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Stakeholder Differences in Brand Kumaun Perceptions: Residents, Migrants, Producers, Tourism Actors, Youth, External Audiences and Experts

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Abstract: Regional brands are not built merely by promotions or destination marketing. They are developed based on the perceptions and experiences of various stakeholders who engage with the concept. This article attempts to understand the stakeholder-specific differences in perceptions of "Brand Kumaun" for the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand. The research design adopted is a sequential exploratory mixed method, employing evidence from survey data involving 730 valid cases. Stakeholders' perceptions regarding Brand Kumaun have been compared at two stages, the first comparing four broad categories of stakeholders and the second involving eight detailed categories. Fifteen constructs of the Brand Kumaun framework have been found to show statistically significant differences for institutional and expert stakeholder types. Higher scores on most of the strategic constructs like awareness, governance support, development potential and support for Brand Kumaun were found in the responses of institutional and expert stakeholders. Strong identity perceptions, culture-based perceptions, and support were found in internal and migrant/semi-internal stakeholders' perceptions. Strong tourism image but weak perceptions related to other regional brand constructs were noticed among external stakeholders. Further comparison reveals that residents have associations with identity and culture, while producers/artisans/self-help groups have associations with product quality and trust. Tourism actors' perceptions revolve around tourism image and ecological concern. Migrants are associated with behavioral intention and support for Brand Kumaun, whereas youth are associated with weak awareness and product-related perceptions. External tourists are strongly associated with tourism image, while external consumers and investors are associated with a product market-oriented perception. Expert respondents have a high level of understanding regarding governance-related perceptions. Thus, there is a need for differential stakeholder strategies for strengthening Brand Kumaun.

Keywords: Brand Kumaun; stakeholder perception; regional branding; place branding; Kumaun; migrants; producers; tourism actors; youth; external stakeholders

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

1. Introduction

Place and regional brands cannot be created simply by promotion efforts, slogans, logos and tourism messaging. They get shaped by perceptions, experiences and expectations of diverse sets of stakeholders (Kavaratzis& Hatch, 2013; Rinaldi &Cavicchi, 2016; Zenker et al., 2017). In a place such as Kumaun, these different sets of stakeholders have their own relationship with the region. Residents experience the region culturally and livelihood-wise. Producers, artisans and self-help groups have their relationship with the region based on its products, quality, authenticity and accessibility. Tourists and homestay providers relate the region to visibility, tourist experience and ecology. Return migrants have migrated out of the region but maintain a link with it on cultural, emotional and behavioural grounds. The youth evaluate the region on the basis of education, employment and opportunity prospects. External tourists know Kumaun by way of scenic beauty and hill tourism. External consumers, investors and entrepreneurs have their relationship with Kumaun based on its products, business prospects and reputation in markets. Institutions and experts see the region from the policy and governance perspective. This paper attempts to address these differences. Its main argument is that stakeholder difference is not a secondary but a primary strategy in the case of Brand Kumaun. A generic regional brand will produce a generic regional image. On the other hand, a differentiated regional branding approach will help to discover how diverse stakeholders see the region and also engage with them to enhance the overall image of the region.

There is already a favourable perception about the region of Kumaun externally. This is based largely on tourism, natural beauty, spirituality, hill stations and Himalayan landscape. However, while there is no negative image about the region, its image is quite narrow. Its image covers many more aspects including culture, language, cuisine heritage, local products, ecological consciousness, migration dynamics, producer groups, district-wise diversity, policy support and development potential. Hence, the need for the stakeholder wise analysis arises to see which stakeholders relate to these aspects and which stakeholders limit themselves to a tourism-based image of the region.

2. Literature Background

2.1. Stakeholders and Place Brand Co-creation

The modern discourse of place branding is not limited by the idea of viewing places as objects for branding in a way that the product is branded using centrally-controlled promotional strategies. The places are inhabited, experienced, negotiated, and constructed by various players, hence implying that place brands are the result of co-creation processes involving stakeholders and not necessarily projections of authoritative and marketing messages (Kavaratzis& Hatch, 2013; Rinaldi &Cavicchi, 2016; Zenker et al., 2017). In regional branding, the role played by the co-creation process among stakeholders becomes highly significant since regions, unlike cities, are heterogeneous social spaces. They have a number of social groups within them, different development experiences, as well as varied levels of attachment to the space. Hence, while stakeholders might share an agreement on certain issues surrounding the regional brand, there could be

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

disagreement in some others. As such, stakeholder perception goes beyond the notion of message reception.

2.2. Participation, Representation and Power

Place branding also raises issues related to participation and representation. Stakeholders do not necessarily have equal influence over the brand story. The visibility of tourism agencies, policy organizations and promoters can be greater compared to that of residents, women organizations, producers, migrants and young people. Hence, critical place branding literature emphasizes that any branding effort should ask whose identity is at stake, who speaks and who gets silenced (Messely et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 1997). This is especially relevant in the case of Kumaon since the visible face of the region is tourism-related whereas much of the reality of people's lives there has to do with their livelihoods, migrations, local products, ecological stress and development in general.

2.3. Stakeholder Perceptions and Brand-Equity Dimensions

The brand-equity literature offers an excellent foundation for measuring stakeholder perception. Variables like awareness, associations, perceived quality, trust/reputation, and behavioural intention provide insights into how stakeholders perceive a brand and if they would back it (Aaker, 1992; Boo et al., 2009; Govers& Go, 2009; Keller, 1993, 2003; Pike, 2010). However, in a regional-branding scenario, these variables need to be customized for the place environment. While awareness includes knowing the name, it also involves knowing about the region’s culture, product, ecology, and developmental opportunities. Quality includes product, experience, services and everything regional. Authenticity requires the projected image to match lived realities. Finally, behavioural intentions can be to visit, recommend, purchase local products, invest in or advocate for the region. In this study, stakeholder comparison will be used to assess how these variables vary among stakeholders. However, besides highlighting these variations statistically, there is also need to understand their significance strategically for a stakeholder-oriented approach to Brand Kumaun.

3.Study Context: Brand Kumaun and Stakeholder Diversity

Kumaun consists of six districts—Almora, Bageshwar, Champawat, Nainital, Pithoragarh and Udham Singh Nagar. Kumaun is one of the two administrative divisions of Uttarakhand state (Kumaon Division, Government of Uttarakhand, n.d.). Some of the themes associated with Kumaun include Himalayan landscape, hill tourism, pilgrimage, forest areas, lakes, local cuisine, festivals, handlooms and handicrafts, local produce, rural settlements, and migrant history (Institute for Human Development, 2019; Kumaon Division, Government of Uttarakhand, n.d.; Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, 2018). Nevertheless, Kumaun is also regionally diverse. Kumaun is composed of hill districts, tourism and service hubs, border areas and terai regions (Census of India, 2011; Institute for Human Development, 2019).

The regionally diverse character of Kumaun creates stakeholder diversity as well. Internal stakeholders may be familiar with the region from its culture, livelihoods, local challenges, and identity. Migrants may have some

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

level of behavioral and emotional attachment irrespective of the distance covered. Tourists may be aware of the region based on tourism aspects and scenery. Producers may have an understanding of Brand Kumaun by considering local produce and their markets. Institutions may understand the opportunities in the region in terms of governance and development. Youths may see the region as a prospective future opportunity.

3. Methodology

The research paper addresses a limited scope of a wider sequential exploratory mixed-method research that examines the issue of strategic regional branding of Kumaun. In general, sequential exploratory approach is suitable for studies in which qualitative research comes first, aimed at understanding a particular context, whereas quantitative measurement follows, examining the constructs identified through qualitative analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the study being referred to, qualitative exploration and secondary data sources provided the understanding of Kumaun-specific branding issues, whereas the quantitative survey measured the stakeholder perceptions in terms of the established Brand Kumaun constructs.

There were 730 valid observations in the quantitative dataset employed. Respondents were grouped into eight different stakeholder categories, representing four broader stakeholder types. The study measures fifteen Brand Kumaun constructs: Regional Identity, Awareness and Knowledge, Tourism Image, Perception Gap, Branding Beyond Tourism, Cultural Association, Ecological Concern, Local Product Awareness, Perceived Quality, Trust/Authenticity, Governance Support, Development Potential, Reputation, Behavioural Intention and Support for Brand Kumaun. The sampling strategy used probability as well as non-probability approaches. Internal stakeholders were sampled through proportionate stratified random sampling since internal sample population was geographically distributed within six Kumauni districts. It facilitated ensuring rural Kumaun coverage within hill, gateway/service and plains/terai contexts. External stakeholders were sampled using the method of judgmental (or convenience) sampling since external samples (such as tourists, consumers, investors, business people, institutions) could not constitute a complete geographic sampling frame. Judgmental sampling allowed inclusion of individuals possessing significant knowledge, experience or intentionality to engage in the region (Cochran, 1977; Kothari, 2004; Saunders et al., 2019).

This article highlights the stakeholder-wise comparisons. One-way ANOVA was performed for comparing groups of stakeholders in regard to their perceptions of all fifteen constructs. Since Levene's Test showed presence of unequal variances in most of the fifteen constructs, Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons have been prioritized for interpretative purposes. Also, results of Tukey HSD tests were computed, with an emphasis placed on broad stakeholder group trend.

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

Table 1: Distribution of survey respondents by stakeholder group

Stakeholder group	Frequency	Percent
Residents of Kumaun	160	21.9
Producers / artisans / SHGs	80	11
Tourism / homestay / guide actors	70	9.6
Migrants / return migrants / potential migrants	100	13.7
Youth / students / job-seekers	100	13.7
External tourists / visitors	120	16.4
External consumers / investors / business-linked actors	70	9.6
Institutional / expert respondents	30	4.1
Total	730	100

Table 2: Distribution of survey respondents by broad stakeholder type

Stakeholder type	Frequency	Percent
Internal stakeholders	410	56.2
Migrant / semi-internal stakeholders	100	13.7
External stakeholders	190	26
Institutional / expert stakeholders	30	4.1
Total	730	100

4. Results

4.1. Broad Stakeholder-Type Differences

There were significant differences between internal stakeholders, migrant/semi-internal stakeholders, external stakeholders, and institutional/expert stakeholders based on the four categories. Institutional/expert stakeholders had the highest mean scores among the four groups in the vast majority of strategic constructs. Internal stakeholders and migrant/semi-internal stakeholders performed well in terms of identity, culture, perception gap, brand outside of tourism, and support for Brand Kumaun. However, external stakeholders were at the top in terms of tourism image but did relatively poorly in other regional brands.

Table 3: Stakeholder-type mean scores across Brand Kumaun constructs

Construct	Internal stakeholders	Migrant/semi-internal stakeholders	External stakeholders	Institutional/expert stakeholders	Total mean
Regional Identity	4.173	4.205	3.436	4.433	3.996
Awareness and Knowledge	4.072	4.028	3.149	4.458	3.841
Tourism Image	4.125	4.015	4.491	4.442	4.218
Perception Gap	4.266	4.25	3.265	4.542	4.014
Branding	4.342	4.308	3.542	4.45	4.134

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

Beyond Tourism					
Cultural Association	4.192	4.225	3.497	4.333	4.022
Ecological Concern	4.21	4.138	3.99	4.517	4.156
Local Product Awareness	4.093	4.19	3.367	4.508	3.935
Perceived Quality	4.104	4.183	3.717	4.425	4.027
Trust/Authenticity	4.163	4.233	3.886	4.425	4.111
Governance Support	4.344	4.15	3.517	4.517	4.109
Development Potential	4.226	4.105	3.542	4.575	4.046
Reputation	4.54	4.565	4.33	4.85	4.502
Behavioural Intention	4.161	4.405	3.959	4.417	4.152
Support for Brand Kumaun	4.16	4.208	3.797	4.508	4.087

Note: Means are based on a 1–5 Likert-type scale

The results of ANOVA carried out among stakeholders, were statistically significant all fifteen constructs. However, the greatest significance was noted in variables such as Perception Gap, Awareness and Knowledge, Branding beyond tourism, Local products awareness, Development potential, Governance support, and Region identity. This supports the assertion that stakeholder type can be used to analyze perceptions of Brand Kumaun.

Table 4: ANOVA results by broad stakeholder type

Construct	**F-value**	**p-value**	**Result**
Regional Identity	216.81	< .001	Significant
Awareness and Knowledge	353.137	< .001	Significant
Tourism Image	54.884	< .001	Significant
Perception Gap	385.572	< .001	Significant
Branding Beyond Tourism	272.687	< .001	Significant
Cultural Association	210.296	< .001	Significant
Ecological Concern	28.031	< .001	Significant
Local Product Awareness	250.953	< .001	Significant
Perceived Quality	78.574	< .001	Significant
Trust / Authenticity	50.149	< .001	Significant
Governance Support	235.045	< .001	Significant
Development Potential	245.112	< .001	Significant
Reputation	32.34	< .001	Significant
Behavioural Intention	65.917	< .001	Significant
Support for Brand Kumaun	87.525	< .001	Significant

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

The general trend implies that the external stakeholder is aware of Kumaun; however, such awareness tends to be limited only through tourism. While the external stakeholder mean for Tourism Image was 4.491, which was greater than the internal and the migrant/semi-internal mean, their lower scores on Regional Identity, Awareness and Knowledge, Branding Beyond Tourism, Cultural Association, Local Product Awareness, Governance Support, and Development Potential imply that external awareness is less comprehensive than the awareness of the internal and expert-related groups. Post-hoc also supports this interpretation. In particular, the most persistent contrast involved the differences between the external stakeholder group and the rest of the stakeholder groups. External stakeholders had significantly lower means compared to internal, migrant/semi-internal, and institutional/expert stakeholders in terms of all major constructs but Tourism Image, except for Tourism Image in case of institutional/experts, where no significant differences occurred due to the recognition of Kumaun's strong tourism presence.

4.2. Detailed Stakeholder Group Differences

The following eight-group comparison provides a more specific understanding of stakeholder perception. It distinguishes residents, producers/artisans/SHGs, tourism actors, migrants, youth, external tourists, external consumers/investors and experts.

Table 5: Detailed stakeholder-group mean scores across Brand Kumaun constructs

Construct	Residents	Producers / SHGs	Tourism actors	Migrants	Youth	External tourists	External consumers/investors	Experts
Regional Identity	4.284	4.197	4.121	4.205	4.01	3.379	3.532	4.433
Awareness and Knowledge	4.184	4.075	4.175	4.028	3.818	3.146	3.154	4.458
Tourism Image	4.136	3.872	4.536	4.015	4.023	4.702	4.129	4.442
Perception Gap	4.434	4.244	4.046	4.25	4.168	3.204	3.368	4.542
Branding Beyond Tourism	4.453	4.378	4.196	4.308	4.238	3.465	3.675	4.45
Cultural Association	4.358	4.188	4.075	4.225	4.013	3.438	3.6	4.333
Ecological Concern	4.234	4.028	4.357	4.138	4.215	4.102	3.796	4.517
Local Product Awareness	4.061	4.35	4.175	4.19	3.883	3.173	3.7	4.508
Perceived Quality	4.08	4.506	4.089	4.183	3.83	3.585	3.943	4.425
Trust / Authenticity	4.155	4.553	4.121	4.233	3.893	3.792	4.046	4.425

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

Governance Support	4.28	4.588	4.418	4.15	4.2	3.388	3.739	4.517
Development Potential	4.17	4.438	4.229	4.105	4.145	3.425	3.743	4.575
Reputation	4.613	4.597	4.664	4.565	4.293	4.377	4.25	4.85
Behavioural Intention	4.153	4.238	4.236	4.405	4.06	3.91	4.043	4.417
Support for Brand Kumaun	4.163	4.309	4.254	4.208	3.973	3.731	3.911	4.508

Note: Means are based on a 1–5 Likert-type scale.

The ANOVA results were significant for all fifteen constructs. The strongest differences were found for Perception Gap, Local Product Awareness, Awareness and Knowledge, Branding Beyond Tourism, Development Potential, Governance Support and Cultural Association.

Table 6: ANOVA results by detailed stakeholder group

Construct	F-value	p-value	Result
Regional Identity	105.8	< .001	Significant
Awareness and Knowledge	180.429	< .001	Significant
Tourism Image	82.037	< .001	Significant
Perception Gap	197.318	< .001	Significant
Branding Beyond Tourism	135.947	< .001	Significant
Cultural Association	115.67	< .001	Significant
Ecological Concern	23.788	< .001	Significant
Local Product Awareness	183.477	< .001	Significant
Perceived Quality	93.684	< .001	Significant
Trust / Authenticity	76.484	< .001	Significant
Governance Support	132.524	< .001	Significant
Development Potential	136.184	< .001	Significant
Reputation	29.397	< .001	Significant
Behavioural Intention	34.499	< .001	Significant
Support for Brand Kumaun	54.044	< .001	Significant

Table 7: Summary of detailed stakeholder-group patterns

Stakeholder group / pattern	Interpretation
Institutional/expert respondents had the highest or among the highest scores on most strategic constructs.	Experts showed stronger awareness of the strategic, governance, development and branding logic of Brand Kumaun.
External tourists/visitors had the highest Tourism Image score but lower scores on deeper constructs.	External tourist perception was strongly tourism-centred and less connected to wider identity, product and governance dimensions.
Producers/artisans/SHGs were strongest on	Local producers were closely associated

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

product-quality-trust related constructs.	with product awareness, quality, authenticity and governance-support dimensions of Brand Kumaun.
Residents showed high identity, culture, perception-gap and branding-beyond-tourism scores.	Residents reflected Kumaun as a lived cultural and regional identity rather than merely a destination image.
Tourism/homestay/guide actors showed high Tourism Image and high Ecological Concern.	Tourism actors recognised the tourism appeal of Kumaun while also reflecting ecological sensitivity.
Migrants/return migrants showed high Behavioural Intention and Support for Brand Kumaun.	Migrant-linked stakeholders retained behavioural and emotional attachment to Kumaun.
Youth/students/job-seekers showed comparatively weaker scores on awareness, local product awareness, quality, trust and support.	Youth may require stronger livelihood, entrepreneurship and participation pathways within Brand Kumaun.
External consumers/investors performed better than external tourists on some product and trust dimensions but remained weaker than internal/expert groups.	Business-linked external audiences may be more receptive to product and market positioning than general tourists.

In-depth analyses of the stakeholder categories further emphasize the interpretation reached from the larger comparison among different stakeholder types. The conclusions point out that the external perception is diverse in nature. The external tourists have a strong tourist orientation compared to other external stakeholders, who have relatively more product/market orientations. On the other hand, internal stakeholders also exhibit diversity. The residents, producers, tourism stakeholders, and youths interact differently with the Brand Kumaun. Lastly, the migrant population should be considered a separate stakeholder category.

5. Discussion

5.1. Residents: Brand Kumaun as a Lived Identity

Residents scored highly in the dimensions of Regional Identity, Cultural Association, Perception Gap, and Branding Beyond Tourism. It appears from this that residents don't see Kumaun as purely a place to visit. Instead, Kumaun is seen as a region rich in language, food, festivals, village, culture, memory, locally made goods, livelihoods, and development needs. With high scores for both the Perception Gap and Branding Beyond Tourism, it is evident that there is an awareness that simply branding the region as a place for tourism isn't sufficient. In other words, Brand Kumaun needs to work not only for tourists but also for local people and identity.

5.2. Producers, Artisans, and SHGs: Product-quality-trust stakeholders

Producers, artisans, and SHGs had very high scores on the dimensions of Local Product Awareness, Perceived Quality, Trust/ Authenticity, Governance Support, and Development Potential. It seems from the data that producer-related stakeholders are important for creating regional brand

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

through products. In particular, their answers show that local products are more than mere commodities. They are bearers of identity and are useful instruments for building trust among people. However, the high score for Governance Support shows that support institutions such as quality control, packing, certification, aggregation, markets, and capturing value are needed.

5.3. Tourism and Homestay Actors: High Tourism Image along with High Ecological Concern

The tourists and tour guides showed both a high Tourism Image rating and Ecological Concern ratings. This indicates the double-sided nature of their involvement as the individuals derive from both benefits of tourism in Kumaun as well as being aware of its negative implications related to capacity considerations, ecological impact, waste management, congestion, dependency on the season, and sustainability concerns. However, at the same time, the involvement of these tourism actors becomes highly important because tourism represents an entrance gate to Brand Kumaun. It is critical to recognize the possibility to involve tourism actors not only as purveyors of picturesque images but as intermediaries of regional identity through the connections between tourist experience and local goods and culture.

5.4. Migrants: Trans-local stakeholders and carriers of emotion

High Behavioral Intention and support of Brand Kumaun among migrant population was observed. The finding supports the statement that the process of migration does not necessarily result in regional identification crisis. Migrants remain emotionally attached to Kumaun through family connections, memories, rituals, festivals, cuisine, culture, language, possession of the land, return visits, product consumption, and emotions. In the case of Brand Kumaun, migrants become trans-local stakeholders capable of functioning as Kumaun product buyers, Kumauni culture supporters, Kumaun visitors, investors, mentors, digital advertisers, and return entrepreneurs.

5.5. Youth: The necessity of livelihood pathways and participation opportunities

Young people, students, and job seekers scored low on Awareness & Knowledge, Local Product Awareness, Quality Perception, Trust/Authenticity, and Brand Kumaun Support. This is important strategically since if the young people fail to relate Brand Kumaun with livelihood opportunities and support entrepreneurship, digital, and culture and innovation-related livelihoods, the brand will remain symbolic and future-oriented. As a result, the engagement of youth could be fostered in areas such as entrepreneurship, digital branding, creative industries, tourism-linked skills, local product innovations, return enterprises, internship, incubation, and participation in region-specific stories.

5.6. External tourists: Tourism-oriented yet partial perception

External tourists and visitors had the highest score for Tourism Image construct, but they lacked awareness related to the more complex constructs of regional branding. This implies that tourists associate Kumaun mainly with its destination image due to its scenic beauty, hill stations, pilgrimage destinations, and tourism experiences.

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

However, this means that the tourists lack adequate knowledge regarding local products, cultural richness, producer systems, ecologically sensitive nature, problems of migrations, and developmental potential. Thus, tourism-oriented communication can be diversified further. Visitor-oriented branding must cover local food and crafts, product trails, ecological practices, village visits, and districts.

5.7. External consumers, investors, and business-related persons: Product-markets potential

While doing better on some of the deeper product and trust related dimensions compared to external tourists, external consumers, investors, and business-related persons scored lower on all the other deep concepts than internal and expert-related parties. It might be said that business-related external audiences could have higher levels of receptivity toward local product-based positioning compared to general tourists. In working with this audience, attention should be paid to the aspects of quality, certification, authenticity, distribution logistics, readiness for investments, markets, and business potential. To these individuals, the brand of Kumaun should stand for scenic beauty as well as economic and product-related opportunities.

5.8. Institutional and expert: Strategic and governance understanding

Institutional and expert perspectives, achieved among the best, scores on all strategic concepts. These findings can imply that experts and institutional parties perceive more clearly than any other respondents the overall regional branding rationale for Kumaun. High scores received by this group on Governance Support, Development Potential, Branding Beyond Tourism, Product Knowledge, Reputation, and Support for Brand Kumaun indicate their understanding of the necessity to coordinate efforts at tourism, products, policies, ecology, and development levels. Still, this finding brings up a practical challenge: expert insight should become institutionalized.

6. Stakeholder-sensitive Brand Kumaun Architecture

These results indicate that Brand Kumaun is best understood in a framework of multi-stakeholder relationships rather than one of promotional activities directed at one way. The key stakeholders fall into four broad categories.

- **Stakeholders associated with core internal identity:** Residents, producers, artists, self-help groups (SHGs), tourism-related people, and youth. These groups provide an identity base, culture, locally available products and services, enterprise, and internal legitimacy.
- **Stakeholders concerned with trans-local attachment:** Migrants, return migrants, and would-be migrants. These groups tie the identity of Kumaun with the outside world but have attachment emotionally and behaviourally.
- **Stakeholders relating to external markets and brand image:** Tourists, visitors, customers, investors, and business-related people. These groups help create an image of the external world, market

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

demand, products and services, and reputation.

- **Stakeholders linked with strategy and governance:** Institutional representatives, specialists, policy-makers, development professionals, and researchers.

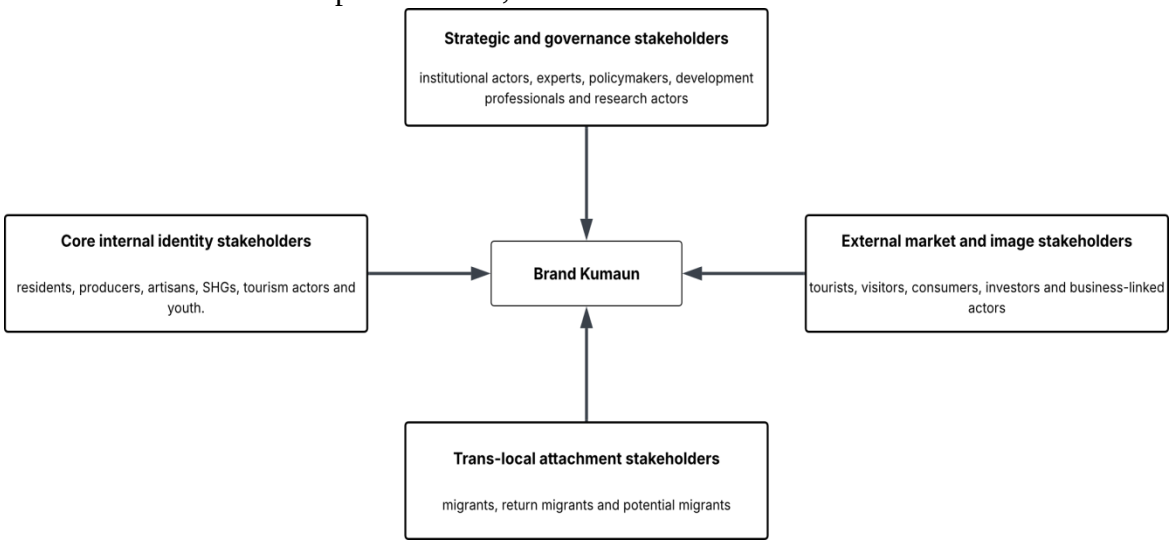


Figure 1: Stakeholder-sensitive Brand Kumaun Architecture

7. Stakeholder Specific Strategic Directions

Table 8: Stakeholder-specific strategic directions for Brand Kumaun

Stakeholder group	Main perception pattern	Strategic direction
Residents	Strong identity, culture, perception gap and support	Build pride, participation and local ownership; connect branding with livelihood and cultural continuity
Producers / artisans / SHGs	Strong product-quality-trust and governance-support orientation	Strengthen packaging, certification, quality assurance, aggregation, market access and fair value capture
Tourism / homestay / guide actors	Strong tourism image and ecological concern	Link tourism with local products, cultural interpretation, responsible tourism and local value capture
Migrants / return migrants / potential migrants	Strong behavioural intention and support	Build diaspora engagement, product consumption networks, return-enterprise pathways and advocacy platforms
Youth / students / job-seekers	Comparatively weaker awareness, product awareness, quality, trust and support	Create entrepreneurship, digital branding, skill-building, incubation and participation pathways
External tourists / visitors	Highest tourism image but weak deeper regional awareness	Use tourism as entry point to communicate culture, products, ecology, rural identity and district diversity
External consumers /	Moderate product and trust orientation, weaker than	Develop product-market positioning, authenticity signals, investor information

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

investors / business actors	internal/expert groups	and enterprise linkages
Institutional / expert respondents	Strong strategic, governance and development understanding	Translate strategic recognition into coordinated governance, policy integration and implementation systems

From the strategy table emerges the primary managerial implication of this research. It may not be possible for Brand Kumaun to employ a single communication strategy. Different approaches need to be employed with each of the stakeholder groups. Internal stakeholders demand involvement and ownership; producers demand quality and markets; tourism stakeholders need inclusion of responsible tourism principles; migrant communities need means for reconnecting; young people need means for moving forward; tourists need wider exposure to culture and products; consumers and investors need accurate information about product-market relationships; and institutions demand collective responsibility and implementation strategies.

8. Theoretical Contribution

This research contributes to the regional-branding field in three main areas. First, it provides an illustration that dissimilarities between various stakeholders go beyond mere differences, since they can also serve as resources in the creation of brands. In other words, stakeholders not only provide different scores but also create different relationships with aspects such as place identity, tourists' perception, products, governance, and development of the region. Secondly, it adds another dimension to the stakeholder co-creation theory by presenting how migrants can be considered semi-internal stakeholders during regional branding. Thirdly, it connects brand equity theory to stakeholder differences.

9. Practical Implications

It becomes clear that the approach adopted by the Brand Kumaun project is inappropriate for responding to the needs of various stakeholders. In particular, residents need to be addressed from the perspectives of participation and pride; producersthrough the provision of access to markets and guarantees of quality; the tourism communitythrough the development of approaches to responsible tourism and value addition. Migrants need to be given the possibility to reconnect; youth, the opportunity to earn a living and interact online; external tourists, greater cultural exposure and awareness of the region’s products; external consumers and investors, reliable information about market-product interactions, and institutions coordination mechanisms coupled with clear implementation obligations.Additionally, it followsthat tourism should be considered an entry point into the brand rather than the whole concept. Indeed, external tourists have become aware of Kumaun thanks to tourism; however, the task at hand is to widen the scope of their awareness beyond tourism itself.

10. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This study has been conducted using a cross-sectional design, meaning that stakeholder views are measured once and therefore no causality can be determined from these findings. In addition, even though the expert sample is well suited for interpretative analysis since it is smaller compared to other types of stakeholders, the sample requires an increase in its size in future research studies. For example,

ISSN-2319-8478
Vol-15 Issue-4, July 2026

more extensive qualitative studies might include specific types of stakeholders, such as women-led self-help groups (SHGs), youth entrepreneurs, migrants, and outsiders. Another limitation is related to the sample design used. Internal stakeholders have been sampled using proportionate stratified random sampling, whereas external stakeholders have been sampled using judgmental sampling since there was no sampling frame for them. Thus, any conclusions derived from the findings about the external stakeholders' opinions must be regarded as evidence of their informed opinions but not generalizable to other potential external stakeholders.

11. Conclusion

According to the stakeholder analysis, Brand Kumaun cannot be considered as one general communication issue, as each stakeholder perceives Kumaun in its unique frame of perception. External tourists will assess the region in terms of tourism image. Local residents see Kumaun as a cultural area. Producers perceive it in terms of the quality and authenticity of local products. Tourism actors have perceptions of destination attraction and ecology. Migrants will have behavioral and emotional connections. Youth stakeholders need better prospects for living and involvement. External consumers and investors might be influenced by product-market positioning. Institutional actors understand the strategy best of all. It can be concluded that stakeholder segmentation is a key aspect of developing Brand Kumaun. The main idea is that a regional brand must balance the aspects of regional identity, migrant connections, producer networks, tourism image, youth development, market positioning, and institutional governance. Thus, Brand Kumaun should not be seen just as a slogan or campaign but as an integrated stakeholder framework.

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