

Identification of Barriers to Ecotourism Promotion Management in South Kalimantan Province

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Abstract. This study examines the challenges in promoting and managing ecotourism in South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia, a region rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage. Using a qualitative research approach, the study identifies three key obstacles: limited human resources, budget constraints, and minimal community involvement. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with stakeholders, field observations, and focus group discussions with local community members, ecotourism site managers, and government officials. Findings reveal that budget limitations restrict promotional activities primarily to social media, while the shortage of trained personnel limits strategic planning and community engagement in sustainable tourism. Additionally, a lack of community awareness about ecotourism's benefits results in passive involvement. The study recommends increasing human resource capacity, allocating more funding for broader promotional strategies, and fostering community engagement to enhance the effectiveness of ecotourism promotion. This research contributes to the broader ecotourism field by proposing a sustainable framework that balances economic, environmental, and cultural needs, offering insights for similar regions facing ecotourism challenges.

Keywords: Ecotourism, sustainable tourism, community involvement, human resources, digital promotion, conservation

1 Introduction

The vision of Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy emphasizes four key pillars to achieve a globally competitive, sustainable, and culturally distinctive tourism industry. These pillars include: 1) advancing Indonesia's tourism and creative economy; 2) fostering competitiveness in Indonesia's tourism and creative sectors; 3) ensuring sustainability in tourism development; and 4) promoting tourism and creative economy that prioritizes local wisdom [1], [2]. Together, these pillars outline a comprehensive framework that aims to position Indonesia as a top tourism destination while protecting its natural resources and cultural heritage.

The significant place given to ecotourism in Indonesia's tourism strategy presents an advantageous opportunity for regions with rich ecotourism potential to integrate into the national tourism framework. Among such destinations, South Kalimantan Province stands out with its varied

landscapes that include tropical rainforests, wetlands, mountain ranges, and thousands of rivers. This diverse geography makes South Kalimantan a potentially attractive ecotourism destination, comparable to some of the most renowned ecotourism sites in Southeast Asia [3], [4], [5].

Recognizing the value of ecotourism, the provincial government of South Kalimantan has set a vision to establish the region as a prominent environmental tourism destination. South Kalimantan Province holds significant ecotourism potential due to its unique geographical diversity and rich natural resources. One of the most remarkable aspects of South Kalimantan's ecotourism is its wetland ecosystems, including large swathes of peatland and mangrove forests, which are globally recognized for their role in biodiversity conservation and climate regulation [6], [7], [8].

On one hand, Ecotourism as a subject itself has evolved significantly over the past few decades, with research reflecting an increasing focus on sustainable tourism practices, environmental conservation, and stakeholder engagement [9], [10]. As the field has matured, researchers have turned their attention to more complex issues in ecotourism, such as the balance between ecological preservation and community benefit, and the long-term sustainability of ecotourism initiatives.

The emphasis on conservation remains a central theme in ecotourism research. Studies frequently focus on protected areas, biodiversity hotspots, and natural reserves, with an aim to evaluate the effectiveness of ecotourism in promoting conservation outcomes. For example, bibliometric analyses of ecotourism literature from 1990 to 2016 indicate a strong focus on sustainable tourism practices that reduce the environmental footprint while ensuring that local flora and fauna are protected [11], [12].

In parallel with conservation efforts, research in ecotourism has increasingly examined the role of stakeholder engagement, particularly the involvement of local communities. Ecotourism inherently relies on local knowledge and resources, making community participation essential for successful project implementation. Studies reveal that when local communities are actively involved in ecotourism, the socio-economic benefits are more equitably distributed, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for natural resource management [13], [14].

Another evolving area in ecotourism research is the assessment of tourist behavior and awareness. Tourists who are aware of the impact of their activities are more likely to support ecotourism initiatives that prioritize sustainability, even if such options may be more costly [15], [16].

In the context of promoting ecotourism, the current promotion of ecotourism is multifaceted, relying on various marketing strategies, digital technologies, and experiential engagement to attract tourists. One of the primary methods for promoting ecotourism is through experiential marketing, which emphasizes creating memorable experiences for tourists. Nogueira [17] argues that positive experiences during ecotourism activities significantly enhance overall satisfaction, which in turn influences tourists' likelihood of returning. In addition to experiential marketing, the integration of local culture and heritage into ecotourism promotion is vital [18], [19]. Yuliarni [20] highlights the importance of showcasing national traditions and customs in ecotourism marketing, particularly in rural areas of Uzbekistan and Indonesia. By incorporating local bazaars and cultural sites into tour itineraries, ecotourism can promote national values while enhancing tourist satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits.

The post-COVID-19 landscape has also necessitated a reevaluation of ecotourism marketing strategies. Dasan et al. [21] emphasize the need for training community members in communication, customer service, and marketing skills to effectively promote ecotourism. The challenges posed by

the COVID-19 pandemic have also prompted a reevaluation of ecotourism strategies. The need for sustainable practices and responsible tourism has become more pronounced, as travelers seek to minimize their environmental impact. Wismantoro et al. [22] emphasize the importance of formulating proper marketing strategies that respect local communities and promote conservation efforts.

Furthermore, digital marketing has become an indispensable tool in promoting ecotourism. The use of social media and online platforms allows for broader outreach and engagement with potential tourists. Kim [23] notes that social media platforms play a crucial role in marketing ecotourism, helping to increase awareness and attract diverse audiences. On one hand, the analysis of digital marketing strategies in ecotourism reveals that effective online campaigns can significantly enhance destination image and tourist perceptions [24].

Moreover, the representation of ecotourism in digital advertising and media is critical for shaping public perceptions. Dang [25] discusses how various representations of ecotourism in Vietnam often fail to meet the established characteristics of responsible tourism, such as environmental conservation and local participation. The promotion of ecotourism also involves addressing environmental sustainability and the conservation of natural resources. Saputra [26] asserts that ecotourism serves as a viable method for conserving biodiversity while promoting local livelihoods.

In addition to traditional and digital marketing strategies, the role of local communities in promoting ecotourism cannot be overstated. Community involvement in ecotourism initiatives is essential for ensuring that the benefits of tourism are felt locally. Morgan and Winkler [27] explore how women's empowerment through ecotourism cooperatives can lead to sustainable development in rural areas.

The promotion of ecotourism is further enhanced by the use of innovative marketing techniques, such as storytelling and immersive experiences. By sharing compelling narratives about the natural and cultural heritage of ecotourism destinations, marketers can engage potential tourists on a deeper emotional level. This approach aligns with the findings of Quynh et al. [28], which highlight the significance of emotional experiences in determining tourist satisfaction.

On one hand, previous studies have shown that the promotion of ecotourism faces several significant obstacles that hinder its growth and effectiveness. These challenges stem from socio-economic factors, community participation issues, infrastructural deficiencies, and political dynamics.

One of the primary barriers to promoting ecotourism is the lack of active community participation in planning and decision-making processes Gumedé & Nzama [29]. In addition to participation issues, socio-economic constraints significantly impact the promotion of ecotourism. Altunel [30] discusses the unspoken restrictions regarding women's roles in ecotourism initiatives, particularly in cultures where men control household incomes. Furthermore, the lack of equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms can lead to discontent among community members, further undermining support for ecotourism initiatives [31].

Infrastructure inadequacies also pose a substantial challenge to ecotourism development. Mkrtchyan [32] notes that insufficient infrastructure, including transportation and visitor facilities, hampers the realization of ecotourism potential in protected areas. Similarly, Xaba [33] emphasizes that limited access to ecotourism opportunities due to poor infrastructure restricts the ability of local communities to engage with and benefit from ecotourism.

Political dynamics and governance issues further complicate the promotion of ecotourism. Fatem [34] points out that while there may be initiatives to support ecotourism, political factors often dictate resource allocation and development priorities, which can be counterproductive to conservation efforts. Moreover, the lack of awareness and understanding of ecotourism among potential stakeholders can hinder its promotion. Chai-Arayalert [35] identifies a general lack of information about ecotourism, particularly among young eco-tourists.

Lastly, economic challenges, such as high costs associated with transport and operational expenses, can deter both tourists and investors from participating in ecotourism ventures. Almeida et al. [36] report that high costs and insufficient public policies contribute to the underperformance of ecotourism in protected areas.

In the Indonesian context, ecotourism studies have revealed positive socio-cultural impacts, particularly in terms of community empowerment and cultural preservation. Case studies in Indonesia demonstrate that ecotourism can strengthen local traditions by providing economic incentives for cultural practices, such as traditional crafts and performances. Nonetheless, challenges remain, including limited infrastructure, environmental degradation, and inconsistent regulation enforcement [13], [14]. Many Indonesian ecotourism sites struggle to balance visitor influx with conservation goals, as infrastructure to support sustainable tourism is often lacking. These limitations point to the need for comprehensive planning and management strategies that consider both immediate tourism needs and long-term conservation goals.

Following that background, a primary research question that guides this study is: How is ecotourism currently promoted in South Kalimantan, and what are the limitations of these promotional efforts? Despite the region's unique ecological and cultural offerings, promotional activities remain limited in scope and impact. Much of the current promotion relies on traditional media and lacks a strong digital presence, which limits South Kalimantan's reach in a competitive tourism market increasingly dominated by online platforms. Additionally, ecotourism promotion in South Kalimantan does not always effectively highlight the specific attractions that distinguish the province as a unique destination, such as its extensive wetlands, rivers, and the cultural heritage of the Dayak people. Understanding the current promotional strategies and identifying areas for improvement can provide insights into how South Kalimantan can more effectively position itself as an ecotourism destination.

This study will contribute to the existing body of ecotourism research by addressing current gaps in the planning, management, and execution of ecotourism promotion in South Kalimantan. By exploring solutions to enhance human resource capacity, foster community involvement, and implement more effective promotional strategies, the study aims to strengthen South Kalimantan's ecotourism model. Through these contributions, this research seeks to provide a framework for sustainable ecotourism development that can serve as a model for other regions in Indonesia, supporting the broader goals of conservation and community well-being within Indonesia's tourism sector.

2 Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore and analyze the barriers in promoting and managing ecotourism in South Kalimantan Province. Qualitative methods are particularly effective for capturing complex and nuanced insights from stakeholders, making them suitable for understanding the various perspectives and experiences involved in ecotourism [37], [38]. Through in-depth interviews, field observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs), this study aims to gain a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by key stakeholders in the ecotourism sector, including government officials, site managers, community members, and NGOs.

A case study design was chosen to provide an in-depth analysis of South Kalimantan's ecotourism context, with the South Kalimantan Provincial Tourism Office identified as the primary stakeholder. This region was selected as the case for its rich ecotourism potential, including unique natural environments and cultural heritage, yet it faces distinct management and promotional challenges that reflect broader issues found in similar ecotourism settings across Indonesia. By focusing on South Kalimantan, this study provides insights that could inform ecotourism strategies in other regions with comparable assets and challenges.

Data collection will be conducted through three primary methods. First, in-depth interviews will be held with key stakeholders, including the Head of the South Kalimantan Tourism Office and ecotourism site managers. The snowball sampling technique will be used to identify additional relevant participants, ensuring a comprehensive range of perspectives. Second, field observations will be conducted at ecotourism sites selected in collaboration with the South Kalimantan Tourism Office. During these visits, the researcher will observe visitor-manager interactions, management practices, and the environmental impact of tourism activities. Third, focus group discussions will be organized with local community groups, tourists, and NGOs involved in ecotourism. FGDs are structured to capture a range of perspectives, allowing for the comparison of viewpoints among stakeholders with varying interests and experiences. Each discussion group will include 6–8 participants, and topics will cover perceptions of

Data analysis will employ content analysis and thematic analysis, following a structured process of transcription, coding, and categorization to identify core themes. Thematic analysis will be conducted through a combination of inductive and deductive coding to capture both emergent and pre-defined themes relevant to the study's research questions.

Finally, after data analysis is completed, the findings will be compiled into a comprehensive report detailing the challenges and potential solutions for enhancing ecotourism management and promotion in South Kalimantan. This report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, ecotourism practitioners, and community leaders seeking to develop a sustainable ecotourism model that benefits both the environment and local communities.

3 Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the various obstacles hindering the effective management and promotion of ecotourism in South Kalimantan Province. But first we have to know how ecotourism in South Kalimantan is being promoted. The findings highlight three primary

obstacles that limit ecotourism's growth and impact in South Kalimantan: human resource limitations, budget constraints, and insufficient community involvement.

Firstly, the study reveals that the limited capacity of human resources (HR) plays a significant role in constraining ecotourism promotion and management. Both at the provincial and district levels, there is a notable lack of personnel with the necessary skills and experience in sustainable tourism practices. A second key finding is the challenge posed by budget constraints, which severely limit promotional efforts for ecotourism. The restricted budget means that promotion largely relies on cost-effective methods, particularly social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. Finally, the study identifies community involvement as a critical yet underutilized component in ecotourism development. Although there are instances of community participation in ecotourism projects, engagement remains minimal and often passive.

3.1 Current State of Ecotourism Promotion in South Kalimantan

Ecotourism promotion in South Kalimantan is primarily conducted by the South Kalimantan Provincial Tourism Office (Dinas Pariwisata Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan), which faces several challenges in reaching a wide audience due to budget constraints and limited resources. These limitations have led the Tourism Office to adopt a cost-effective approach focused mainly on digital platforms, particularly social media. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook serve as the primary tools for showcasing South Kalimantan's ecotourism potential. Through these channels, the Tourism Office shares visually engaging content that highlights the province's natural beauty, such as its extensive wetlands, rainforests, rivers, and mountains. This digital strategy allows the Tourism Office to reach domestic and international audiences, offering glimpses of the unique ecotourism experiences available in South Kalimantan. [39]

While social media offers broad reach, the impact of these efforts is constrained by the limited production quality of the content due to budget restrictions. Unlike more popular destinations in Indonesia, which can afford high-quality, professionally produced promotional materials, South Kalimantan's campaigns rely on minimalistic, low-cost production. This approach, although financially viable, often fails to stand out in the competitive digital tourism landscape, where well-funded destinations utilize advanced digital marketing techniques and professional imagery to attract potential tourists.

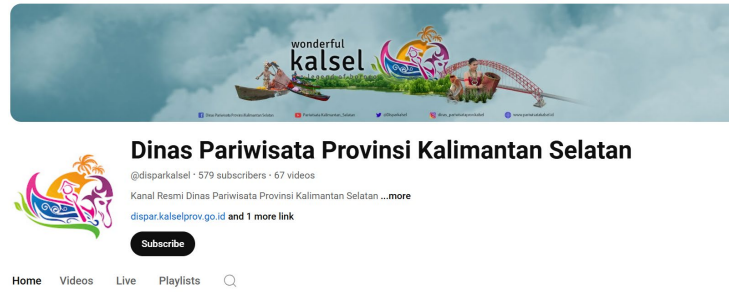


Fig. 1. South Kalimantan Provincial Tourism Office YouTube Channel

The Provincial Tourism Office has also initiated collaborations with other provinces, districts, and tourism agencies to expand its reach through shared promotional efforts. By pooling resources, South Kalimantan integrates its ecotourism sites into larger tourism packages or regional campaigns, targeting tourists interested in multi-destination travel within Indonesia. This collaborative approach, although beneficial in increasing exposure, is still in its early stages and faces logistical challenges due to varying levels of commitment and resource availability across different regions. Nonetheless, these cooperative efforts represent a strategic step towards broader national promotion, allowing South Kalimantan to capitalize on the collective appeal of Indonesia's diverse ecotourism offerings.

Additionally, due to budget constraints, South Kalimantan's offline promotional presence is minimal, as participation in tourism expos, conferences, and partnerships with travel agencies is often not feasible. These channels, which provide in-person engagement opportunities and allow for direct connections with tourists, travel influencers, and industry professionals, are essential in building credibility and expanding reach. However, without sufficient funding, the Tourism Office is limited in its ability to establish a robust offline promotional strategy, which could otherwise complement its digital efforts and enhance the overall visibility of the province's ecotourism assets.

To address these limitations, the Tourism Office is exploring low-cost strategies to optimize its digital presence. Engaging with social media influencers and eco-travel bloggers is a potential approach that can increase South Kalimantan's online visibility at minimal cost. By partnering with content creators specializing in sustainable travel, South Kalimantan can reach an audience aligned with the values of ecotourism, enhancing the appeal of its natural and cultural offerings. Additionally, the Tourism Office is working to improve its own digital marketing skills, aiming to create higher-quality, more impactful content that can effectively compete in the crowded tourism market.

3.2 Human Resources Limitation

One of the most significant obstacles to ecotourism development in South Kalimantan is the limitation of human resources (HR), specifically the shortage of trained personnel skilled in sustainable tourism management and promotion. Despite South Kalimantan's abundant natural and

cultural resources, which provide a strong foundation for ecotourism, the lack of skilled human capital restricts the potential for effective planning, promotion, and management in this sector. This issue is prevalent both at the provincial level, within the South Kalimantan Tourism Office, and at the district and city levels, where regional tourism offices struggle to maintain consistent standards and cohesive management strategies [39].

This HR limitation affects ecotourism management on multiple fronts. Firstly, there is a shortage of personnel with specialized training in sustainable tourism, digital marketing, and visitor engagement, all of which are critical to promoting and managing ecotourism effectively. For example, while some employees may be knowledgeable in tourism basics, few possess the expertise needed to create and implement strategic, targeted marketing campaigns on digital platforms, which are increasingly essential in today's competitive tourism market. Additionally, there is a gap in conservation knowledge, a crucial component in ecotourism management that emphasizes environmental preservation alongside tourism growth. Without adequate training in these areas, ecotourism projects risk becoming ineffective or even counterproductive, as unsustainable practices could harm the very natural resources that ecotourism seeks to showcase and protect.

The inconsistent availability of skilled personnel across districts further exacerbates this issue. Although the South Kalimantan Provincial Tourism Office attempts to coordinate ecotourism efforts among various districts, each district's commitment and resources vary widely. Some districts with more experienced personnel or a higher budget may manage to develop and promote ecotourism effectively, while others lag due to limited HR capabilities. This disparity results in fragmented ecotourism experiences across the province, which undermines the potential for South Kalimantan to present a unified and consistent tourism identity. A cohesive strategy, executed with uniform standards across all districts, is crucial for creating a strong, recognizable ecotourism brand that can attract both domestic and international tourists.

Moreover, the HR limitations extend beyond government offices to community-level stakeholders. Community involvement is central to ecotourism, as local residents play a vital role in managing ecotourism sites, preserving cultural heritage, and providing unique local experiences for tourists. However, due to limited training and awareness of ecotourism's economic benefits, many community members lack the skills and motivation to actively engage in tourism activities. This gap in community HR capacity means that valuable resources, such as local knowledge and traditional practices, remain underutilized. To build sustainable ecotourism in South Kalimantan, it is essential that community members receive training that empowers them to manage and contribute to ecotourism initiatives effectively.

3.3 Coordination and Commitment Challenges

Effective coordination and consistent commitment across districts are essential for the successful development of ecotourism in South Kalimantan. However, these elements remain challenging for the province, leading to fragmented promotional efforts and management strategies. Although the South Kalimantan Provincial Tourism Office has made ongoing efforts to establish coordination with various districts to optimize ecotourism, the level of commitment and resources dedicated to these efforts varies widely across regions. This uneven distribution of commitment has

created gaps in ecotourism development, as districts with more resources and enthusiasm often progress faster than those with limited support or lower prioritization of ecotourism within their agendas [39].

One key challenge in coordination lies in achieving a unified strategy for ecotourism across South Kalimantan. Given that each district may have different priorities, funding levels, and human resource capacities, it is difficult to implement consistent standards or strategies throughout the province. For instance, some districts may prioritize ecotourism development as part of their economic growth plan, while others may not recognize its potential and therefore allocate fewer resources to its promotion and management. This inconsistency leads to a lack of cohesiveness in the provincial ecotourism strategy, resulting in disjointed visitor experiences and a weaker overall brand for South Kalimantan's ecotourism sector.

Furthermore, the absence of strong, formalized partnerships between the provincial government and district-level authorities hinders integrated planning and execution of promotional activities. While the Provincial Tourism Office coordinates promotional activities and provides guidelines, the execution of these strategies often depends heavily on the initiative of district officials, whose commitment to ecotourism may fluctuate based on local political priorities or changing administrative agendas. This variability affects the continuity and effectiveness of ecotourism promotions, as districts with limited commitment may not fully participate in collaborative campaigns, missing out on opportunities to draw tourists. The result is an unbalanced promotional approach that undercuts the potential benefits of a coordinated, province-wide strategy.

Inter-district collaboration is also essential for creating a cohesive ecotourism network that can enhance the visitor experience by providing diverse, well-managed destinations within a single province. However, the lack of joint planning and shared objectives has limited such collaboration. For example, districts could cooperate to offer package tours or mutual promotions that encourage visitors to explore multiple sites within the province, but such initiatives are rare due to insufficient inter-district communication and planning. This lack of collaborative initiatives means that ecotourism attractions remain isolated, which limits their collective appeal and reduces the overall tourism revenue for South Kalimantan.

Budget constraints further complicate coordination efforts. The limited provincial budget restricts the ability of the Provincial Tourism Office to support districts consistently, especially those with fewer resources. Consequently, promotional efforts become sporadic, focusing primarily on low-cost options like social media campaigns, which are helpful but insufficient in building a robust ecotourism reputation. A consistent, well-funded promotional strategy would require stronger financial and logistical support across districts, enabling them to achieve aligned, impactful ecotourism promotion

3.4 Budget Constraints and Digital Promotion Strategies

Budget constraints represent a major barrier to effective ecotourism promotion in South Kalimantan, limiting the scope and reach of marketing efforts and making it challenging to raise awareness of the province's ecotourism potential on a national or international scale. The South Kalimantan Provincial Tourism Office, like many local government entities, operates with a limited

budget that restricts its ability to fund comprehensive tourism campaigns or maintain a consistent presence in diverse promotional channels. Consequently, ecotourism promotion has primarily relied on low-cost digital platforms, such as social media, which provide broad outreach but come with their own set of limitations [39].

Given the budgetary limitations, the Tourism Office has strategically focused on social media as its main promotional tool. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook are leveraged to showcase South Kalimantan's ecotourism destinations, allowing the Tourism Office to connect with a large audience in a cost-effective manner. By posting content that highlights the province's diverse landscapes—such as rainforests, rivers, and mountains—South Kalimantan can build interest and engagement from both domestic and international audiences. Social media also offers interactive features, like comments and direct messaging, enabling the Tourism Office to engage directly with potential tourists and address their inquiries. This approach helps increase accessibility and visibility, albeit with the constraints that come from a primarily digital presence.

However, the reliance on social media alone has limitations. While social media can provide broad outreach, it lacks the depth of engagement and impact that comes from multi-channel, integrated campaigns. Digital platforms are also highly competitive, as numerous destinations and businesses vie for the attention of online users. Without a substantial budget to produce high-quality content, the promotional material may struggle to stand out amidst other, better-funded tourism campaigns. Additionally, maintaining a dynamic and engaging social media presence requires digital marketing skills and resources that may be limited within the current Tourism Office team. This skills gap further constrains the effectiveness of social media campaigns, as the Tourism Office may not be able to produce optimized content that fully leverages the capabilities of each platform.

Budget constraints also limit opportunities for offline promotions, such as travel expos, tourism conferences, or partnerships with travel agencies. These channels are essential for reaching audiences who may not actively engage on social media or who prefer in-person interactions and trusted endorsements when choosing travel destinations. Offline promotion can enhance credibility and provide opportunities for direct engagement with prospective tourists, travel influencers, and industry professionals. However, due to budget restrictions, South Kalimantan's presence in such venues is minimal, which reduces its visibility among a broader, diverse pool of potential tourists.

Despite these challenges, the Tourism Office has taken steps to enhance its promotional impact within its limited budget. Collaborative efforts with other provinces, districts, and tourism agencies have been initiated to pool resources and share promotional efforts. These collaborations help expand South Kalimantan's reach by integrating its ecotourism offerings into larger tourism packages or cross-promotions, targeting tourists interested in exploring multiple destinations. However, these cooperative strategies are still in their early stages and face logistical hurdles due to varying priorities and commitments among partners.

3.5 Community Involvement And Awareness

Community involvement and awareness play a crucial role in the success and sustainability of ecotourism in South Kalimantan, yet this study reveals significant gaps in these areas. While community participation is essential for fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring that ecotourism

benefits local residents, involvement remains limited and often passive. A key reason for this is the general lack of awareness among local communities about the potential benefits that ecotourism can bring, both economically and socially. Without sufficient understanding of how ecotourism can contribute to local development, many community members view it as a peripheral activity rather than a viable source of livelihood or a means of preserving their cultural heritage and environment.

This lack of awareness leads to a low level of engagement from local residents, many of whom are unaware of the ways they could actively participate in and benefit from ecotourism. In some cases, communities see little connection between ecotourism initiatives and their day-to-day lives, resulting in minimal interest and involvement. This passivity can be attributed to limited outreach and educational efforts by local authorities and ecotourism promoters, which leaves many residents uninformed about the potential impact of ecotourism on their community and environment. For example, local farmers, artisans, and small business owners may not realize the opportunities ecotourism could create for generating income by showcasing local products, cultural practices, and services to tourists.

The limited involvement of local communities also hinders the sustainable management of ecotourism sites, as community support is essential for long-term preservation efforts. Local residents possess invaluable knowledge of their natural environment, cultural traditions, and historical sites, which can contribute significantly to creating a rich, authentic ecotourism experience. However, without active participation, this local knowledge remains largely untapped, leaving potential resources for environmental preservation and cultural enrichment underutilized. Additionally, communities that do not see direct benefits from ecotourism may lack motivation to support conservation efforts, which can jeopardize the sustainability of these natural and cultural assets in the long run.

Furthermore, while there are some supportive local organizations, such as nature enthusiasts' groups and NGOs, their involvement remains scattered and lacks the coordination needed for meaningful impact. These organizations could potentially drive community engagement and ecotourism initiatives, but they often operate independently, without consistent collaboration with government bodies or other community stakeholders. As a result, their efforts to involve communities in ecotourism remain fragmented and limited in scope.

3.6 Discussion

The promotion of ecotourism in South Kalimantan presents unique challenges and opportunities, as outlined in both the findings and the broader scholarly context of effective ecotourism marketing strategies. The current promotional efforts in South Kalimantan rely heavily on social media due to budget constraints, allowing the Provincial Tourism Office to engage with a broad audience cost-effectively. This aligns with findings in the literature, where digital marketing is recognized as an essential tool in reaching diverse audiences and increasing awareness of ecotourism destinations. Kim [23] and Khan et al. [24] emphasize that social media platforms are vital in shaping destination image and improving tourist perceptions, both of which are crucial for lesser-known destinations like South Kalimantan that aim to attract environmentally conscious travelers.

However, the quality of South Kalimantan's promotional content on digital platforms is constrained by limited funding, impacting its ability to compete with destinations that can afford high-quality, professionally produced materials. In the competitive digital tourism landscape, well-funded campaigns often overshadow minimalistic, low-cost content. This limitation highlights a gap between current practice in South Kalimantan and recommended strategies for impactful digital marketing, as highlighted by Dang [25], who suggests that authentic and high-quality digital representation is crucial for promoting responsible tourism. Improving content quality, potentially through partnerships with eco-travel influencers or content creators, could enhance South Kalimantan's appeal, attracting travelers who prioritize sustainability and cultural authenticity.

Furthermore, the current approach in South Kalimantan includes collaborations with other provinces and tourism agencies, a strategic move to broaden exposure by integrating ecotourism sites into larger tourism packages. This aligns with the value of regional collaboration as emphasized by scholars such as Nogueira [17], who stresses the importance of creating memorable, multi-destination experiences that can attract repeat visitors, especially younger generations who seek authentic experiences. Despite the advantages, these cooperative efforts are still developing in South Kalimantan and face challenges related to resource disparities and varying levels of commitment across districts. This inconsistency weakens the impact of an otherwise promising approach and suggests that stronger frameworks for inter-regional collaboration could help unify and strengthen the province's promotional strategy.

The findings also reveal a limited offline promotional presence in South Kalimantan due to budget restrictions, reducing opportunities for in-person engagement with potential tourists and industry influencers. While online marketing offers broad reach, the literature suggests that offline channels, such as tourism expos and partnerships with travel agencies, play a crucial role in building credibility and facilitating direct tourist interactions. Dasan et al. [21] emphasize that training community members in customer service and marketing skills can improve local engagement in tourism and empower communities to play a larger role in promoting ecotourism. Expanding offline strategies, although currently constrained, would provide South Kalimantan with more holistic promotion that balances digital outreach with face-to-face engagement, as recommended in ecotourism best practices.

The development of ecotourism in South Kalimantan faces several significant challenges, as identified in the research findings and supported by literature on common ecotourism barriers. Both the findings and literature highlight that human resource limitations, infrastructural deficiencies, and socio-economic barriers significantly hinder ecotourism's growth. The shortage of skilled human resources within the South Kalimantan Tourism Office and at the district level limits the ability to promote and manage ecotourism effectively. As noted in the findings, many officials lack the specialized training needed for sustainable tourism management, digital marketing, and community engagement, which are crucial for advancing ecotourism initiatives. This aligns with Gumede and Nzama's [29] observation that Western-centric frameworks and insufficiently trained local personnel often result in ecotourism strategies that are poorly adapted to local contexts.

In addition to human resource constraints, limited community participation emerged as a critical barrier. The findings indicate that community members often lack awareness of ecotourism's potential benefits, leading to passive engagement and a disconnect between local stakeholders and ecotourism efforts. This lack of participation is common in ecotourism settings worldwide, as

pointed out by Tiwari [31], who highlights that equitable benefit-sharing and tailored participatory approaches are essential for successful ecotourism development.

Budget constraints further exacerbate these challenges, limiting both promotional activities and essential infrastructure development. The findings note that the Tourism Office relies heavily on social media for cost-effective promotion, which, while useful for outreach, lacks the depth and engagement of multi-channel campaigns. This restricted approach limits South Kalimantan's visibility, especially when compared to other destinations with well-funded ecotourism programs. Scholars such as Mkrtchyan [32] and Xaba [33] emphasize that poor infrastructure, from inadequate transportation to subpar visitor facilities, is a significant deterrent to ecotourism growth.

Another significant barrier discussed in both findings and literature is the socio-economic constraint of equitable participation, particularly for women and marginalized groups. The findings highlight the passive role of communities, a situation compounded by economic and social factors that limit active involvement. Altunel [30] and Morgan & Winkler [27] both address how gender disparities and socio-economic limitations reduce opportunities for local women to engage in ecotourism, despite their potential contributions to cultural enrichment and sustainable development.

Lastly, political dynamics and governance issues further complicate ecotourism promotion, with limited coordination between provincial and district levels resulting in fragmented efforts. The findings reveal that inconsistent commitment across districts leads to a lack of cohesive strategies and inconsistent visitor experiences, weakening South Kalimantan's ecotourism brand. Fatem [34] discusses how top-down approaches and resource allocation based on political priorities often disconnect ecotourism policies from local needs.

4 Conclusions

This study set out to examine the barriers to effective management and promotion of ecotourism in South Kalimantan Province. Through an in-depth qualitative analysis involving interviews with stakeholders, field observations, and focus group discussions, the study identified three primary obstacles: limitations in human resources, budget constraints, and low community involvement. Despite the vast ecotourism potential of South Kalimantan, with its rich biodiversity and unique cultural heritage, these barriers significantly hinder the realization of its full potential as a sustainable tourism destination.

The findings highlight that human resource constraints are a critical barrier. Both provincial and district tourism offices lack sufficient personnel with expertise in sustainable tourism management, digital marketing, and community engagement. This shortage affects the quality of ecotourism services and limits the scope of promotional activities. While there are some national and regional ecotourism programs, the lack of skilled personnel at the local level impedes the effective execution of these initiatives. Consequently, ecotourism in South Kalimantan struggles to compete with more developed tourism destinations in Indonesia, where there is greater capacity to plan, promote, and manage tourism sustainably.

Budget limitations compound these HR challenges, restricting the scope of promotional strategies and necessitating reliance on social media as a primary promotional tool. While social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram offer affordable outreach options, the limited budget

prevents the expansion of promotional efforts into more impactful, multi-channel campaigns or collaborations. As a result, South Kalimantan's ecotourism remains under-promoted on a national and international scale, with its unique attractions—such as the Barito River, Meratus Mountains, and Dayak cultural heritage—receiving insufficient visibility. Additionally, budget constraints reduce opportunities for offline promotions, which could enhance the credibility of South Kalimantan's ecotourism offerings through in-person events and partnerships with established tourism operators.

Community involvement emerged as another essential factor yet remains underutilized in South Kalimantan's ecotourism. Many local residents lack awareness of the benefits ecotourism can bring to their communities, including economic opportunities, environmental preservation, and cultural enrichment. This lack of awareness results in limited engagement and passive participation, which undercuts the potential for a community-centered ecotourism model. Although local organizations and nature groups are supportive, their involvement is often fragmented and lacks coordination, diminishing their impact. This finding underscores the need for greater outreach and educational efforts to raise community awareness, encouraging residents to actively participate in and support ecotourism initiatives.

To address these obstacles, the study recommends a multi-faceted approach: enhancing human resource capacity through targeted training in tourism management and digital marketing, increasing budget allocation for comprehensive promotional efforts, and fostering community involvement through educational programs and collaborative platforms. Building human resource expertise in sustainable tourism management can strengthen the quality and competitiveness of ecotourism services. Budget enhancements would enable South Kalimantan to expand its promotional reach and improve its visibility among potential tourists. Community engagement efforts, including outreach programs and regular community meetings, can cultivate a deeper sense of ownership and active participation in ecotourism projects.

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