This condition indicates the need for communication evaluation that does not stop at activity and exposure, but traces communication effects more comprehensively.

The *AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework* (IEF) provides an evaluation framework to address this need by connecting organizational and communication objectives with the *target audience*, strategy, activities, and measurement stages in the form of *output*, *outtake*, *outcome*, and *impact*. *Output* looks at what is produced and received by the audience; *outtake* looks at how the audience responds to and makes sense of the communication; *outcome* looks at changes that occur in attitudes, trust, preferences, intentions, or advocacy; while *impact* looks at communication's contribution to the organization's strategic goals (AMEC, 2026). This framework allows the effectiveness of *smart branding* to be assessed not only based on the intensity of digital activity, but also on audience response, the changes produced, and their contribution to regional *branding* objectives.

Prior research has discussed these aspects separately. Studies on *digital government communication* highlight the use of digital media as a means of two-way communication between government and the public (Dunan, 2020; Novchi et al., 2022; Sibarani et al., 2026), while research on *place/smart branding* discusses the use of technology in building regional identity, image, and

competitiveness (Subkhan et al., 2017; Bastit & Nurlukman, 2021). Meanwhile, AMEC offers an approach for evaluating communication effectiveness through the *output*, *outtake*, *outcome*, and *impact* stages. However, research integrating *smart branding as a digital government communication strategy* while also evaluating its effectiveness through these stages remains limited. There is therefore room for research connecting these three perspectives to analyze how government digital communication can support *smart branding* and produce broader communication outcomes.

This study uses Banjarmasin City and Mojokerto Regency as *multiple empirical cases* to examine this gap. The two regions were selected because they have different *smart branding* characteristics and regional *positioning*, allowing comparison of how *branding* strategy is translated into digital communication and how its communication outcomes are formed. Mojokerto Regency focuses its *branding* on reconstructing a cultural and historical narrative (Prayitno, 2024), while Banjarmasin City is characterized by regional identity development anchored in river potential, Banjar culture, and tourism and creative-economy activities as part of its regional appeal. This contextual difference provides room to observe variation in the implementation and effectiveness of *smart branding* as local government digital communication.

Based on the above, this study poses two research questions: (1) How is *smart branding* implemented as a *digital government communication* strategy, and how do these communication activities produce *output*, *outtake*, *outcome*, and *impact* based on the *AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework*?; and (2) How do the implementation and effectiveness of *smart branding as digital government communication* differ between Banjarmasin City and Mojokerto Regency? In line with these questions, this study aims to analyze the implementation of smart branding as a digital government communication strategy and its communication outcomes based on the output, outtake, outcome, and impact stages of the AMEC framework, while comparing the implementation and effectiveness produced in the two regional contexts.

METHOD

This study uses a **qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design** to analyze *smart branding* as a *digital government communication* strategy in Banjarmasin City and Mojokerto Regency. Data were collected through *in-depth interviews* with practitioners or parties involved in planning and managing digital communication and regional *branding* in each local government. Interviews were used to gain an understanding of strategy, objectives, implementation processes, target audiences, the selection of communication channels, and managers' perceptions of communication responses and outcomes. The study also used document analysis, covering planning documents, policies, *branding* materials, communication reports, and other relevant documents, as well as observation of local governments' digital media channels to identify message patterns, content formats, interaction with the public, and *smart branding* communication activities carried out.

Key informants were selected purposively based on their strategic roles in planning, coordinating, and managing regional branding and digital communication. In Mojokerto Regency, the informant was the Head of the Office of Culture, Youth, Sports, and Tourism (Disbudporapar), representing the institutional unit responsible for tourism and regional branding. In Banjarmasin City, the informant was an official from the Office of Communication, Informatics, and Statistics (Diskominfo), representing the institutional unit responsible for government communication and

digital information management. Informants are identified by their institutional roles and categories rather than by name. Digital media observation covered the official social media accounts of Banjarmasin City and Mojokerto Regency, as well as selected local influencers involved in regional branding communication. The observation focused on a one-month period, specifically extracting insights from content published during the last week of July 2026, with the data retrieval process conducted in the first week of September 2026. Document analysis covered relevant planning documents, policy documents, branding materials, and government publications.

Data analysis was conducted *within-case* and *cross-case*. At the *within-case* stage, data from each region were analyzed using the **AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework** as an analytical framework to map communication effectiveness into four stages: *output*, *outtake*, *outcome*, and *impact*. The results of the analysis were then compared *cross-case* to identify similarities, differences, and contextual factors influencing the implementation and effectiveness of *smart branding as digital government communication* in Banjarmasin and Mojokerto. Data validity was strengthened through source and method triangulation, comparing findings from interviews, documents, and digital media observation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Smart Branding as Digital Government Communication

Based on the data collection and analysis, the implementation of smart branding in Banjarmasin City and Mojokerto Regency shows that government digital communication does not only function as a medium for delivering information, but also as part of how government shapes regional identity and public experience. Although both cities make use of digital technology, they take different approaches. Banjarmasin places greater emphasis on strengthening local identity through communication, collaboration, and cultural and tourism promotion, while Mojokerto places greater emphasis on the public's experience of using digital-based public services.

Banjarmasin City's implementation of smart branding starts from the local identity of "City of a Thousand Rivers," which is then developed within a smart city framework. This is evident in planning documents that position the preservation of local wisdom as part of the "River Smart City" vision. The identity of the river, Banjar culture, and the city's religious character are not positioned as an identity separate from technological development, but rather as the basis for building Banjarmasin's image as a city that is modern while retaining its local character. Digital technology is thus used to strengthen and package the identity the region already holds so that it remains relevant amid changing patterns of public communication.

This identity is then realized through various cultural and tourism activities, such as the Floating Market Festival, River Parade, Jukung Hias Tanglong Festival, and Banjarmasin Sasirangan Festival. These activities are not only government agenda items, but also form direct experiences of Banjarmasin's identity for residents and tourists. When these activities are communicated back through social media, digital tourism channels, or local content creators, that experience can reach a wider audience. Through this pattern, "City of a Thousand Rivers" does not remain merely a slogan, but is translated through activities that the public can see, follow, and share.

In practice, this strategy is supported by a Pentahelix approach involving government, creative and youth communities, MSMEs, media, and the public. Diskominfo (the Communication,

Informatics, and Statistics Office) acts as one of the main links in disseminating information, while regional agencies such as Disbudporapar (Culture, Youth, Sports and Tourism Office) and Bappeda Litbang are also involved through coordination via the Banjarmasin City Smart City Forum. The involvement of creators, photographers, videographers, MSME actors, and local communities also helps bring a perspective closer to the character of the community. However, this collaborative pattern still has limitations. Community and community-group involvement tends to be stronger at the activity-implementation stage than in strategic planning and evaluation processes. In addition, coordination among actors still faces the constraint of *sectoral ego*, so that the Pentahelix concept has not yet fully produced an equal collaborative process.

This condition is also visible in the use of digital channels. The government has used Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, its official website, and various service and digital promotion platforms to convey information about government, culture, tourism, and MSMEs. The use of local creators and language closer to the community is one effort to make messages more relevant to the audience. However, communication on social media still tends to be one-directional, with relatively standard visuals and limited encouragement of user-generated content (UGC). This means that collaboration that has been institutionally built has not yet been fully translated into participatory digital communication. The public is still placed more often as a recipient of information than as a party that helps shape the city's narrative in digital space.



Figure 1. Digital Government Communication Ecosystem of Banjarmasin City.

In addition to participation issues, Banjarmasin also faces challenges in maintaining visual identity consistency. The absence of an official brand guideline means that iconography, color, visual style, and slogans can differ across events and communication channels. This condition risks making identities such as "City of a Thousand Rivers," "Banjarmasin Pintar," and "River Smart City" appear as stand-alone messages, when in fact all three could form part of one larger narrative about the city's identity. Meanwhile, the use of data such as social media analytics and social listening is also not yet optimal, so communication evaluation still focuses more on message delivery than on understanding how the message is received and responded to by the public.

Overall, Banjarmasin already has a fairly strong smart branding foundation through its local identity, smart city policy, cultural and tourism activities, digital channels, and Pentahelix collaboration. The next challenge is no longer to add more channels or communication activities, but to integrate all these elements into a more consistent identity, open greater room for public participation, and use data to understand audience response. Strengthening these aspects would ensure that the "City of a Thousand Rivers" identity is not only visible in government communication, but is also formed through public experience and participation in digital space.

The implementation of *smart branding* in Mojokerto Regency shows that the formation of regional image occurs not only through tourism promotion or the conveyance of visual identity, but also

through how government communicates and provides experience to the public through a digital ecosystem. From a *digital government communication* perspective, every digital interaction between government and the public can become a *touchpoint* that shapes perceptions of government and the region. Digital public services, complaint channels, social media, and communication about culture and tourism can thus be understood as part of the *smart branding* process, because the public does not only receive messages about Mojokerto Regency's identity, but also experiences how the government works, responds, and builds relationships with the community.

In the dimension of regional identity, interview results with the Mojokerto Regency Office of Culture, Youth, Sports, and Tourism (Disbudporapar) show that Mojokerto Regency's *city branding* is directed at the identity of **"Full of Majapahit Greatness."** This identity draws on the strength of Majapahit history and culture as Mojokerto Regency's distinguishing character and is directed at supporting increased tourism visits, investment, and local own-source revenue (PAD). This identity has been officially launched as Mojokerto Regency's *city branding* since 2022 and has since been used to guide the introduction of regional potential, including through the design of a regional visual identity (Al Khairi, 2025). This means the government already has a core narrative for how it wants Mojokerto Regency to be recognized by the public, namely as a region rooted in Majapahit greatness while also developing within the context of modern development.

In practice, communication about this identity runs alongside the transformation of government communication through digital technology. The Mojokerto Regency government has developed various public service platforms, including **DAMARMOJO (Dengar Aspirasi Masyarakat Mojokerto / Listening to Mojokerto Community Aspirations), Satu Data Palapa, Mojosakti, Tumbas, and Si Panjol**. The presence of these platforms extends government communication's function from merely delivering information to providing space for interaction and service. In the context of *smart branding*, this digitalization is relevant because a modern and adaptive regional image is not only formed through communication claims, but also through the public's experience of dealing directly with the digital government system.

One form most relevant to *digital government communication* is DAMARMOJO, a community complaint channel of the Mojokerto Regency Government integrated with SP4N-LAPOR. Through this channel, the public can submit complaints that are then forwarded to the relevant regional agency for follow-up. DAMARMOJO thus forms *two-way government communication*, because the public is no longer merely a recipient of government information, but can provide feedback about the problems they experience. Digitalization at this point functions as communication infrastructure that directly connects government with the public's experience.

Evaluation of DAMARMOJO also shows that the quality of government communication is determined not only by the availability of a digital channel, but by the government's ability to respond to interactions coming in through that channel. As of 2 December 2024, there were **749 complaints submitted to 49 agencies**, with 652 complaints resolved, 94 still in process, and three not yet followed up. The Mojokerto Regency government then evaluated regional agencies' responses and pushed for improved coordination so that public reports could be handled more quickly and accurately. This shows that *digital government communication* does not stop at the process of sending or receiving messages, but also covers how the government provides a response that then shapes public perceptions of its responsiveness, accountability, and quality of governance.

This development is further visible in the 2025 DAMARMOJO evaluation, when the Mojokerto Regency government pushed for complaint data to be used not only for administrative resolution, but also as material for planning, budgeting, and service innovation. In this context, digital communication produces a public feedback–government response–service improvement cycle. The public conveys its experience through a digital channel, the government processes that information, and the results are used as a basis for service improvement. This pattern matters for smart branding because a region's reputation is formed not only by what the government says about itself, but also by how the government actually responds to public needs.

Efforts to build a more integrated digital communication experience are also visible through the development of **Mojosakti (Mojokerto Satu Aplikasi Semua Terlayani / One Application, All Services)** and the direction toward integrating public services through *Super Apps*. The Mojokerto Regency government has begun consolidating various information and services that were previously scattered into a more connected digital ecosystem. The government also emphasizes that digital transformation should not be measured by the number of applications, but by the extent to which the system is integrated and provides real benefit to the public. From a communication perspective, this integration has the potential to create a more consistent government interaction experience. The public no longer deals with various services as separate programs, but with a single Mojokerto Regency government ecosystem that is increasingly accessible and connected.



Figure 2. The Digital Government Experience in Mojokerto Regency

At the same time, *digital government communication* is also used to communicate Mojokerto Regency's **place identity**. Based on interview results with Disbudporapar, the *branding* process is carried out through identifying leading potential, determining identity, drafting narrative, and ongoing socialization. The government makes use of Instagram and TikTok, coordination with Diskominfo, and the involvement of local *influencers* to broaden communication about culture, tourism, MSMEs, and various regional activities. Digital channels thus function not only as a medium for government information, but as a space in which Mojokerto Regency's identity is constructed and circulated to the public.

This digital narrative is then reinforced through physical experience. The "Full of Majapahit Greatness" identity is translated through various cultural festivals, tourism activities, Car Free Day, MSMEs, the creative economy, and activities such as MajaFest. Based on interview results,

Disbudporapar emphasizes that *branding* is not enough when conveyed only through social media, but must have a real implementation the public can encounter. The relationship between digital communication and direct experience forms a mutually reinforcing communication pattern: regional activities and identity produce public experience, that experience is communicated through digital channels, and digital communication in turn broadens exposure and shapes public expectations of Mojokerto Regency.

This condition shows that Mojokerto Regency's *smart branding* is formed through two layers of communication running simultaneously. First, **government experience communication**, namely the perception formed through the public's experience of using digital services, submitting aspirations, receiving responses, and interacting with government. Second, **place identity communication**, namely communication that explicitly introduces Mojokerto Regency's character through the "Full of Majapahit Greatness" narrative, Majapahit culture, tourism, MSMEs, and the creative economy. These two layers meet in public experience: the public judges Mojokerto Regency not only based on how the region is promoted, but also based on how its government works.

However, this integration still faces a number of challenges. Interview results indicate *sectoral ego*, limited collaboration with the private sector, budget constraints, and the need to maintain consistency in *branding* implementation. In the digital context, the continued presence of complaints that are unresolved or still in process indicates a gap between the existence of a communication channel and the organization's response capacity. Meanwhile, in the tourism context, Disbudporapar assesses that the *attraction* and *amenities* aspects still need to be strengthened. This matters because digital communication shapes public expectations, while the quality of services and experience on the ground determines whether those expectations can be met. A mismatch between **communicated identity** and **experienced reality** thus risks weakening the credibility of the *smart branding* the government has built.

Based on the overall findings, Mojokerto Regency's smart branding can be understood as **the result of a digital government communication process that connects regional identity, government communication, digital services, public participation, and public experience**. *Full of Majapahit Greatness* provides a narrative about who Mojokerto Regency is; social media channels and promotional activities communicate how that identity is introduced; while DAMARMOJO and the digital service ecosystem form the experience of how the government interacts with and works for the public. *Smart branding* is thus formed not only through regional promotion, but through consistency between what government communicates, how government interacts, and what the public experiences. In this context, government digital communication becomes a strategic part of building Mojokerto Regency's reputation as a region with a strong historical identity that is also working to build a modern, responsive government connected to its community.

Element	Banjarmasin	Mojokerto
Core Identity	City of a Thousand Rivers / River Smart City	Full of Majapahit Greatness

Primary Narrative	River identity, Banjar Majapahit heritage, culture, tourism, creative culture, modern urban economy services
Digital Channels	Government website, Instagram, TikTok, Diskominfo channels, Instagram, TikTok, influencer networks YouTube, integrated digital services
Offline Activation	River festivals, MajaFest, CFD, cultural festivals, tourism Sasirangan Festival, events cultural events
Main Stakeholders	Government, communities, schools, MSMEs, MSMEs/creative economy, influencers, media media, creative actors
Communication Orientation	City-system and service- Heritage-led and experiential integrated

Table 1. Comparative Findings on Smart Branding

Overall, the implementation of smart branding in Banjarmasin and Mojokerto shows that government digital communication has developed from merely delivering information toward a process of shaping identity, interaction, and public experience. Banjarmasin places greater emphasis on strengthening the "City of a Thousand Rivers" identity through culture, tourism, collaboration, and digital channels, while Mojokerto connects the "Full of Majapahit Greatness" identity with public experience through digital services, cultural communication, and regional activities. Although the approaches differ, both show the importance of consistency between the identity communicated, how government interacts with the public, and the experience the public receives. However, the presence of various communication channels and activities does not automatically indicate that the smart branding strategy has been effective. The next stage therefore needs to examine how this communication is received, responded to, and produces change for the public and the region through the AMEC evaluation framework.

AMEC Evaluation & Cross Comparison

Banjarmasin

At the *output* stage, the Banjarmasin City Government shows a high intensity of digital communication distributed across several official channels. Based on observation of the **@pemko_banjarmasin** Instagram account during September 2026, the account regularly uploaded around 2–7 pieces of content per day, with *view* counts ranging from roughly 1,000 to more than 100,000 impressions, and *likes* ranging from tens to thousands depending on content type. Banjarmasin City Government's TikTok shows a relatively similar pattern, since most of its content is an adaptation of, or *mirrors*, its Instagram content.

Observation results show that government content can be grouped into several communication functions: (1) Cultural Identity and City Branding, such as the Baayun Maulid tradition, city history, Banjar culture, and the City of a Thousand Rivers identity; (2) Public Service Information, such as Feeder Trans information, registration for social protection programs, holistic early childhood education, and various public facilities; (3) Issue Response and Public Accountability, such as explanations of PAM water distribution, temporary suspension of the Bilu River water intake, fire response, and infrastructure development progress; (4) Public Education and Risk Communication, such as fire mitigation education and safety warnings; (5) Government Performance Reporting, including official visits and completion of facilities such as the Bailey Bridge; and (6) Institutional and Ceremonial Communication, such as regional awards, official statements, and other government activities. This pattern shows that Banjarmasin's digital channels function not merely as destination-promotion media, but as an integrated government communication channel combining city identity, public service, performance transparency, education, and responsive communication, including in handling issues with crisis potential such as public-service disruptions and disasters, consistent with the importance of social-media-based crisis communication for public institutions (Rahmawati & Latif, 2026).

This finding is consistent with local government interviews, which position the river and Banjar culture as the main identity of Banjarmasin's smart branding. The "City of a Thousand Rivers" brand is translated through spatial planning, preservation of the floating market, promotion of river tourism, entrepreneurship empowerment, and digital campaigns to build public awareness. Its implementation also involves Diskominfo, Disbudporapar, Bappeda, creative communities, Sasirangan MSMEs, the floating-market community, and media in a pentahelix coordination pattern, with Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and cultural festivals as the main communication channels. This integration is also visible on the City Government's official channels: the government website places the "City of a Thousand Rivers" identity, river-based tourism, public services, transportation, regulation, and transparency within a single information ecosystem. Meanwhile, the Banjarmasin Pintar application functions as a single sign-on portal integrating various SKPD (regional work unit) applications; its official portal records 63 applications, consisting of 18 public-service applications and 45 government applications. At the output stage, therefore, Banjarmasin's smart branding can be categorized as relatively strong in terms of frequency, channel integration, message diversity, and digital visibility.

At the *outtake* stage, user responses show that digital exposure does not stop at viewing or giving *likes*, but for a number of pieces of content develops into **information seeking, appreciation, feedback, criticism, and civic suggestion**. Engagement is more pronounced for content directly connected to the public's identity or daily experience, such as documentation of the Baayun Maulid tradition, completion of bridge construction, handling of water-distribution disruptions, transportation services, and government program information. Based on observation of comments, the public did not only give symbolic responses such as emojis or expressions of support, but also asked about transport payment mechanisms via QRIS or card, departure schedules, how to obtain water-tanker assistance, and procedures for certain services. Other comments expressed appreciation for the speed of government response and infrastructure development, while some users voiced complaints about water distribution, public services, or environmental issues. In addition, more substantive forms of participation emerged, such as suggestions for providing smoke-free areas at public events, developing river-cruise tourism routes, strengthening MSMEs, and using urban areas as tourist destinations. This shows that digital

interaction is not merely one-way reception of information by the audience, but has begun to use the comment space as a *feedback mechanism* and a space for dialogue about services and city development.



Figure 3. Forms of Public Response toward Banjarmasin Government Digital Communication

Interestingly, this pattern aligns with the informant's view that the effectiveness of Banjarmasin's communication depends on communication that is inclusive and authentic, so that the public feels part of the city's branding rather than merely an object of promotion. The informant also emphasized the need for alignment between the "City of a Thousand Rivers" narrative and the public's actual experience, while acknowledging challenges such as the digital-literacy gap and the need to reach communities in riverside peripheral areas. This shows that Banjarmasin's outtake is not confined to the attention level, but has displayed understanding, interest, engagement, and participation, although the intensity differs across content types.

At the *outcome* stage, the available evidence begins to show movement from receiving information toward action and participation, although the relationship between digital communication activity and behavioral change in the public cannot yet be established directly. One relevant indicator is the use of the government's digital service ecosystem. The **Banjarmasin Pintar** application, which integrates various services into a single account, had recorded **more than 50,000 downloads** on Google Play in 2026. This figure indicates *behavioral uptake* of the digital service channel, although the number of downloads cannot be equated with the number of active users or assumed to be a direct result of social media communication. On the experience-based branding side, the Banjarmasin City Government also developed a 2026 Calendar of Events with a target of 500 activities to mark the city's five-hundredth anniversary; as of July 2026 around 405 activities had been recorded, with activities explicitly designed to involve the public, community groups, companies, banks, and local organizations. The informant also assessed that the momentum of Banjarmasin's 500th anniversary produced higher public participation than regular campaigns, through the use of the city's historical significance, revitalization of riverside areas, and the unification of the City Anniversary narrative.

However, evidence at the *outcome* stage is still more limited than at *output* and *outtake*. Social media interaction, application download numbers, and involvement in public activities indicate a *behavioral response*, but are not yet sufficient to conclude that a long-term change has occurred in the public's perception, trust, preference, or advocacy toward the Banjarmasin City brand. Strengthening this stage requires triangulation with data such as the number of active Banjarmasin Pintar users, the number of participants or visitors at events, changes in public participation across periods, satisfaction surveys, or interview results on changes in public perception.

At the *impact* stage, several macro indicators show achievements aligned with the strategic objectives of smart branding, particularly increased regional appeal, tourism, economic activity, and city competitiveness. Based on data from the Statistics Indonesia (BPS) office for South Kalimantan

Kategori	Sub-kategori	Kategori A		Kategori B		Kategori C		Kategori D		Kategori E		Total
		2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	
Kategori A	Sub-kategori A1	100	120	150	180	200	220	250	280	300	320	1500
	Sub-kategori A2	80	90	110	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	1000
Kategori B	Sub-kategori B1	120	140	160	180	200	220	240	260	280	300	1600
	Sub-kategori B2	90	100	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	1100
Kategori C	Sub-kategori C1	150	170	190	210	230	250	270	290	310	330	1800
	Sub-kategori C2	110	120	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	1200
Kategori D	Sub-kategori D1	180	200	220	240	260	280	300	320	340	360	2000
	Sub-kategori D2	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	1300
Kategori E	Sub-kategori E1	200	220	240	260	280	300	320	340	360	380	2200
	Sub-kategori E2	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	250	1400
Total		1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	1900	10000

Country	Population (1990)	Population (2000)	Population (2010)	Population (2015)	Population (2020)	Population (2025)	Population (2030)	Population (2040)	Population (2050)
USA	250,000,000	260,000,000	270,000,000	280,000,000	290,000,000	300,000,000	310,000,000	320,000,000	330,000,000
Canada	30,000,000	32,000,000	34,000,000	36,000,000	38,000,000	40,000,000	42,000,000	44,000,000	46,000,000
China	1,200,000,000	1,300,000,000	1,400,000,000	1,500,000,000	1,600,000,000	1,700,000,000	1,800,000,000	1,900,000,000	2,000,000,000
India	800,000,000	900,000,000	1,000,000,000	1,100,000,000	1,200,000,000	1,300,000,000	1,400,000,000	1,500,000,000	1,600,000,000
Japan	120,000,000	125,000,000	130,000,000	135,000,000	140,000,000	145,000,000	150,000,000	155,000,000	160,000,000
Germany	80,000,000	82,000,000	84,000,000	86,000,000	88,000,000	90,000,000	92,000,000	94,000,000	96,000,000
France	60,000,000	62,000,000	64,000,000	66,000,000	68,000,000	70,000,000	72,000,000	74,000,000	76,000,000
UK	55,000,000	57,000,000	59,000,000	61,000,000	63,000,000	65,000,000	67,000,000	69,000,000	71,000,000
Italy	58,000,000	60,000,000	62,000,000	64,000,000	66,000,000	68,000,000	70,000,000	72,000,000	74,000,000
Spain	40,000,000	42,000,000	44,000,000	46,000,000	48,000,000	50,000,000	52,000,000	54,000,000	56,000,000
Sweden	8,000,000	9,000,000	10,000,000	11,000,000	12,000,000	13,000,000	14,000,000	15,000,000	16,000,000
South Korea	40,000,000	42,000,000	44,000,000	46,000,000	48,000,000	50,000,000	52,000,000	54,000,000	56,000,000
China (cont.)	1,200,000,000	1,300,000,000	1,400,000,000	1,500,000,000	1,600,000,000	1,700,000,000	1,800,000,000	1,900,000,000	2,000,000,000
India (cont.)	800,000,000	900,000,000	1,000,000,000	1,100,000,000	1,200,000,000	1,300,000,000	1,400,000,000	1,500,000,000	1,600,000,000
Japan (cont.)	120,000,000	125,000,000	130,000,000	135,000,000	140,000,000	145,000,000	150,000,000	155,000,000	160,000,000
Germany (cont.)	80,000,000	82,000,000	84,000,000	86,000,000	88,000,000	90,000,000	92,000,000	94,000,000	96,000,000
France (cont.)	60,000,000	62,000,000	64,000,000	66,000,000	68,000,000	70,000,000	72,000,000	74,000,000	76,000,000
UK (cont.)	55,000,000	57,000,000	59,000,000	61,000,000	63,000,000	65,000,000	67,000,000	69,000,000	71,000,000
Italy (cont.)	58,000,000	60,000,000	62,000,000	64,000,000	66,000,000	68,000,000	70,000,000	72,000,000	74,000,000
Spain (cont.)	40,000,000	42,000,000	44,000,000	46,000,000	48,000,000	50,000,000	52,000,000	54,000,000	56,000,000
Sweden (cont.)	8,000,000	9,000,000	10,000,000	11,000,000	12,000,000	13,000,000	14,000,000	15,000,000	16,000,000
South Korea (cont.)	40,000,000	42,000,000	44,000,000	46,000,000	48,000,000	50,000,000	52,000,000	54,000,000	56,000,000

Figure 4. BPS Data on the Number of Domestic Tourist Trips in South Kalimantan

From the dimension of *business attractiveness* and competitiveness, Banjarmasin's realized investment in 2025 was recorded at around Rp3.52 trillion, consisting of roughly Rp3.17 trillion in domestic investment (PMDN) and Rp345.1 billion in foreign investment (PMA). Banjarmasin then achieved **third rank among regencies/cities with the largest realized investment in South Kalimantan** in 2026. In the same year, Banjarmasin also received the Regional Competitiveness Index award from BRIN, which assesses regions based on supporting environment, human resources, market, and innovation ecosystem. Institutionally, in the digital dimension, Banjarmasin's Smart City index previously reached 3.57 and its SPBE (electronic-based government system) index reached 4.06, both in the very-good category, indicating supporting capacity for the implementation of digital-based government communication and services.

Although these indicators point in a direction consistent with smart branding objectives, this study does not assume a direct causal relationship between digital communication activity and increases in tourism, investment, or regional competitiveness. These data are more appropriately positioned as *organizational and city-level impact indicators* showing the strategic context in which smart branding communication operates. Communication's contribution to *impact* can thus be identified, but the degree of attribution still requires more specific evidence, such as data on tourists' information sources, campaign evaluation, event-level economic transactions, or tracking of indicator changes before and after a particular communication program.

Mojokerto

At the *output* stage, the Mojokerto Regency Government shows efforts to distribute *smart branding* communication through a combination of institutional channels, social media, *offline* activation, and external communication networks. Interview results with the Mojokerto Regency Office

of Culture, Youth, Sports, and Tourism (Disbudporapar) show that the communication channels used include the official Instagram account **@disbudporapar.kabmjk**, TikTok, local Mojokerto *influencers*, and collaboration with Diskominfo to extend message reach. Social media was chosen because it is considered to have wide reach at relatively low cost, while *branding* implementation is also carried out through *Car Free Day*, cultural festivals, and tourism events integrating traditional arts performances, *live music*, MSMEs, arts communities, and the creative economy. The use of external networks is also visible in the promotion of MajaFest, when the Mojokerto Regency Government engaged *influencers* and Mojokerto Raya social media activists to spread the event while also introducing batik, culinary offerings, MSMEs, and Majapahit identity to a wider public.

Based on observation of its communication materials, Mojokerto Regency's digital output can be grouped into five main functions: (1) Historical and Cultural Identity, through the historical narrative of Majapahit, the Trowulan area, temples, and local arts and traditions; (2) Tourism Promotion, showcasing historical-cultural tourism, the Pacet–Trawas nature-tourism area, religious tourism, and recreational destinations; (3) Cultural and Creative Economy Communication, through Mojokerto batik, culinary offerings, MSMEs, arts, and the creative economy; (4) Event and Destination Activation, such as MajaFest, cultural festivals, and Car Free Day; and (5) Government and Regional Development Communication, documenting government activities and the development of regional potential. This pattern shows that digital channels do not function only as administrative publication, but become an integrated regional branding communication channel connecting historical identity with tourism, the creative economy, and the regional development agenda.

The "Full of Majapahit Greatness" identity in Mojokerto Regency is no longer merely a promotional slogan. This identity was officially launched by the Mojokerto Regency Government in 2022 to popularize regional potential and build Mojokerto Regency's differentiation. In interviews, the government also explicitly defines branding as a representation of the region's character, potential, and identity, in the hope of supporting increased tourism visits, investment, and PAD (local own-source revenue). Furthermore, the "Full of Majapahit Greatness" narrative is subsequently used in Mojokerto Regency's 2025–2045 long-term development vision, which articulates "greatness" not only as Majapahit history, but as economic progress, equitable development, and socio-cultural and human-resource maturity.



Figure 5. The “Full of Majapahit Greatness” Development Vision of Mojokerto Regency, 2025–2045.

At the *outtake* stage, communication on the Instagram page shows a fairly positive audience response through *likes*, *comments*, *shares*, and *reposts* across various social media accounts that also shared information about the activities. The high level of interaction and content resharing indicates that information about these activities receives attention and relevance among the audience. Beyond this

quantitative response, public comments show positive reception of the activities, such as appreciation for support given to MSMEs and community activities.

Audience responses also show an understanding of the message conveyed through the Peken Wilwatikta activation. Several comments linked the activity to micro-economic growth, benefits for MSMEs, and the provision of positive activities for the public. Mojokerto's communication *outtake* is thus visible in positive audience reception, content sharing, and understanding of the socio-economic benefits of the activities communicated.



Figure 6. Forms of Public Response toward Mojokerto Government Digital Communication

Mojokerto Regency's smart branding communication shows a number of indications of movement from identity introduction toward **participation and experiential engagement**, especially through cultural and tourism activation. MajaFest is one important example, because Majapahit branding is not only presented as a digital narrative, but is translated into public experience through culinary offerings, batik, performing arts, MSMEs, and local tradition. At MajaFest 2022, the *nguleg sambel wader* (chili-paste pounding) activity involved **1,035 participants** and received MURI (Indonesian Records Museum) recognition, while at MajaFest 2023 cultural activation again involved hundreds of participants; the Bedoyo Putri Mojosakti dance performance recorded **509 dancers** and again received a MURI record. This pattern shows that regional branding is not only consumed as a promotional message, but is translated into public participation in the cultural symbols that form part of regional identity.

This activation aligns with a strategy the government deliberately pursues by developing Car Free Day, cultural festivals, and tourism events as spaces of interaction among the public, arts communities, MSMEs, and creative-economy actors. From an AMEC perspective, public involvement in these activities can be read as an indication of *participation* and *behavioral response*. However, the available evidence is not yet sufficient to conclude a long-term change in the form of *preference*, *trust*, *advocacy*, or *repeat-visit* decisions. This is in fact acknowledged by Disbudporapar, which still lists increasing repeat visits, strengthening attractions and amenities, branding consistency, and developing a Calendar of Events as agenda items that still need to be developed.

At the *impact* stage, regional development indicators show progress consistent with Mojokerto Regency's strategic smart branding objectives, particularly in increasing tourism appeal, economic

activity, and investment. Official government data show that the number of tourist visits increased from around **663,265 in 2022 to 845,377 in 2023 and 921,151 in 2024**. Government documents link this development to tourism recovery, infrastructure improvement, and promotion of local tourism potential. BPS Mojokerto Regency has also made tourist visits, domestic tourist trips, hotel occupancy rates, and length of stay official tourism indicators; in the first quarter of 2025, **44,082 domestic guests** and 56 foreign guests were recorded staying at accommodation services in Mojokerto Regency. This development aligns with a regional branding orientation that positions Majapahit historical tourism, nature, religious tourism, and the creative economy as its main assets of appeal.

On the dimension of economic appeal, Mojokerto Regency's realized investment in 2025 reached around **Rp4.45 trillion, or 110% of target**, while absorbing more than **16,000 workers**. In the first quarter of 2026, realized investment was again recorded at around **Rp1.06 trillion**. This achievement is relevant to the smart branding objectives mentioned by the informant, namely increasing tourism appeal, investment, and local own-source revenue. On the local-economy side, the turnover of Mojokerto Regency's assisted micro-enterprises also increased from around **Rp114.50 billion in 2024 to Rp120.46 billion in 2025**, or growth of around 5.2%. However, these economic indicators are cross-sector development achievements and thus cannot be assumed to be a direct effect of branding activity or digital promotion.

Although trends in tourist visits, investment, and economic activity are consistent with the objectives of *Full of Majapahit Greatness*, this study does not assume a direct causal relationship between smart branding communication and these achievements. These indicators are more appropriately positioned as **regional-level impacts aligned with branding objectives**, while attributing communication's contribution requires additional evidence such as tourists' information sources, *campaign tracking*, events' contribution to MSME transactions, tourism PAD, or evaluation of changes in public perception.

AMEC Dimension	Banjarmasin City	Mojokerto Regency	Comparative Finding
Output	Digital communication is carried out intensively and in an integrated manner through the government website, Instagram, TikTok, and Banjarmasin Pintar, and various digital public services. Messages cover the “City of a Thousand Rivers” identity, Banjar culture, public services, issue response, education, development,	Communication is distributed through Disbudporapar's and Diskominfo's Instagram and TikTok, local influencers, MajaFest, CFD, cultural festivals, and tourism activities. Messages mainly integrate the “Full of Majapahit Greatness” identity, Majapahit history, tourism, culture, MSMEs, and the creative economy.	Both use multiplatform communication and connect local identity with the development agenda. However, Banjarmasin shows a more institutionally integrated and service-oriented communication pattern, while Mojokerto is more heritage-led, promotional, and event-oriented.

and government
activities.

Outtake	Digital response shows information seeking, appreciation, service complaints, criticism, and civic suggestions. Audiences use the comment space not only to react but also to ask questions, give input, and respond to city issues.	There is strong recognition of the Mojokerto–Majapahit association; prior studies show 85.4% of respondents were aware of Mojokerto's link to the Majapahit Kingdom's center. However, direct evidence of audience response to government digital communication remains more limited.	Banjarasin has more observable and dialogic evidence of digital outtake, while Mojokerto is stronger on cognitive recognition of cultural identity, but does not yet have an equally strong measure of digital response.
Outcome	There are indications of behavioral response through use of digital services, participation in government activities, and community involvement in various city programs and moments. However, long-term change in perception and advocacy cannot yet be directly demonstrated.	Outcome is mainly visible through experiential participation at MajaFest, CFD, cultural festivals, and community, MSME, arts, and creative-economy involvement. However, change in preference, trust, repeat visits, or advocacy has not been systematically measured.	Both regions are beginning to move from exposure toward participation, but in different forms: Banjarasin is more service- and civic-behavior oriented, while Mojokerto is more experiential and cultural-participation oriented.

Impact	Macro indicators show Growth in tourist visits, Both cases show strategic progress consistent with realized investment, local alignment between branding branding objectives, economic activity, and communication and regional including high tourist creative-economy development objectives, but visits, investment development shows a both also face an attribution achievement, and direction consistent with gap. Banjarmasin shows competitiveness and the “Full of Majapahit broader impact on city digital transformation of Greatness” objective. competitiveness and digital the region. However, However, a direct governance, while Mojokerto is communication's direct relationship with more concentrated on tourism, contribution to these branding communication heritage, and local economic achievements cannot yet activity has also not been development. be causally attributed. demonstrated.
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Table 2. Findings on Differences and Similarities

The comparison of the two cases shows that although Banjarmasin City and Mojokerto Regency both make use of local identity as the basis for *smart branding*, they produce different patterns of communication effectiveness. This difference is mainly influenced by **the character of regional identity and communication strategy orientation**. Banjarmasin builds its branding on river identity and Banjar culture, but integrates it with public-service communication, response to residents' issues, development, education, and digital services. In interviews, the Banjarmasin government also positions Diskominfotik as the main information bridge, supported by Disbudporapar, Bappeda, creative communities, MSMEs, and media. This makes Banjarmasin's *smart branding* closer to **day-to-day government–citizen communication**, so that effects at the *outtake* stage are more easily seen in the form of public questions, criticism, appreciation, and suggestions. Mojokerto, by contrast, places Majapahit heritage at the core of its regional differentiation and operationalizes it more through tourism promotion, cultural festivals, *Car Free Day*, community involvement, MSMEs, and *influencers*. Its communication pattern thus tends to produce stronger **experiential engagement** than day-to-day public-service interaction.

This difference is also related to **organizational capacity and inter-stakeholder coordination patterns**. Banjarmasin shows a relatively integrated digital communication ecosystem linking information channels, public services, and city branding, while Mojokerto still faces challenges such as *sectoral ego* among regional agencies, limited collaboration with the private sector, budget constraints, and consistency of branding implementation. Mojokerto's Disbudporapar has even identified a need for *collaborative government* and an actor capable of orchestrating the various stakeholders so that branding communication runs more consistently. This helps explain why Mojokerto already has a relatively strong cultural identity — previous studies even show high public recognition of Mojokerto's link to Majapahit — yet has not shown digital *outtake* evidence as strong as Banjarmasin's.

Overall, the findings from both cases show that high digital activity does not by itself determine the effectiveness of smart branding. Banjarmasin shows a clearer pathway from *output* to *outtake* through public interaction within the government's communication ecosystem, while Mojokerto shows a more pronounced transition from *output* to *outcome* through cultural experience and event participation. In

both regions, however, the relationship between communication and strategic *impact* — such as tourism growth, investment, PAD, or regional competitiveness — still faces an attribution gap. The effectiveness of *smart branding* as *digital government communication* is thus determined not only by the number of channels or intensity of publication, but also by the fit of regional identity, institutional integration, choice of activation formats, stakeholder engagement, and government capacity to measure change from *visibility* toward behavioral and organizational effect.

Discussion

The research findings show that *smart branding* in local government functions not only as a promotional activity, but as part of *strategic government communication*. In Banjarmasin, the "City of a Thousand Rivers" identity is communicated through culture, tourism, digital channels, public services, and *stakeholder* collaboration, while Mojokerto connects "Full of Majapahit Greatness" with cultural communication, tourism, regional activation, and the public's experience of government digital services. This finding aligns with Kingsley et al. and Kent (2013) regarding government digital media as a means of government–public interaction, but extends it by showing that a region's *brand meaning* is also formed through the public's experience of how government works, responds, and delivers services.

The AMEC evaluation shows that high *digital visibility* does not automatically mean effective communication. Banjarmasin has strong *output* and fairly visible *outtake* through *information seeking*, appreciation, criticism, and *civic suggestions*, but evidence of long-term change in perception, trust, or advocacy remains limited. Mojokerto shows a different pattern, with more pronounced development in *experiential participation* through MajaFest, cultural festivals, MSMEs, and the creative economy, while tourism and investment indicators cannot yet be directly attributed to branding communication. These findings confirm that *reach*, *views*, *likes*, and *engagement* are only the early part of the process, not the final measure of communication effectiveness.

Integrating the three perspectives shows that *smart branding* is more accurately understood as a **communication process** rather than merely a *branding campaign*. Regional identity becomes the substance of communication, *digital government communication* becomes the space for interaction with the public, while AMEC helps assess the relationship between activity and effect. In both regions, the public is not only a recipient of messages, but also helps shape brand meaning through response, experience, criticism, participation, and involvement in regional activities. Branding communication can thus be understood as a cycle of **identity articulation–public interaction–public experience–feedback–brand meaning**.

Comparing the two cases shows that the effectiveness of *smart branding* is shaped by regional context and strategic communication choices. Banjarmasin tends to be *city-system and service-integrated*, because river identity is connected to day-to-day government communication and public services. Mojokerto is more *heritage-led and experiential*, with Majapahit as the central point of differentiation translated through culture, tourism, events, community, and the creative economy. This difference shows that there is no single universal model of digital smart branding for local government; its effectiveness depends on identity consistency, institutional integration, *stakeholder* engagement, and

government's capacity to connect communication with public experience and the region's strategic objectives.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that smart branding in Banjarmasin City and Mojokerto Regency has developed as part of digital government communication that connects regional identity, government communication, public interaction, and public experience. Banjarmasin applies a more city-system and service-integrated approach by integrating the "City of a Thousand Rivers" identity into public-service, cultural, tourism, and digital-channel communication, while Mojokerto applies a more heritage-led and experiential approach by making "Full of Majapahit Greatness" its main identity, reinforced through digital communication, cultural activities, tourism, and the creative economy. Based on the AMEC evaluation, both regions have shown progress from output toward outcome, but with different patterns: Banjarmasin is more visible in public interaction and civic feedback, while Mojokerto is more prominent in participation and cultural experience. At the impact level, both show regional achievements consistent with smart branding objectives, but the direct contribution of communication to tourism, investment, or competitiveness cannot yet be causally demonstrated. The effectiveness of smart branding as digital government communication is thus determined not only by the intensity of digital communication, but by identity consistency, institutional integration, stakeholder engagement, the quality of public experience, and government capacity to connect communication with measurable change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their highest gratitude and appreciation to the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), for the funding support provided through the Operational Assistance Program for State Universities for Research and Community Service (BIMA). Thanks are also extended to the Vocational School and IPB University for their facilitation, guidance, and administrative and infrastructural support throughout this research. In addition, the authors express appreciation to the Banjarmasin City Government and the Mojokerto Regency Government, as well as all informants and stakeholders who provided valuable data and information for the completion of this study.

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