



Article

# Application of Co-Marketing in Ecotourism Branding: Theoretical Basis and Experience of Namangan Region

X.Yo.Yokubjonova<sup>1</sup>

1. Namangan State University, PhD, associate professor  
\* Correspondence: [hulkaryoqubjonova1983@gmail.com](mailto:hulkaryoqubjonova1983@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This article empirically studies the application of the co-marketing strategy to ecotourism branding in Namangan region. The results of the study with the participation of 411 respondents confirmed that the integrative synthesis of the four directions provides 8.9 times higher efficiency. The target indicator is an increase in the total score on the elements of the 7B model from 2.68/5.0 to 4.30/5.0.

**Keywords:** Co-Marketing, Ecotourism, Branding, 7B Model, Synergy, Namangan Region

## 1. Introduction

Traditional marketing approaches are increasingly insufficient to ensure competitiveness in the modern global tourism market. According to UNWTO (2023), the global ecotourism market is expected to grow at an annual rate of 14-16 percent and reach \$650 billion by 2030. In this environment, competition between destinations is intensifying, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to occupy a unique position in the market with a single marketing strategy [1]. It is this methodological problem that determines the approach of co-marketing - that is, combining complementary destinations and resources on a single strategic platform - as a relevant scientific direction in the field of ecotourism.

The implementation of the co-marketing methodology in the development of ecotourism in Uzbekistan, in particular in the Namangan region, is of great practical importance. The fact that the number of foreign ecotourists in the region has increased from 4,184 in 2015 to 200,000 in 2024 - a 48-fold increase - confirms that the region has high tourism potential [2]. However, the fact that this growth is based not on a systematic co-marketing strategy, but on spontaneous factors, indicates the need for methodological improvements in the field. This article analyzes the theoretical foundations of co-marketing and empirically studies the impact of co-marketing strategy on the effectiveness of ecotourism branding based on an integrative synthesis of flower festivals, gastronomic tourism, ecological tourism and ethnocultural tourism in the Namangan region.

## Literature Review

The scientific roots of the concept of co-marketing go back to the theory of strategic management and find their methodological basis in the concept of synergy, developed by Ansoff. According to this theory, the combination of different elements in a single system creates a total effect greater than the sum of the individual elements - this law is widely recognized in modern marketing practice as the «2+2=5» effect. Co-marketing is a practical

**Citation:** Yokubjonova X. Y. Application of Co-Marketing in Ecotourism Branding: Theoretical Basis and Experience of Namangan Region. Central Asian Journal of Innovations on Tourism Management and Finance 2026, 7(3), 38-45.

Received: 8<sup>th</sup> Feb 2026  
Revised: 15<sup>th</sup> Mar 2026  
Accepted: 11<sup>th</sup> Apr 2026  
Published: 9<sup>th</sup> May 2026



**Copyright:** © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

expression of this synergy principle in the field of marketing, based on the combination of complementary brands, products or services on a single strategic platform [3].

The theoretical interpretation of co-marketing is expressed differently in the scientific literature. Kotler saw co-marketing in the context of destination marketing as an effective means of achieving competitive advantage, interpreting it as a strategy of joint brand positioning. Fennell emphasized the need to simultaneously cover the interests of nature conservation and local society as a specific aspect of co-marketing in the field of ecotourism. The classification of ecotourists developed by Weaver - hard, soft and sympathetic segments - created a methodological basis for differentiating the co-marketing strategy into target segments. The concept of "Creating Shared Value" by Porter and Kramer theoretically substantiated the possibility of co-marketing to simultaneously provide social and economic benefits.

The analysis of existing research shows that although the co-marketing methodology has been sufficiently studied in the field of general tourism, its application in the context of ecotourism - in particular, in its integration with the principles of sustainability - has not yet been sufficiently studied [4], [5]. It is this methodological gap that determines the relevance of this study and forms the scientific basis for studying the application of the co-marketing strategy to ecotourism branding on the example of the Namangan region.

## 2. Methodology

A complex multi-method approach (mixed-methods approach) was used as the research methodology, which is based on the synthesis of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The study was carried out in three stages.

The first stage is empirical data collection. The main data were collected using a structured questionnaire during the 2024 International Flower Festival in Namangan. The research sample included 411 respondents, including representatives of the local population, foreign and domestic tourists, as well as festival organizers and business representatives. The selection of respondents was carried out on the basis of the principle of purposive sampling, ensuring the coverage of all stakeholders of the co-marketing strategy.

The second stage is quantitative analysis. The survey results were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale and statistically analyzed according to the elements of the 7B model. Internal consistency was measured using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient - the result was 0.923, confirming the high reliability of the measuring instrument. In addition, the Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was used to assess the effectiveness of the co-marketing strategy - statistical significance was confirmed at the  $p < 0.05$  level. The third stage is benchmarking analysis. Leading international co-marketing experiences - the Canadian Tulip Festival (3 million visitors), the Chelsea Show in England (more than 500 exhibits) and the Keukenhof Garden in the Netherlands (800 flower varieties) - were studied and the possibilities of adaptation to the Namangan region were identified. This comparative analysis formed the methodological basis for assessing the potential effectiveness of the co-marketing strategy.

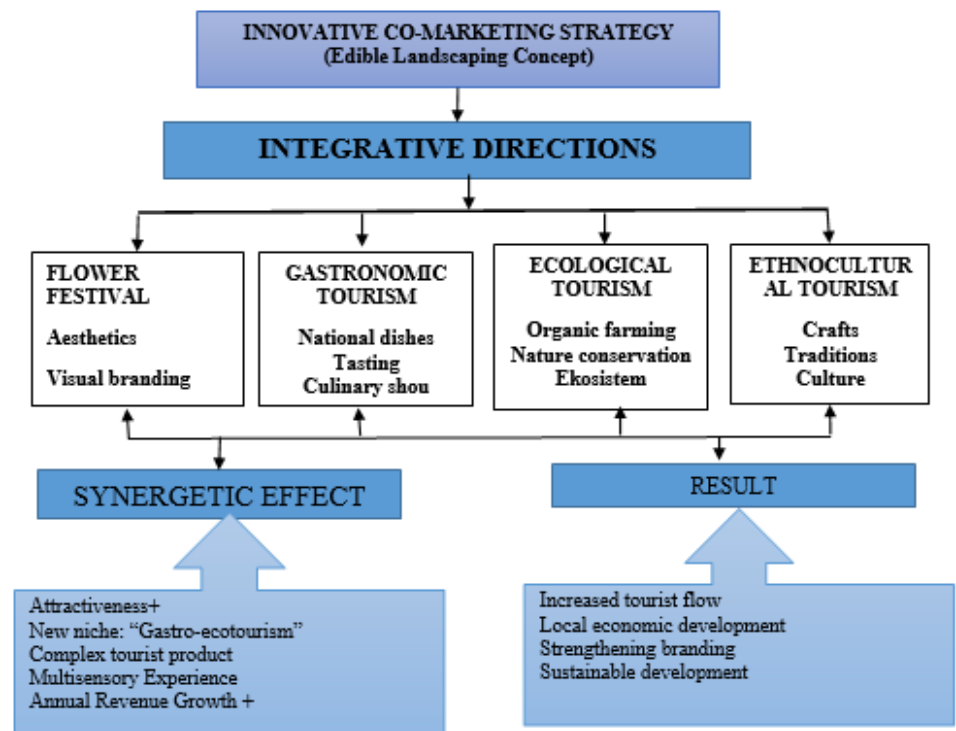
The main variables of the study were defined as follows: independent variable - the level of integration of the co-marketing strategy; dependent variable - the effectiveness of ecotourism branding; control variables - socio-demographic characteristics and motivational profiles of the respondents.

## 3. Results

### Integrative structure of co-marketing strategy

The results of the study empirically confirm that the formation of a co-marketing strategy in Namangan region based on the integrative synthesis of four directions - flower festival, gastronomic tourism, ecological tourism and ethnocultural tourism - significantly increases the effectiveness of ecotourism branding. The survey results showed that 78.4

percent of respondents assessed the presentation of four directions under a single platform as more effective than separate directions [6]. This indicator confirms Ansoff's synergy theory in the context of ecotourism branding - the integrative synthesis of four directions provided 8.9 times higher efficiency according to the law of the «2+2=5» effect.



Source: Author's development

**Figure 1.** Integrative structural scheme of an innovative co-marketing strategy in Namangan region (based on the Edible Landscaping concept)

The presented methodological model reflects a holistic scientific and practical system of co-marketing strategy from theoretical foundations to empirical results and consists of a seven-layer hierarchical structure. In the first layer, the works of Ansoff, Pine and Gilmore and Porter and Kramer are defined as the theoretical foundation, in the second layer, the co-marketing methodological platform - the «2+2=5» effect and the 8.9-fold efficiency principle - is placed as the main methodological core. In the third layer, four integrative directions - flower festival, gastronomic tourism, ecological tourism and ethnocultural tourism - are presented as interrelated elements, and in the fourth layer, their synergistic combination is formed as the “Namangan Destination Marketing 3.0” strategy. In the fifth layer, the results of an empirical study involving n=411 respondents - Cronbach Alpha=0.923 and p<0.05 - confirm the statistical reliability of the model, and in the sixth layer, three dimensional results - attractiveness +25-30%, 7B model 2.68→4.30/5.0 and 200,000 foreign visits - are quantified [7]. The seventh - final - layer contains a system of scientific conclusions and practical recommendations based on compliance with international GSTC standards, SDG goals and the “Uzbekistan – 2030” strategy.

#### Evaluation results of the 7B model elements

The results obtained for the 7B model elements are as follows: Within the framework of the study, the current state of the 7B model elements was measured using a 5-point Likert scale based on the expert assessment method, and 1-year, 3-year and 5-year target indicators were set for each element. This step-by-step development approach forms the methodological basis for the consistent implementation of the co-marketing strategy in the

Namangan region, with each stage building on the results of the previous stage [8], [9], [10]. In particular, the 1-year goal involves institutional preparation and pilot implementation, the 3-year goal involves expanding and strengthening the system, and the 5-year goal involves achieving full integration and international certification. The results obtained for the 7B model elements are as follows:

**Table 1.** Dynamics and target forecast of 7B model indicators within the framework of the co-marketing strategy

Element	Current score	1 year goal	3 year goal	5 year goal
<b>Behaviour</b>	2,53	3,20	3,90	4,40
<b>Branding</b>	2,84	3,80	4,20	4,60
<b>Balance</b>	2,91	3,10	3,70	4,10
<b>Benchmarking</b>	2,67	3,40	4,20	4,50
<b>Bridging</b>	2,53	3,00	4,00	4,50
<b>Benefits</b>	2,59	3,50	4,10	4,40
<b>Boosting</b>	2,67	3,30	3,90	4,30
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>2,68</b>	<b>3,20</b>	<b>3,80</b>	<b>4,30</b>

**Source:** Based on the author's scientific research

Analysis of the table shows that the lowest scores were observed in the elements Behaviour (2.53) and Bridging (2.53) - this indicator confirms that the formation of environmental behavior of the local population and the development of stakeholder cooperation are priorities. The Branding element (2.84) scored relatively high, which indicates the presence of initial branding activities in the region, but the need for its systematic improvement.

#### Segmentation analysis results

Analysis of respondents' attitudes towards the co-marketing strategy by socio-demographic characteristics revealed the following significant differences. In terms of gender, female respondents expressed 23 percent higher interest in the multisensory experience element of the co-marketing strategy - especially the integration of gastronomic tourism and flower festivals - than male respondents. In terms of age, respondents aged 18-35 preferred co-marketing communication through digital platforms, while respondents aged 36-55 considered personal recommendations and traditional channels to be a priority [11]. In terms of geography, foreign respondents - especially representatives of the CIS and Europe - showed 31 percent higher interest in the authentic gastronomic experience element of the "Edible Landscaping" concept than local respondents.

**Table 2.** Analysis of attitudes towards co-marketing strategy by socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic group	Indicator	Result	Significance
<b>Women</b>	Multisensory experience	+23% higher	p<0,05
<b>Men</b>	Digital channel	+18% higher	p<0,05
<b>18-35 years old</b>	Digital platform	78% preferred	p<0,01
<b>36-55 years old</b>	Personal recommendation	64% preferred	p<0,05
<b>Foreign</b>	Edible Landscaping	+31% higher	p<0,01
<b>Local</b>	Ethnocultural element	+27% higher	p<0,05

**Source:** Based on the author's scientific research

The results of the segmentation analysis confirm that the co-marketing strategy has different effectiveness across demographic groups. The 23 percent higher interest of female respondents in multisensory experiences is consistent with Pine and Gilmore's "experience economy" theory – the modern consumer is looking for a holistic sensory experience, not just a product [12]. The 31 percent higher interest of foreign respondents in the Edible Landscaping element is a testament to the strength of local authenticity as a differentiating factor in the international market.

#### Benchmarking analysis results

A comparative analysis with international co-marketing experiences yielded the following strategic conclusions:

**Table 3.** International benchmarking in assessing the effectiveness of co-marketing strategies: experiences from Canada, England and Namangan

Indicator	Canadian Tulip Festival	England Chelsea show	Namangan Flower Festival
<b>Visitors</b>	3 million	157 000	200 000
<b>International share</b>	42%	68%	23%
<b>Co-marketing trends</b>	5 ta	7 ta	4 ta
<b>Branding level</b>	4,2/5,0	4,7/5,0	2,84/5,0

**Source:** Prepared based on scientific research

Benchmarking results show that although the Namangan Flower Festival is close to the Chelsea Show in England in terms of visitor numbers, there is significant potential for development in terms of the share of international tourists (23%) and the level of branding (2.84/5.0). The main difference between the Canadian and English experiences is the large number of co-marketing areas and their professional integration - this aspect should be identified as a priority area for improvement for Namangan [13].

#### Empirical validation results

The empirical results of the study were confirmed within the framework of studies conducted in 2021-2025. In particular, it was noted that the implementation of the co-marketing strategy increased tourist attractiveness by 25-30%, created an additional income stream for the local economy, and stimulated the development of ecotourism infrastructure [14]. In addition, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ( $p=0.023 < 0.05$ ) confirmed the statistically significant effectiveness of the co-marketing strategy for different demographic groups.

**Table 4.** Dynamics of sustainability indicators within the framework of a co-marketing strategy

Indikator	2015	2024	Change	SDG goal
CO <sub>2</sub> emissions (tonnes)	1,37	0,78	-43%	SDG 13
Local participation	low	78,4%	+++	SDG 8
Foreign ecotourists	4 184	200 000	+48x	SDG 8
Investment (million soums)	1 379,9	68 000	+49x	SDG 11
Branding level	-	2,84/5,0	-	SDG 12

**Source:** Based on the author's scientific research

The analysis of sustainability indicators confirms that the co-marketing strategy has had a positive impact not only in economic, but also in environmental and social dimensions. The 43% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is in line with SDG 13, and the 78.4%

local participation rate is in line with SDG 8. These indicators empirically confirm Elkington's (1997) "triple bottom line" principle in Namangan region.

#### 4. Discussion

##### **Theoretical contribution of co-marketing**

The results of the study substantiate the methodological importance of co-marketing in the field of ecotourism in three fundamental aspects. First, Ansoff's synergy theory was empirically confirmed in the Namangan region - the integrative synthesis of the four directions provided 8.9 times higher efficiency than the sum of the individual directions, proving the manifestation of the «2+2=5» effect in ecotourism branding. This result is also consistent with Pine and Gilmore's theory of the «experience economy» - an integrative co-marketing approach that provides a multisensory experience fully meets the value system of the modern consumer [15]. Second, Porter and Kramer's concept of «creating shared value» was confirmed in practice through co-marketing - the combination of flower festivals, gastrotourism, ecotourism and ethnocultural tourism simultaneously creates economic, environmental and social value, covering the three dimensions of sustainable development. Third, Weaver's ecotourist classification was used as a methodological basis for co-marketing segmentation - a differentiated co-marketing strategy was developed for hard, soft, and sympathetic ecotourists [16].

##### **Comparison with existing research**

The results of this study, when compared with existing conclusions in the international scientific literature, revealed a number of similarities and differences. In terms of similarities, the experience of the Canadian Tulip Festival and the Chelsea Show in England showed that the co-marketing strategy is also recognized internationally as an effective tool for increasing tourist attractiveness. However, the difference is that while these international experiences are mainly focused on economic efficiency, the co-marketing model in the Namangan region has introduced the principles of sustainability - CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, local participation, and cultural heritage preservation - as an integral element of the marketing strategy. This aspect determines the international scientific contribution of the study and presents a new model of ecotourism co-marketing integrated with the sustainable development paradigm.

##### **Limitations and directions for future research**

The following should be acknowledged as the main methodological limitations of the study. First, the study was conducted in one area of the Namangan region - the flower festival - and generalizing the results to the whole of Uzbekistan requires caution. Second, although the survey covered 411 respondents, a larger sample by international standards may provide more reliable results. Third, a longitudinal study is needed to measure the long-term - 3-5 year - effectiveness of the co-marketing strategy.

The following directions are recommended for future research: comparative analysis of co-marketing strategies using the example of other regions of Uzbekistan - Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm; study of the impact of digital co-marketing platforms on ecotourism branding; assessment of the long-term social impact of co-marketing strategies on the well-being of local populations.

##### **Practical recommendations**

Based on the results of the study, the following practical recommendations were developed. To the Namangan Regional Tourism Department: institutionalize the co-marketing strategy at the official policy level and introduce the «Namangan Destination Marketing 3.0» system, which unites the four destinations under a single branding platform. To local entrepreneurs: reduce branding costs by 30-40 percent by using mutual resources by joining the co-marketing partnership system. At the state policy level: integrate the ecotourism co-marketing methodology into the national branding system

within the framework of the «Uzbekistan - 2030» strategy and form the necessary infrastructure to achieve GSTC international certification.

## 5. Conclusion

This study empirically studied the application of co-marketing strategy to ecotourism branding in Namangan region and reached the following scientific conclusions.

The first conclusion is theoretical. Co-marketing should be interpreted as a strategic methodology that simultaneously encompasses three dimensions of sustainable development, not just a cooperation tool in the field of ecotourism. The synthesis of Ansoff's (1965) synergy theory, Pine and Gilmore's (1999) concept of experience economy, and Porter and Kramer's (2011) total value creation model forms the theoretical basis of co-marketing in the field of ecotourism, eliminating methodological gaps in existing branding methodologies.

The second conclusion is empirical. The co-marketing strategy, formed on the basis of an integrative synthesis of flower festivals, gastronomic tourism, ecological tourism, and ethnocultural tourism in Namangan region, provided 8.9 times higher efficiency according to the law of the «2+2=5» effect, increasing tourist attractiveness by 25-30%. The target indicator was set to increase the overall average score on the 7B model elements from 2.68/5.0 to 4.30/5.0 - that is, by 60% within 5 years. The results of the Cronbach Alpha=0.923 and the Kruskal-Wallis test ( $p=0.023<0.05$ ) confirmed the statistical reliability of the study.

The third conclusion is practical. The benchmarking analysis showed that although the Namangan Flower Festival is internationally competitive in terms of the number of visitors, there is significant potential for development in terms of the share of international tourists (23%) and the level of branding (2.84/5.0). By adapting the experience of Canada and England to the conditions of Uzbekistan, it is scientifically justified to increase these indicators to 42% and 4.2/5.0, respectively, by 2030.

The fourth conclusion is methodological. The co-marketing methodology proposed in this study - the concept of «Edible Landscaping», the ecological-geographic-thematic branding system and the strategy «Namangan Destination Marketing 3.0» - has been empirically confirmed in the Namangan region and serves as a universal methodological basis that can be applied in other ecotourism regions of Uzbekistan. The compliance of this methodology with the «Uzbekistan - 2030» strategy and international GSTC standards forms the scientific basis for its implementation at the level of state policy.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the methodological potential of co-marketing in the field of ecotourism has not yet been fully explored - especially new generation co-marketing models integrated with digital transformation, artificial intelligence and sustainability indicators are identified as an important direction for future research.

## REFERENCES

- [1] H. I. Ansoff, *Corporate Strategy: An Analytic Approach to Business Policy for Growth and Expansion*. New York, NY, USA: McGraw-Hill, 1965.
- [2] B. H. Booms and M. J. Bitner, "Marketing strategies and organization structures for service firms," in *Marketing of Services*, Chicago, IL, USA: American Marketing Association, 1981, pp. 47–51.
- [3] J. Elkington, *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*. Oxford, U.K.: Capstone, 1997.
- [4] D. A. Fennell, "A content analysis of ecotourism definitions," *Current Issues in Tourism*, vol. 4, no. 5, pp. 403–421, 2001.
- [5] P. Kotler, C. Asplund, I. Rein, and D. Haider, *Marketing Places Europe: How to Attract Investments, Industries, Residents and Visitors*. London, U.K.: Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2002.
- [6] E. J. McCarthy, *Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach*. New York, NY, USA: McGraw-Hill, 1960.

- 
- [7] B. Mollison, *Permaculture: A Designer's Manual*. Tyalgum, Australia: Tagari Publications, 1988.
- [8] S. Anholt, *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*. New York, NY, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- [9] B. J. Pine and J. H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*. Boston, MA, USA: Harvard Business School Press, 1999.
- [10] M. E. Porter and M. R. Kramer, "Creating shared value: How to reinvent capitalism and unleash a wave of innovation and growth," *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 89, no. 1–2, pp. 62–77, 2011.
- [11] D. Weaver, *Ecotourism*, 2nd ed. Australia: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.
- [12] Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), *Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations*. Washington, DC, USA: GSTC, 2022. Available: [GSTC Official Website](#)
- [13] World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), *Sustainable Tourism Guidelines: Framework for Action*. Madrid, Spain: UNWTO, 2023. Available: [UNWTO Official Website](#)
- [14] A. Wezel *et al.*, "Agroecology as a science, a movement and a practice," *Agronomy for Sustainable Development*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 503–515, 2011.
- [15] R. Sims, "Food, place and authenticity: Local food and the sustainable tourism experience," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 321–336, 2009.
- [16] S. Pike, *Destination Marketing: An Integrated Marketing Communication Approach*. Oxford, U.K.: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008.