

DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED UNIVERSITY TOWN FRAMEWORK AS A CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN BANDUNG

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ABSTRACT

University towns function not only as centers of higher education but also as ecosystems of economic, social, cultural, creative, and tourism activity. This study aims to analyze the factors shaping university town competitiveness, identify development constraints, and formulate an integrated framework that positions university towns as catalysts for sustainable tourism in Bandung. The study applies a qualitative approach by integrating Porter's Diamond Model with a netnographic perspective. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, documentation, and digital content analysis across Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Google Reviews, X, Reddit, travel blogs, and online forums. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement in university, business, government, community, and tourism ecosystems. The data were analyzed thematically through transcription, reduction, coding, categorization, triangulation, and interpretation. The findings show that university town competitiveness is shaped by academic resources, student and visitor mobility, supporting industries, collaborative strategies, government policies, and digital transformation opportunities. Campus experiences also generate digital narratives that develop into electronic word of mouth, shape the tourist gaze, strengthen community experience, and build destination branding. This study proposes the Integrated University Town Framework for Sustainable Tourism Development, which positions universities as catalysts for knowledge-based, competitive, inclusive, authentic, and sustainable destinations with long-term socioeconomic value.

Introduction

Sustainable tourism has become an important approach to destination development because tourism growth must balance economic benefits with environmental protection, social inclusion, cultural preservation, and community well-being (Barbosa et al., 2024; Haid et al., 2021). Destination sustainability is not determined only by the availability of tourist attractions. Its success also requires effective governance, stakeholder coordination, resource management, and consistent policy implementation (Haid et al., 2021). In addition, sustainable tourism programs require strong local networks, institutional legitimacy, and the capacity to integrate resources across sectors (Mwesiumo et al., 2022). These conditions encourage cities to develop new tourism models based on knowledge, creativity, innovation, and urban experiences.

University towns have the potential to develop as a form of knowledge-based urban tourism. Universities attract students, lecturers, researchers, conference participants, alumni, students' families, and institutional partners, creating continuous mobility. Their activities increase demand for accommodation, transportation, food services, retail, cultural activities, and creative spaces. The relationship between higher education, urban structure, and visitor activity shows that students interact not only with campus environments but also with commercial areas, public spaces, cultural facilities, and local communities (Iranmanesh & Mousavi, 2023). University areas can therefore develop into urban destinations that combine educational, cultural, social, creative, and recreational experiences.

Universities can also serve as anchor institutions that contribute to economic, social, and knowledge development at the local level (O'Farrell et al., 2022). Their contribution extends beyond education and research because universities possess human resources, facilities, networks, innovation capacity, and institutional stability. These resources can support regional transformation when universities respond to local economic needs and collaborate with public and private sectors (Medina-Bueno et al., 2024). Universities also contribute to culture- and creativity-led development through talent development, cultural programs, research facilities, and partnerships with creative industries (Cinar & Coenen, 2023). However, these benefits depend on strategic collaboration among universities, government, businesses, tourism organizations, communities, and local residents (Nieth & Radinger-Peer, 2023).

Bandung provides a relevant context for examining the development of a university town as a sustainable tourism cluster. The city has a high concentration of higher education institutions and a strong identity in education, creativity, culture, culinary activities, and technological innovation. In 2025, Bandung had 157 higher education institutions, indicating the scale of its academic ecosystem and student mobility (Badan

Pusat Statistik Kota Bandung, 2025). Institutions such as Institut Teknologi Bandung, Universitas Padjadjaran, Universitas Pasundan, and BINUS University contribute through academic activities, research, entrepreneurship, cultural programs, and industry collaboration. These activities support the growth of hotels, student housing, cafés, restaurants, transportation services, coworking spaces, creative hubs, and micro, small, and medium enterprises around campus areas.

University town competitiveness does not arise only from the quality of academic resources. It is formed through interactions among skilled human resources, visitor demand, supporting industries, institutional strategies, government policies, and external opportunities. Recent studies show that tourism competitiveness should consider social progress, resident well-being, destination management, and sustainability outcomes, rather than focusing only on visitor growth (Barbosa et al., 2024). University towns therefore need to transform academic resources and urban amenities into experiences that benefit visitors, businesses, residents, and local communities. Stakeholder collaboration is essential because fragmented planning can separate higher education development from tourism, creative economy, transportation, and spatial planning policies.

Digital media also influence how university towns build visibility and destination identity. Students, alumni, tourists, educational institutions, and businesses produce photos, videos, comments, reviews, and stories about campus life and surrounding areas. Social media enables diverse stakeholders to participate in destination branding by producing and circulating meanings about a place (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). User-generated content can develop into electronic word of mouth, shape expectations, and influence how prospective visitors evaluate academic environments, culinary attractions, cultural events, and creative activities. Digital narratives are important because destination image is no longer formed only through formal promotion but also through experiences shared by users. Netnography can be used to examine online cultures, interactions, and representations in tourism contexts (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). This approach can also identify emotional, social, informational, and experiential factors that shape destination perceptions (Küster & Vila, 2024).

Previous studies have examined sustainable destination management, the role of universities in regional development, educational tourism, destination competitiveness, and social media-based destination branding. However, these research streams tend to remain separate. Limited research explains the relationship between the structural competitiveness of a university town and narratives produced by digital communities. This study addresses this gap by integrating Porter's Diamond Model with a netnographic perspective. It aims to identify the factors shaping Bandung's competitiveness as a university town, analyze its development constraints, and formulate an integrated

framework for sustainable tourism development. The framework connects academic capacity, supporting industries, stakeholder collaboration, digital narratives, electronic word of mouth, tourist gaze, community experience, destination branding, and tourism competitiveness.

Method

This study uses a qualitative design with Bandung as a case study because the city has a high concentration of universities and an established urban tourism ecosystem. The location was selected purposively because it demonstrates clear connections among academic activities, the creative economy, culture, urban services, and visitor mobility. The field focus covers areas associated with Institut Teknologi Bandung, Universitas Padjadjaran, Universitas Pasundan, and BINUS @Bandung. The selection of these four universities does not represent a ranking. Instead, they represent variations in academic character, urban setting, cultural orientation, and relationships with industry.

The study draws data from interviews, observation, documentation, and digital spaces. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement and knowledge of university-area development, the creative economy, business activities, and tourism policy. The source groups included academics, business actors, and government representatives. Field observations focused on campus activities, supporting facilities, mobility patterns, public spaces, cultural activities, culinary services, accommodation, transportation, and interactions between academic communities and local residents.

Netnography was used to understand narratives, experiences, and representations of the university town in digital spaces. Digital sources included posts, comments, photos, videos, and reviews on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Google Reviews, Reddit, X, travel blogs, and online forums. Content was selected based on its relevance to campus life, academic activities, local culture, creative spaces, culinary experiences, visits, and Bandung's image. Netnography was selected because it can capture cultural practices and meanings formed through user interactions in digital environments (Kozinets, 2020).

The research instruments consisted of interview guidelines, observation sheets, documentation lists, and a netnographic search protocol. Porter's Diamond Model served as an initial deductive lens for grouping factor conditions, demand conditions, related and supporting industries, firm strategy, structure, and rivalry, government, and chance. Netnography provided space for inductive analysis of digital narratives, e-WOM, tourist gaze, community experience, and destination branding. This combination maintained a clear theoretical focus while allowing new themes to emerge from the data.

The analysis involved transcription, data reduction, coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation. The principles of thematic analysis were used to identify consistent patterns, examine relationships among themes, and develop

conceptual explanations. Field and digital data were compared to assess whether online images were supported by observable experiences and facilities. The coding results were then mapped onto Porter's determinants and netnographic dimensions before being synthesized into the conceptual model.

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source and method triangulation. Statements from academics were compared with the views of business actors and government representatives, then examined against field observations and digital evidence. Triangulation was not used to force uniformity but to explain points of convergence and differences in perception. The final stage involved interpreting relationships among themes and developing a conceptual model that addressed the research objectives.

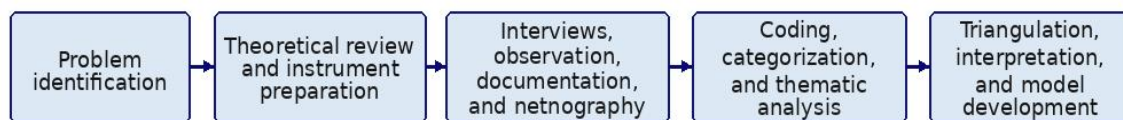


Figure 1. Research stages

Source: Authors (2026)

Results and Discussion

University as an Economic and Knowledge Catalyst

The findings show that universities act as the initial trigger for area-based activity. The mobility of students, lecturers, researchers, academic guests, and families continues throughout the academic year. This pattern differs from destinations that depend heavily on holiday seasons. Demand for student housing, hotels, food services, printing, online transportation, fitness centers, coworking spaces, and public facilities creates a relatively recurring market.

The Institut Teknologi Bandung area demonstrates a close relationship between academic activity and urban life in Dago and Jalan Ganesha. Seminars, innovation exhibitions, graduations, student activities, libraries, cafés, and discussion spaces create experiences that extend beyond campus boundaries. Universitas Padjadjaran in Jatinangor shows a similar area transformation through the growth of student housing, apartments, culinary centers, minimarkets, printing services, transportation, and communities. These findings indicate that academic demand can stimulate service agglomeration and alter the functions of surrounding areas.

Universitas Pasundan adds a cultural dimension through festivals, student entrepreneurship activities, community engagement, and programs that showcase Sundanese culture. These relationships extend economic benefits to MSMEs and arts communities. BINUS @Bandung presents a pattern oriented toward technology, design,

student projects, and industry collaboration. Its location within a commercial district brings students, businesses, visitors, and urban facilities together in the same space.

The four cases show variations in factor conditions. Academic reputation, human resources, research, innovation, facilities, and networks form the main assets. These assets create area-level impacts only when they meet strong demand conditions. The findings support the Triple Helix perspective because universities do not operate independently. Value grows through interaction with local businesses, creative industries, government, and communities (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). The findings are also consistent with evidence that universities can drive urban growth through innovation and local engagement (McCann et al., 2023). Unlike studies that emphasize economic functions and localization policy, the Bandung findings show that these interactions also create knowledge-, culture-, and creativity-based tourism experiences.

The academic calendar acts as a demand stabilizer for surrounding areas. Student admissions, lectures, seminars, competitions, graduations, and family visits generate user flows at different times. This pattern gives businesses opportunities to develop services that do not depend on a single season. At the same time, concentrated activity requires effective management of transportation, housing, cleanliness, and public spaces. Without coordination, economic growth may be accompanied by congestion, housing pressure, and declining area quality. The importance of physical and functional relationships between campuses and cities has also been identified in a systematic review of sustainable campus-city relations (Mohammed et al., 2022). This study adds that such coordination should also cover visitor experience management and the integration of academic activities with tourism services.

Differences among campuses create a complementary portfolio of experiences. ITB emphasizes science, technology, innovation, and creative districts. UNPAD demonstrates the scale of student life and the transformation of Jatinangor. UNPAS connects education with Sundanese culture and entrepreneurship. BINUS @Bandung highlights digital technology, design, and industry collaboration. This diversity strengthens Bandung's position because visitors do not encounter a single uniform image. Instead, they experience a combination of education, culture, creativity, culinary activities, and urban life. The findings extend university-city research by showing that institutional differentiation can also become a source of destination differentiation.

Table 1
Observation Findings in Campus Environments

Location	Observation Findings	Digital Evidence	Implication
ITB–Dago	Campus life, international seminars, cafés, and creative	Official Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube	Strengthens Bandung's image as an education and

Location	Observation Findings	Digital Evidence	Implication
	spaces		creative city
UNPAD–Jatinangor	Student life, housing, culinary services, and communities	TikTok, Instagram, and educational tourism content	Forms a student-town identity and year-round activity
UNPAS	Cultural festivals, entrepreneurship, and Sundanese activities	University and student-organization channels	Connects local culture with the university-town identity
BINUS @Bandung	Technology, design, student projects, and industry collaboration	Official Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube	Reinforces the creative and digital positioning of Bandung

Source: Authors (2026)

Digital Narratives, e-WOM, and Destination Branding

Digital observation shows that university town life is widely represented through everyday content. Posts display not only academic activities but also food, public spaces, cafés, festivals, graduations, sports, student organizations, trips to campus, and student housing life. This content creates a broader image than institutional promotion alone. The campus appears as part of the urban experience rather than as a separate space.

In the ITB area, content about Jalan Ganesha, Dago, graduation activities, innovation exhibitions, and cafés around campus forms narratives of education and creativity. Content about Jatinangor highlights student life, food, housing, organizations, and public spaces. Universitas Pasundan channels feature Sundanese culture, festivals, entrepreneurship, and community engagement. BINUS @Bandung content emphasizes technology, design, student projects, and links with the business sector.

These patterns show that destination branding is formed through co-creation. Universities and government provide official communication, but students, alumni, visitors, and residents produce more organic narratives. Relevant experiences then receive likes, comments, shares, and reviews. This process transforms personal experiences into e-WOM that can influence the decisions of prospective students and tourists. The influence of user-generated content on trust, destination image, and visit intention has also been demonstrated among Generation Z tourists (Yamagishi et al., 2024). In Bandung, this content does not merely promote tourism attractions. It connects academic life, local culture, culinary experiences, and creative spaces within a unified city image.

e-WOM also shapes the tourist gaze. Users who repeatedly see Bandung presented as an educational, creative, and culinary city develop expectations before visiting. When they arrive, they seek academic atmospheres, creative spaces, student activities, and

culinary experiences that correspond with this image. Their experiences are then reproduced as new content. This cycle explains why destination image is not static and why the quality of real experiences remains the foundation of digital reputation.

Community experience emerges when visitors interact with students, MSME actors, artists, communities, and local residents. A student festival at Universitas Pasundan, for example, offers more than a campus event. Visitors can also watch cultural performances, purchase local products, and interact with participants. These social relationships add an authentic dimension that advertising alone cannot create. Place branding becomes stronger when experience, identity, and communication support one another (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2021).

Official and organic narratives perform different functions. Official channels provide certainty about programs, achievements, schedules, and institutional identity. User content shows how facilities and activities are experienced in everyday life. When both are consistent, the credibility of destination branding increases. When they conflict, users tend to trust experiences communicated by other users. This pattern is consistent with findings that e-WOM is perceived as credible because it originates from user experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Recent research also shows that user-generated content influences the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image, although cognitive effects may vary across generations (Correia et al., 2025). University town communication strategies should therefore combine factual information with authentic experiences that are relevant to visitor segments.

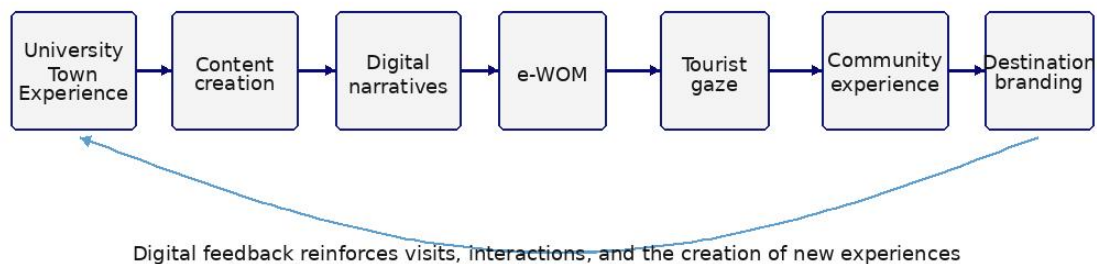


Figure 2. Transformation of university-town experiences into destination image

Source: Authors (2026)

Porter's Diamond and the University Town Ecosystem

Factor conditions in Bandung include university reputation, research capacity, skilled human resources, educational facilities, digital infrastructure, academic networks, public spaces, and cultural assets. These factors distinguish a university town from other urban areas. However, asset quality does not automatically create tourism experiences.

Accessibility, openness of activities, information availability, safety, and connections with surrounding areas determine whether academic assets can be experienced by visitors.

Demand conditions arise from the mobility of students, conference participants, families attending graduations, alumni, researchers, and educational tourists. This demand encourages local businesses to adjust services, operating hours, products, and digital communication. Academic markets also create demand for study spaces, internet access, transportation, affordable food, and creative activities. Diverse demand can stimulate service innovation, but it can also create pressure on traffic, housing, public spaces, and the environment when not properly managed.

Related and supporting industries are reflected in the growth of hotels, student housing, cafés, restaurants, transportation, printing services, creative hubs, museums, art centers, and MSMEs. These industries extend the value chain from academic activities to the local economy. Hjalager (2015) notes that tourism innovation often emerges from adopting changes developed in other sectors. In a university town context, campus-based technology, design, research, and entrepreneurship can renew tourism products and services.

Firm strategy, structure, and rivalry are evident in how universities build reputation, develop activities, establish industry collaboration, and use digital media. Competition among universities and districts can increase innovation, but destination development requires shared strategies to avoid fragmentation. Government acts as an enabler through tourism, transportation, public space, creative economy, and promotional policies. Chance arises through digital transformation, growing interest in knowledge-based experiences, and changing travel patterns.

The integration of these determinants shows that competitiveness results from relationships rather than from a list of assets. A strong campus that remains disconnected from supporting industries does not create a cluster. Similarly, growing industries without identity and coordination struggle to build differentiation. These findings support the cluster approach, which emphasizes networks, knowledge exchange, and synergy among actors.

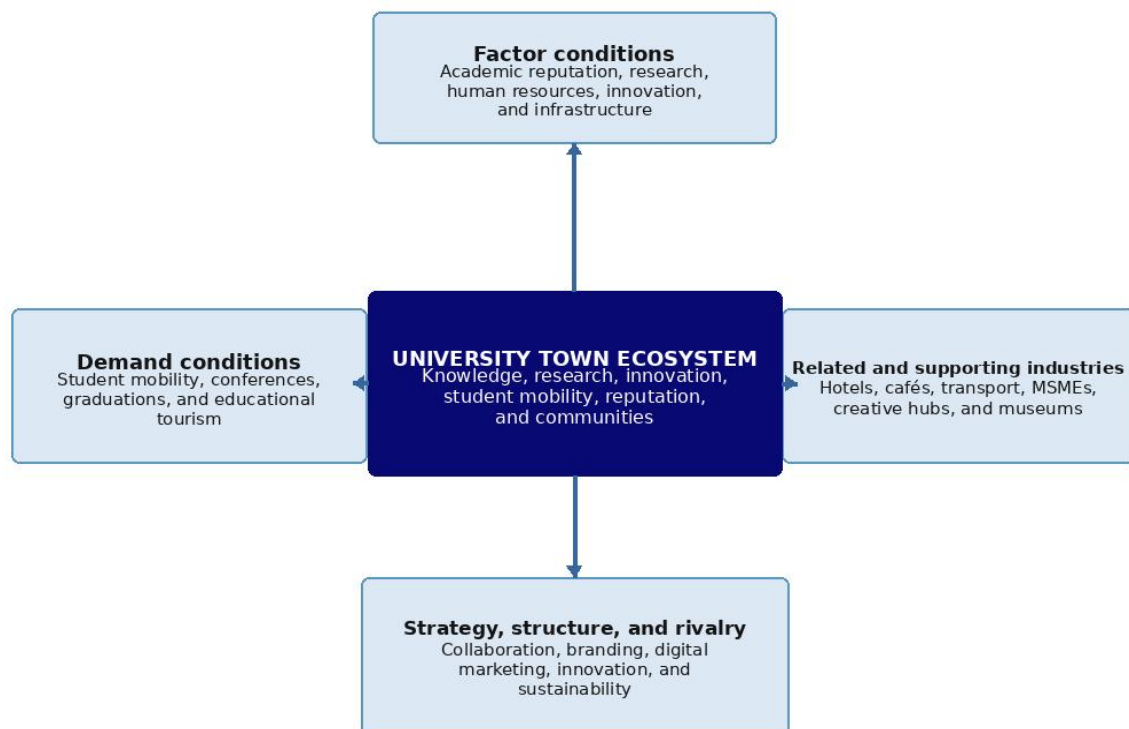


Figure 3. Porter's Diamond within the university town ecosystem

Source: Authors (2026)

Table 2
Triangulation of Informant Sources

Theme	Academics	Business	Government	Synthesis
Creative economy	Students produce innovation and entrepreneurial activities	Firms obtain new markets from academic communities	Programs support university–industry collaboration	Universities strengthen the local creative economy
Digital narratives	Academic activities become digital content	User posts promote local businesses	Digital media supports destination promotion	Narratives grow through user-generated content
Destination branding	University reputation strengthens the city image	Area brands attract customers	Tourism policy communicates city identity	Academic identity and visitor experience jointly form the brand
Tourism competitiveness	Education and innovation increase attractiveness	Visits generate economic benefits	Investment and regional competitiveness improve	Competitiveness requires cross-actor synergy

Source: Authors (2026)

Integrated University Town Framework

The study develops an Integrated University Town Framework that connects two dimensions. The first dimension is the area's internal capability, explained through Porter's Diamond Model. The second is external perception, explained through netnography. Internal capabilities create experiences, while external perceptions transform those experiences into narratives, images, and reputation. The two dimensions converge in destination branding and tourism competitiveness.

The model begins with the university as a center of knowledge, research, innovation, academic reputation, student mobility, and international communities. These capabilities form the University Town Ecosystem. The ecosystem generates amenities and activities such as hotels, cafés, culinary services, museums, festivals, transportation, creative hubs, and MSMEs. Porter's Diamond explains how resources, demand, supporting industries, strategies, policies, and opportunities shape internal competitiveness.

Along another pathway, student and visitor experiences generate content. This content develops into digital narratives, e-WOM, tourist gaze, and community experience. The process builds destination branding that does not depend solely on official communication. Technology accelerates the distribution of experiences and expands market reach. However, technology cannot replace destination quality. Effective digital strategies must be grounded in consistent services, identity, and experiences (Kannan & Li, 2017; Sigala, 2018).

The relationships in the model are cyclical. Internal capabilities generate high-quality experiences. Experiences form digital narratives. These narratives strengthen branding and attract students, tourists, researchers, investors, and event organizers. Increased activity then reinforces the ecosystem through new investment, innovation, and collaboration. This cycle can generate sustainable benefits when growth is managed inclusively and does not reduce environmental quality or community well-being.

The theoretical contribution of the model lies in extending Porter's Diamond from an explanation of regional competitiveness to the relationship between structural conditions and digital construction. Netnography adds a way to understand how users interpret available assets. The model also clarifies that branding is an intermediate outcome rather than the starting point. Credible branding emerges after academic identity, supporting industries, community experiences, and digital communication form a consistent pattern.

This framework differs from smart tourism studies that primarily emphasize the integration of technology, data, and services. Gretzel et al. (2015) explain the importance of technological and business foundations in smart destinations, whereas this study shows that academic reputation and knowledge mobility can also serve as destination foundations. The framework also complements place branding research. Kavaratzis &

Hatch (2021) emphasize the dynamic relationship between identity and brand, while the Bandung findings show a mechanism connecting that identity with campus experiences and digital narratives. The role of universities in opening spaces, connecting stakeholders, and creating value in place-branding ecosystems is also supported by recent research (Lemmettyinen et al., 2025). This study contributes by positioning these three roles within a sustainable tourism competitiveness cycle.

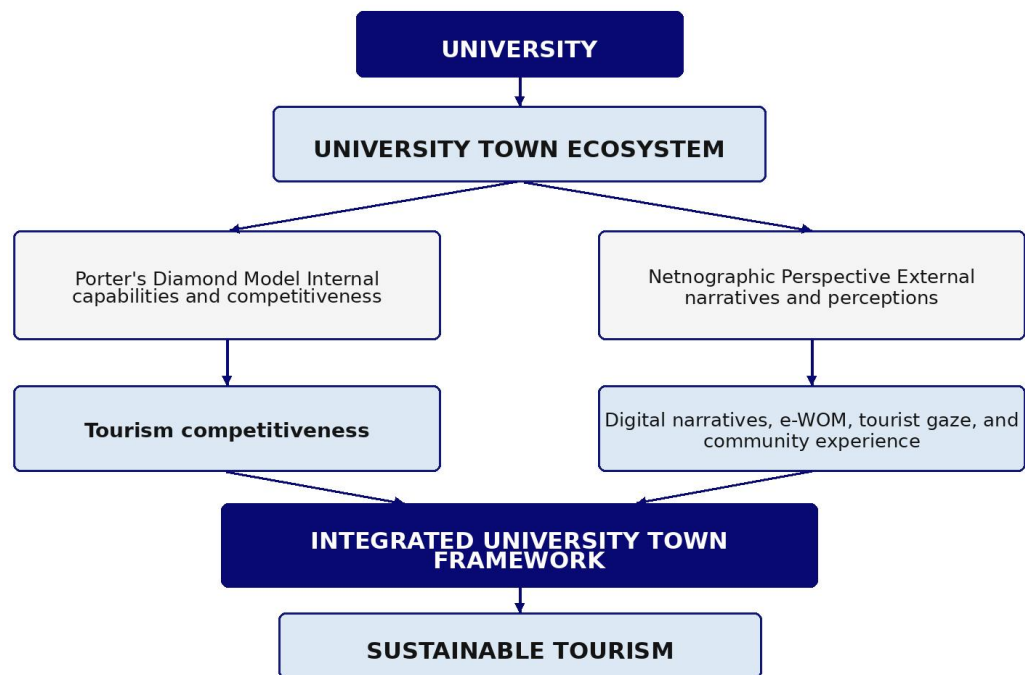


Figure 4. Integrated University Town Framework for Sustainable Tourism Development

Source: Authors (2026)

Table 3

Integration of Empirical Findings and Analytical Perspectives

Empirical Finding	Diamond Determinant	Netnographic Meaning	Development Outcome
Academic reputation, research, and innovation	Factor conditions	Academic digital narratives	Education and innovation attractiveness
Student and academic mobility	Demand conditions	Campus-life content	Year-round local economic activity
Hotels, cafés, transport, creative hubs, and MSMEs	Supporting industries	Community experience	More diverse visitor experiences
Seminars, graduations, conferences, and festivals	Demand conditions	e-WOM	Stronger educational destination image

Empirical Finding	Diamond Determinant	Netnographic Meaning	Development Outcome
Social media and online reviews	All determinants	Digital narratives and tourist gaze	Greater digital visibility
University–government–business–community collaboration	Strategy and government	Community engagement	Competitiveness and investment
Integration of structural and digital dimensions	Determinant interaction	Narrative integration	Sustainable tourism

Source: Authors (2026)

Constraints and Development Priorities

The findings reveal several constraints. First, relationships among higher education, tourism, creative economy, transportation, and spatial planning policies may still operate sectorally. Fragmentation reduces the area's ability to develop joint programs and measure impacts consistently. Second, the availability of facilities is not always accompanied by integrated information, access, and experience design. Visitors may discover activities through social media but may not find connected routes, event calendars, or area services. Developing a competitive city brand requires the integration of the creative economy, social inclusion, sustainability, and stakeholder participation (Lemmetynen et al., 2025). The Bandung findings emphasize that this integration should begin with shared governance among universities, government, businesses, communities, and digital society.

Third, digital narratives develop rapidly and cannot be fully controlled. Negative experiences related to congestion, cleanliness, safety, prices, or services can spread alongside positive content. This condition shows that the most effective response is not simply to increase promotion but to improve the experience itself. Fourth, economic benefits may become concentrated among particular actors when MSMEs and local communities are not connected with campus activities and visitor flows.

Development priorities should focus on collaborative governance, shared activity calendars, area information systems, improved accessibility, MSME strengthening, and environmental impact management. Universities can open more activities to the public, develop educational tourism, support data-based content production, and connect research with local needs. Government can align transportation, public spaces, promotion, and creative economy policies. Businesses and communities should participate from the planning stage so that destination branding reflects an authentic identity.

The model also provides a basis for establishing a digital marketing and tourism study center involving universities and government. Such a center could monitor content trends, analyze sentiment, develop communication calendars, strengthen MSME capacity,

and evaluate consistency between digital image and field conditions. Data use should remain directed toward improving experiences and distributing benefits rather than merely expanding promotional reach.

Conclusion

University town competitiveness in Bandung is shaped by interactions among academic resources, student and visitor mobility, supporting industries, university strategies, government policies, and digital opportunities. Universities act as economic and knowledge catalysts because their academic activities generate demand, innovation, networks, and area identity. These impacts become stronger when universities connect with MSMEs, creative industries, transportation, accommodation, culture, and public spaces.

The Integrated University Town Framework shows that structural capabilities and digital perceptions operate simultaneously. Campus experiences generate digital narratives, e-WOM, tourist gaze, and community experience. These processes build destination branding and enhance tourism competitiveness. Sustainable tourism is achieved when increased visitation also produces balanced economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits.

Area development requires collaborative governance that brings together universities, government, businesses, communities, and digital society. Policy priorities include information integration, activity calendars, accessibility, MSME strengthening, environmental impact management, and visitor experience evaluation. Future research can test the model through comparative studies, longitudinal designs, or mixed-methods research in other university towns.

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