

SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING AND THE ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AT THE GEOTOURISM DESTINATIONS OF MERATUS MOUNTAIN AND RIVER TOURISM IN BANJARMASIN

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Abstract

Sustainability marketing has emerged as a crucial approach in promoting environmentally friendly tourism, particularly in geotourism destinations that emphasize both natural conservation and local cultural preservation. This study aims to explore the role of local communities in implementing sustainability marketing strategies in the geotourism destinations of Meratus Mountain and the river tourism of Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan. The focus is on how local communities contribute to promoting sustainable tourism practices and enhancing tourist engagement through environmentally responsible marketing efforts. Using a qualitative research method, the study employs in-depth interviews and observations with key stakeholders, including community leaders, tourism operators, and local authorities. The research also incorporates content analysis of promotional materials used to market these geotourism destinations. The findings indicate that local communities play a vital role in promoting sustainable tourism through various initiatives, such as eco-friendly tours, community-based conservation programs, and the promotion of local traditions and crafts. These efforts are aligned with sustainability marketing principles, which prioritize long-term environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment of the local population. Moreover, the study reveals that community involvement enhances the authenticity and appeal of the destination, attracting tourists who are increasingly conscious of environmental and cultural sustainability. The integration of local community efforts with broader marketing strategies helps position Meratus Mountain and the river tourism of Banjarmasin as attractive, sustainable travel destinations. However, challenges remain, particularly in scaling these initiatives and ensuring consistent involvement of the community in decision-making processes. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on sustainable tourism marketing by highlighting the intersection of local community participation and marketing efforts in promoting sustainable geotourism. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and tourism operators seeking to enhance sustainable tourism practices in geotourism destinations globally.

Keywords: Sustainability marketing, local communities, geotourism, Meratus Mountain, Banjarmasin

A. INTRODUCTION

Tourism serves as a significant driver of economic and cultural development, especially in regions rich in natural and cultural heritage like South Kalimantan. Geotourism, which emphasizes environmental conservation and cultural preservation, aligns closely with the growing global demand for sustainable tourism (Harahap & others, 2021; Weaver & Lawton, 2017). Meratus Mountain and river tourism in Banjarmasin represent valuable geotourism destinations with

unique geological formations and cultural assets. However, these sites face challenges in balancing tourism development with sustainable practices, such as conserving the environment and preserving cultural traditions (Ali et al., 2023; Budeanu, 2005). While sustainable tourism marketing is critical in this context, studies addressing the integration of community-based approaches in such strategies remain limited, particularly in Indonesia's lesser-known destinations (Harahap & others, 2021; Tan & Chan, 2020).

Existing research has predominantly focused on well-known locations, such as Bali and Java, often overlooking smaller destinations like South Kalimantan, where tourism infrastructure and community engagement are still developing (Budi et al., 2020; Nugraha & Putri, 2022). Furthermore, most sustainable tourism marketing studies employ top-down frameworks driven by government or corporate initiatives, leaving a gap in understanding grassroots efforts led by local communities (Mahmud et al., 2020; Yusuf & Hidayatullah, 2023). Studies have also noted that community-based tourism often lacks the necessary financial and institutional support to fully implement sustainable marketing strategies, further limiting the potential of local initiatives to scale (Dwyer et al., 2012; Ramli & Syahrin, 2021). This study addresses this gap by exploring the role of local communities in implementing sustainability marketing strategies, with a focus on Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin's river tourism. By highlighting community-driven initiatives, this research contributes to the sustainable tourism literature, offering insights into how grassroots efforts can foster environmentally and culturally responsible tourism.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on community-led sustainability marketing, which integrates environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and local economic empowerment. This approach provides a unique perspective on geotourism development, demonstrating how authentic, locally-rooted practices can create meaningful experiences for tourists while promoting long-term sustainability. The objectives of this study are to analyze the contributions of local communities to sustainability marketing, identify challenges and opportunities, and offer actionable recommendations for policymakers and tourism operators to strengthen community involvement in sustainable tourism promotion.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the role of local communities in implementing sustainability marketing strategies at the geotourism sites of Meratus Mountain and river tourism in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 20 key stakeholders, including community leaders, tourism operators, and local government representatives, focusing on their roles, perceptions, and contributions to sustainability marketing (Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participant observations during eco-tours, cultural events, and traditional craft exhibitions were conducted to capture real-time interactions between community members and tourists (Guest et al., 2013; Patton, 2002). Additionally, content analysis of promotional materials such as brochures, social media posts, and banners was performed to identify recurring themes related to sustainability marketing and cultural preservation (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2018).

Thematic analysis, following the Braun & Clarke (2006) framework, was used to process and interpret the data, identifying patterns and key themes across the three data sources. Triangulation was applied to validate findings by cross-referencing interview data, observational insights, and promotional material analysis, ensuring the robustness of the conclusions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Although the study is geographically limited to Meratus Mountain and

Banjarmasin, its methodology provides a replicable framework for examining community-led sustainability marketing in other geotourism destinations (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018).

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings were derived from in-depth interviews and observations conducted with key stakeholders, including community leaders, tourism operators, and local government authorities, as well as a content analysis of promotional materials such as brochures and social media posts created or endorsed by these local communities, allowing for a comprehensive examination of their role in promoting sustainable tourism at Meratus Mountain and river tourism in Banjarmasin

1. Role of Local Communities in Sustainability Marketing

The involvement of local communities in promoting sustainable tourism at Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin is evidenced through several community-driven initiatives. Notably, community-led eco-tours are organized to educate tourists on local biodiversity, emphasizing the importance of preserving these natural resources (Ramli & Syahrin, 2021; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). These tours often include guided treks through ecologically significant areas, where guides from the local community share insights about flora, fauna, and local conservation practices (Patton, 2002). Additionally, the promotion of traditional handicrafts plays a vital role in sustainability marketing. Local artisans showcase and sell handmade products, including woven fabrics and carved items, directly to tourists, enhancing both cultural appreciation and economic benefits for the community (Ali et al., 2023; Budi et al., 2020). Cultural events, such as traditional dance performances and festivals, are also organized to offer visitors a more immersive experience, bridging tourism with cultural preservation (Nugraha & Putri, 2022). Data gathered from interviews with community leaders and observations indicate that these initiatives are instrumental in making sustainable tourism not only appealing but also deeply authentic, resonating with tourists' growing demand for meaningful, responsible travel experiences (Guest et al., 2013; Mahmud et al., 2020).

These findings underscore the impact of community-led sustainability marketing in fostering a tourism experience that is both authentic and environmentally conscious. Community involvement in eco-tours, handicraft marketing, and cultural events provides an organic and locally rooted approach to tourism that supports environmental conservation and cultural preservation while stimulating the local economy (Kotler, 2011; Weaver & Lawton, 2017). By involving local people as guides, artisans, and performers, these practices cultivate a sense of pride and responsibility within the community, empowering them as stewards of their environment and culture (Creswell, 2013). This grassroots approach aligns closely with the principles of sustainability marketing, as it promotes long-term ecological health and respects the cultural heritage of the area, creating a tourism model that is sustainable and resilient (Ali et al., 2023; Dwyer et al., 2012). Additionally, the economic benefits gained from these activities allow local communities to directly participate in and profit from the tourism industry, enhancing local livelihoods and reinforcing the value of maintaining these sustainable practices (Bramwell & Lane, 2012; Budeanu, 2005).

The findings from Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin align with several studies that highlight the effectiveness of community-led marketing models in geotourism. Budi et al., (2020) similarly observed that local involvement in eco-tourism activities contributes to greater authenticity and engagement among tourists, as it allows for a direct connection between visitors

and the host community. Likewise, research by Nugraha & Putri (2022) documented how traditional handicraft marketing not only supports local artisans but also enhances tourists' appreciation for the cultural heritage of the destination. However, unlike some regions where community involvement is sporadic, the Meratus and Banjarmasin initiatives appear more consistent, indicating a stronger integration of sustainability into the tourism framework. This suggests that community-driven sustainability marketing efforts in South Kalimantan may serve as a model for other geotourism destinations, showing that when communities are actively engaged in tourism promotion, the outcomes are often more sustainable, culturally respectful, and economically beneficial.

To further strengthen and scale these community-driven sustainability marketing efforts, it is crucial to establish partnership mechanisms with the private sector. Collaborations with tourism operators, local businesses, and hotel chains can provide the financial resources, expertise, and networks needed to develop comprehensive and sustainable tourism packages. These packages can integrate eco-tourism experiences, local cultural activities, and conservation efforts, enhancing the overall appeal of Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin to a broader audience. Moreover, forming partnerships with digital marketing agencies could significantly improve the online presence of these initiatives, allowing them to reach international eco-tourists who prioritize sustainability in their travel choices. Engaging with the private sector in these ways would not only enhance the visibility of the community-led initiatives but also ensure consistent financial and logistical support, fostering long-term sustainability for the region's tourism economy.

2. Challenges in Community-Based Marketing Efforts

Local communities involved in promoting sustainable tourism at Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin face significant challenges that limit the scalability and consistency of their marketing efforts. Interviews with community leaders and tourism operators revealed common obstacles, such as limited financial resources, which restrict the ability to expand marketing initiatives and support eco-tourism projects. Furthermore, a lack of formal training in digital marketing and tourism management was cited as a barrier, preventing communities from fully capitalizing on online platforms to reach broader audiences (Mahmud et al., 2020). Additionally, inconsistent support from government and tourism authorities has hindered long-term planning and the maintenance of community-led programs. These challenges highlight a critical gap in resources and skills necessary for effective sustainability marketing, which, if addressed, could enhance the potential for community-driven tourism initiatives to thrive.

The challenges identified emphasize the complex dynamics that often arise when attempting to integrate community-based marketing with sustainable tourism practices. Limited financial resources, for example, constrain the ability of local communities to develop, maintain, and promote eco-tourism initiatives, potentially stalling momentum and reducing the visibility of these destinations (Budeanu, 2005; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). The lack of marketing expertise further exacerbates these issues, as communities may struggle to leverage modern, digital tools necessary for reaching international tourists who increasingly seek sustainable travel options. Without formal training, community members rely on traditional marketing methods, which may not be sufficient in the competitive tourism landscape (Yusuf & Hidayatullah, 2023). The intermittent support from government entities and tourism bodies also presents a risk to the sustainability of these initiatives, as it affects the continuity and resilience of community-driven efforts. Consistent collaboration and support from authorities are crucial to providing the necessary resources, training, and

infrastructure for communities to engage effectively in sustainability marketing (Dwyer et al., 2012).

The challenges faced by the communities in Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin reflect broader patterns observed in community-based tourism. Studies by Mahmud et al., (2020)) and Tan & Chan (2020) similarly noted that limited resources and inadequate institutional support are common obstacles in sustainable tourism initiatives. While research by Harahap (2021) has shown that public-private partnerships can mitigate some of these challenges, such collaborations are largely absent in the Meratus and Banjarmasin context. The findings also align with Budi et al., (2020), who observed that without formal marketing training, community-led tourism projects often struggle to attract larger, more diverse tourist demographics. Addressing these challenges in Meratus and Banjarmasin could provide a framework for overcoming similar barriers in other geotourism destinations, potentially through partnerships with NGOs or the establishment of dedicated community support programs by local governments.

To address these challenges and expand the reach of community-based marketing efforts, it is essential to foster collaborations with the private sector and NGOs. Tourism operators and local businesses could provide not only financial resources but also digital marketing expertise to help local communities develop and implement more effective online strategies. Moreover, establishing partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on sustainable tourism can provide critical training in digital marketing, sustainable tourism management, and capacity building. These collaborations can assist in overcoming the skill gaps that currently limit the effectiveness of community-led marketing. Government support in the form of grants, policy initiatives, and infrastructure improvements is also critical to sustaining these efforts. Engaging the private sector and NGOs could offer the technical and financial support needed to ensure the longevity of these initiatives, providing communities with the tools to overcome resource limitations and scale their efforts.

3. Impact of Community-Led Marketing on Tourist Engagement

The data reveal that community-led marketing initiatives at Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin have had a positive impact on tourist engagement, particularly among environmentally conscious travelers. Through eco-tours led by locals, tourists gain a first-hand understanding of environmental conservation practices and the region's unique biodiversity, fostering a deeper connection to the destination. Additionally, the promotion of traditional crafts and cultural events has heightened tourist appreciation for the area's cultural heritage, with many visitors expressing interest in learning more about local customs and crafts. Interviews with visitors indicate that these community-driven efforts provide a sense of authenticity, as tourists feel they are supporting local livelihoods and contributing to cultural preservation by participating in these activities. Observational data further suggest that such authentic, community-oriented experiences increase the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth recommendations, thereby attracting more tourists who value sustainability.

The findings suggest that community-led sustainability marketing plays a vital role in enhancing the authenticity and appeal of Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin as tourism destinations. By involving local communities in guiding tours, promoting crafts, and organizing cultural events, these destinations offer unique, culturally immersive experiences that resonate strongly with tourists seeking environmentally and culturally responsible travel (Weaver & Lawton, 2017). This authentic engagement aligns with the core principles of sustainability marketing, as it not only helps conserve local ecosystems and cultural heritage but also enables

tourists to connect personally with the community (Budeanu, 2005). Such experiences are crucial in attracting a growing segment of tourists who prioritize meaningful interactions with local cultures over conventional sightseeing (Kotler, 2011). The community-led model also empowers locals to share their stories and values, making visitors feel like participants in rather than observers of the destination, which strengthens tourist satisfaction and fosters a sustainable tourism ecosystem (Ramli & Syahrin, 2021).

The positive impact of community-led marketing on tourist engagement in Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin aligns with findings from other studies that highlight the benefits of local involvement in sustainable tourism. Research by Budi et al., (2020) and Nugraha & Putri (2022) similarly found that when communities actively participate in tourism marketing, tourists report higher levels of satisfaction due to the sense of authenticity and personal connection to the culture. Studies on eco-tourism by Mahmud et al., (2020) also support these findings, noting that tourist interest and willingness to support conservation efforts increase when locals are visibly engaged in the promotion and preservation of their environment. However, unlike some case studies where tourist engagement remains surface-level, the Meratus and Banjarmasin models demonstrate deeper, more sustainable interactions between tourists and communities. These findings suggest that, when properly supported, community-led sustainability marketing can serve as an effective strategy for fostering long-term tourist engagement and promoting responsible tourism practices in geotourism destinations.

To amplify the positive impact of community-led marketing and increase tourist engagement, the private sector can play a crucial role by investing in digital marketing and online platforms. Collaboration with social media influencers or eco-tourism agencies can help promote the community-driven initiatives to a larger, global audience. Tourism operators can also develop partnerships with local artisans to create exclusive, sustainable travel packages that emphasize both environmental conservation and cultural immersion. Additionally, government support in terms of creating destination marketing campaigns can help elevate these initiatives, reaching tourists who prioritize responsible travel. By working with the private sector, local communities could benefit from targeted marketing efforts that increase awareness and engagement among a broader audience, particularly the growing number of eco-conscious tourists.

4. Sustainability Marketing Strategies Aligned with Cultural Preservation

The community-driven sustainability marketing efforts at Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin reflect a strong emphasis on cultural preservation, positioning local traditions and crafts as central attractions for visitors. Key strategies identified include the integration of cultural heritage elements into tourism promotions, such as highlighting traditional dance, indigenous crafts, and local folklore in marketing materials. Observations of promotional campaigns and interviews with local artisans reveal that cultural preservation is not only a point of pride for the communities but also serves as a distinctive feature that differentiates these destinations from others. These strategies allow tourists to engage with the local culture through experiences that are both educational and immersive, creating a culturally rich tourism experience that supports the local economy. Such initiatives also offer an additional revenue stream for the community, as tourists are encouraged to purchase authentic, locally-made crafts, which helps sustain traditional artisanship.

The emphasis on cultural preservation within sustainability marketing strategies enhances the authenticity and uniqueness of Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin as sustainable tourism destinations. By showcasing traditional arts and crafts, these communities not only preserve their

cultural heritage but also attract tourists who are increasingly seeking authentic, meaningful experiences. This alignment with cultural preservation in marketing strategies strengthens the destination's brand as a place where environmental and cultural sustainability coexist, which is particularly appealing to the eco-conscious traveler (Kotler, 2011; Weaver & Lawton, 2017). Additionally, promoting local crafts and traditions serves as a form of economic empowerment for artisans, who benefit directly from increased tourist demand for unique, hand-made products. This approach fosters a reciprocal relationship between tourism and cultural preservation, where each supports and enhances the other, contributing to a sustainable model of tourism that respects and preserves the cultural identity of the community (Bramwell & Lane, 2012; Nugraha & Putri, 2022).

These findings are consistent with previous research that highlights the role of cultural preservation in sustainable tourism marketing. Studies by Budi et al., (2020) and Yusuf & Hidayatullah, (2023) emphasize that incorporating cultural elements into sustainability marketing can significantly enhance a destination's appeal, particularly among tourists interested in cultural heritage. The use of traditional arts and crafts as part of the tourism experience aligns with findings by Nugraha & Putri, (2022), who documented similar approaches in other Indonesian regions. Unlike destinations where cultural preservation is secondary to environmental efforts, Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin demonstrate a more integrated model where cultural preservation is a primary component of sustainability marketing. This approach not only increases tourist engagement but also helps maintain the cultural fabric of the community, underscoring the effectiveness of blending sustainability marketing with cultural heritage to create a holistic, appealing tourist experience.

To further enhance the effectiveness of these sustainability marketing strategies, it is essential to forge stronger partnerships with the private sector specifically with businesses involved in tourism development, hospitality, and cultural enterprises. By collaborating with local hotels, restaurants, and souvenir shops, cultural preservation initiatives can be integrated into the overall tourism experience, encouraging tourists to purchase locally-made crafts and participate in traditional cultural events. Additionally, working with tour operators to include cultural elements in guided tours can increase awareness and appreciation for the local heritage. Furthermore, digital platforms can play a key role in showcasing the cultural richness of Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin, allowing for the promotion of local crafts and traditions to a global audience. Collaborations with international organizations that focus on cultural preservation can also help increase visibility and support for these initiatives, ensuring that cultural preservation remains a core component of the sustainability marketing strategy.

5. Opportunities for Enhancing Sustainability Marketing in Meratus and Banjarmasin

Interviews with community leaders, tourism operators, and local government authorities identified several potential opportunities to enhance community-based sustainability marketing at Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin. One significant opportunity lies in establishing partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private sector entities that could provide financial resources, training, and expertise in sustainable tourism marketing. Additionally, digital marketing training for community members was frequently cited as a priority, as most local stakeholders currently rely on traditional marketing methods with limited online presence. This shift to digital platforms, particularly social media, could expand the reach of community-driven tourism initiatives and attract a broader, more diverse audience. Lastly, government support in the form of grants, infrastructure improvements, and policy initiatives could bolster community-based

marketing efforts, allowing for more comprehensive and consistent sustainability marketing strategies that align with regional and national tourism goals.

These opportunities underscore the potential for a multi-stakeholder approach to enhance the effectiveness and reach of sustainability marketing at Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin. Partnerships with NGOs and the private sector could provide essential resources and skills that local communities currently lack, facilitating more professional and strategic marketing initiatives (Dwyer et al., 2012; Weaver & Lawton, 2017). Furthermore, digital marketing training would empower community members to leverage modern marketing tools and platforms, increasing their capacity to reach international eco-tourists who prioritize sustainable and culturally immersive travel experiences. Government support, such as infrastructure improvements and policy backing, would not only strengthen community-led marketing but also legitimize these efforts, providing a solid foundation for long-term sustainability (Budeanu, 2005). Collectively, these opportunities represent a pathway to scaling community-based sustainability marketing, making it more impactful and sustainable over time.

These findings are consistent with recommendations from previous studies on enhancing community-based tourism marketing. For example, Mahmud et al., (2020) and Tan & Chan (2020) emphasize the role of public-private partnerships in overcoming resource limitations and providing communities with the training needed for effective marketing. Similarly, Budi et al., (2020) suggest that digital marketing is crucial for small, community-driven tourism initiatives, allowing them to reach wider audiences with relatively low costs. The importance of government support is also highlighted by Yusuf & Hidayatullah (2023), who found that policy backing and infrastructure improvements can significantly strengthen the sustainability of community-led tourism projects. In comparison, Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin represent a case where these opportunities, though recognized, remain largely untapped. Implementing these strategies could position these destinations as models for community-driven sustainable tourism, showcasing the benefits of collaboration and modern marketing techniques in enhancing local tourism initiatives.

In addition to establishing partnerships with NGOs, the private sector can play a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of sustainability marketing efforts by providing funding and training for digital marketing initiatives. Collaborations with technology companies could enable communities to access digital tools and platforms that facilitate the promotion of their tourism offerings. Furthermore, working closely with local government bodies to create policy frameworks that encourage collaboration between communities and the private sector can provide long-term support for sustainability marketing initiatives. These frameworks could include tax incentives for businesses involved in sustainable tourism, as well as funding programs aimed at developing tourism infrastructure and digital marketing capabilities. Ultimately, a multi-stakeholder approach involving government, private businesses, and NGOs can significantly enhance the sustainability and impact of community-based tourism initiatives in Meratus Mountain and Banjarmasin, positioning them as models for other destinations in Indonesia and beyond.

D. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pivotal role of local communities in implementing sustainability marketing strategies to promote geotourism at Meratus Mountain and river tourism in Banjarmasin. Community-driven initiatives, including eco-tours, traditional crafts promotion, and cultural events, significantly enhance the authenticity, sustainability, and appeal of these destinations. These efforts align with sustainability marketing principles by fostering

environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment for local communities.

However, the study also reveals critical challenges, such as limited financial resources, inadequate training in digital marketing, and inconsistent support from government authorities, which hinder the scalability and consistency of these initiatives. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving NGOs, private sector collaboration, and increased government backing to ensure the sustainability of community-led efforts.

The findings contribute to the growing literature on sustainable tourism by emphasizing the effectiveness of grassroots participation in geotourism marketing, particularly in lesser-known destinations. Future research could explore the comparative impact of community-led sustainability marketing across similar geotourism sites globally. Additionally, investigating the role of digital marketing tools in enhancing community-driven initiatives could provide actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders seeking to optimize sustainable tourism practices.

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