

LOCAL WISDOM-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION IN ECOTOURISM PRESERVATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN THE SAWARNA BEACH AREA

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Abstract. The threat of environmental damage due to massive tourism activities at Sawarna Beach has the potential to degrade coastal ecosystems, necessitating a communication pattern capable of integrating nature protection with the active involvement of the local community. This study aims to analyze and describe in depth how environmental communication strategies based on local wisdom values are implemented by indigenous communities in preserving Sawarna ecotourism. The researcher argues that the integration of local traditions into environmental information dissemination patterns is proven to strengthen tourists' ecological compliance and safeguard natural resources from the exploitation of mass tourism industries. Theoretically, this study applies Robert Cox's concept of environmental communication and Habermas's The theory of communicative action, alongside the theory of local wisdom to dissect message construction, communication channels, and cultural interactions in ecosystem management. The method used is a qualitative case study, with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews with customary leaders, field observations at Sawarna Beach, and documentary analysis of village regulations. Data analysis shows that the indigenous community utilizes interpersonal communication, customary rituals, and oral traditions as effective channels to internalize environmental preservation norms for both external parties and the local community. In conclusion, environmental communication based on local wisdom in Sawarna has successfully created a self-reliant, harmonious, and effective ecotourism preservation model to mitigate the negative impacts of environmental degradation in coastal areas.

Keywords: Environmental Communication, Local Wisdom, Ecotourism, Sawarna Beach, Indigenous Community, Case Study.

INTRODUCTION

The Sawarna Beach area in Lebak Regency, Banten, is currently under severe ecological pressure due to an uncontrolled surge in mass tourism. According to an investigative report by the reliable national news outlet Aktual.com, tourism activities along the Sawarna coast have triggered massive accumulations of waste, degrading the beach's aesthetic value, and exacerbated by illegal sand mining that accelerates coastal erosion along the southern shore. Empirical field evidence demonstrates that the high volume of domestic and international tourist arrivals has not been matched by adequate environmental communication awareness among tourism business actors. This reality poses a threat to coastal ecosystem health, causes pollution from homestay waste, and degrades the environmental carrying capacity, which could jeopardize the long-term sustainability of Sawarna tourism. This environmental degradation highlights a distinct dysfunction in how environmental protection messages are communicated, as commercial information flows far outpace local conservation narratives.

Ideally, nature-based tourism should be conducted sustainably through the integration of robust environmental communication rooted in the local wisdom of the indigenous community. This policy aligns with five major theoretical foundations in communication and culture: the environmental communication theory (Cox, 2017) which highlights the public sphere's role in cultivating ecological consciousness, and the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 2015a). Furthermore, this study draws upon the social construction of reality theory (Berger & Luckman, 2016), Furthermore, this study draws upon the social construction of reality theory (Heider, 2013), Furthermore, this study draws upon the social construction of reality theory, (Steward, 2014) . The importance of synergy among communication, customary traditions, and ecotourism preservation is also reinforced within academic frameworks developed by leading global environmental scholars (Pezzullo, 2018), (Corbert, 2016), and (Flor, 2019). These ideal values mandate that the management of southern coastal destinations must position customary law, oral traditions, and local norms as primary instruments for educating tourists

and preserving ecological harmony.

Conceptualizations of community-based tourism and local wisdom have been extensively investigated by researchers nationally and internationally in recent years. In domestic literature, recent global tourism research at this destination was developed in the INCOSTE proceedings on Sawarna tourism sustainability (Ahmadi et al., 2026), regarding healthy environments (Ganiem & Pandjaitan, 2020) and concerning coastal management (Sumiati & Tambunan, 2021). Lifestyle patterns aligned with nature are also validated regarding the Baduy Tribe (Siombo et al., 2022), on the cultural dynamics of Lebak, (Bahrudin & Zurohman, 2021), and through Banten oral literature (Hartanto et al., 2022). Globally, similar research is supported by references on ecotourism politics (Fletcher, 2020), on tourism environmental innovation (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2019), and regarding indigenous communication dynamics (Walker, 2021). Methodological contributions (Littlejohn & Foss, 2017), (Devito, 2019), (Yin, 2018), (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and supporting references (Mulyana, 2018) and (Soekanto, 2015) further solidify the importance of a descriptive-qualitative approach to analyzing social interactions within communities.

Tabel 1. Previous Studies

No.	Athors (Year)	Focus and Main Findings	Relavancy to This Study	Identified Gap in Previous Literature
1.	(Ahmadi et al., 2026)	Tourism sustainability at Sawarna Beach reviewed from macro-governance aspects.	Supplies baseline empirical data regarding tourism growth and macro-governance conditions specifically at Sawarna Beach.	Primary Contextual Gap: Ahmadi et al. examine Sawarna Beach exclusively through a top-down, administrative lens (<i>macro-governance</i>). The study completely ignores the micro-level interpersonal dynamics, customary <i>Kasepuhan</i> leadership, and grassroots linguistic interactions that sustain daily environmental preservation.
2.	(Ganiem & Pandjaitan, 2020)	Tourism communication studies regarding healthy environments in tourist destinations.	Offers a broad conceptual foundation regarding environmental health messaging in Indonesian tourism spots.	Specificity Gap: The communication models discussed are generic, urban-centric, and media-driven. They do not account for customary indigenous contexts where environmental messages are embedded in oral literature, local dialects, and ancestral value systems.
3.	(Sumiati & Tambunan, 2021)	Sustainable management and dynamics of tourism in coastal areas.	Highlights the physical vulnerabilities, waste management challenges, and ecological dynamics specific to coastal zones	Disciplinary Gap: The study is grounded purely in environmental science and physical geography. It identifies ecological threats accurately but fails to offer a communication-based intervention framework to alter human behavior along vulnerable shorelines.
4.	(Siombo et al., 2022)	Lifestyles, customary laws, and nature-harmonious interactions of the Baduy Tribe.	Strengthens sociological insight into indigenous Banten cultural traits that share historical	Locus & Tourism Dynamics Gap: The study focuses strictly on the isolated Baduy ecosystem, which rejects mass tourism. It cannot be directly applied to Sawarna Beach, where

			and geographical proximity with Sawarna.	indigenous <i>Kasepuhan</i> traditions must directly negotiate and interact with commercial mass tourism pressures.
5.	(Bahrudin & Zurohman, 2021)	Cultural dynamics, social values, and community structure in Lebak Regency	Supplies essential demographic, social, and cultural background data regarding Lebak Regency (Sawarna's geographic locus).	Analytical Scope Gap: The research provides a purely descriptive sosiological map of Lebak. It treats social structures as static cultural backgrounds rather than analyzing how these cultural values are actively mobilized into strategic environmental communication practices.
6.	(Hartanto et al., 2022)	Preservation of noble values and local culture through Banten oral literature.	Serves as an analytical lens to understand how oral traditions operate as cultural communication media.	Applied Communication Gap: Hartanto et al. analyze oral literature through a folkloric and literary preservation lens. They do not explore how these oral traditions can be operationalized as active, persuasive environmental communication tools to enforce visitor compliance.
7.	(Fletcher, 2020)	Ecotourism politics and critique of the impacts of global mass tourism capitalization.	Establishes a global theoretical baseline regarding the ecological threats of mass tourism capitalization.	Theoretical & Empirical Gap: While Fletcher offers a compelling political-economy critique of tourist exploitation, the analysis remains strictly macro-structural. It lacks a micro-level communication mechanism or empirical framework to explain how local communities actively resist or mediate these global pressures through everyday communicative interactions.
8.	(Binkhorst & Dekker, 2019)	Environmental innovation and community engagement in tourism ecosystems.	Contextualizes social innovation and participatory communication as essential tools to relieve tourism-induced ecological stress.	Contextual & Methodological Gap: The proposed innovations are tailored primarily to modern, institutionalized Western destination management systems. They fail to address how traditional, unwritten indigenous norms, spiritual beliefs, and customary governance systems operate as informal channels for environmental communication.
9.	(Walker, 2021)	Indigenous communication dynamics and local message transmission in the modern era.	Establishes a theoretical foundation for the resilience and adaptability of traditional	Functional Gap: Walker's focus is on general cultural heritage preservation and internal message transmission. The study does not investigate how traditional message systems can be

			indigenous communication systems.	strategically directed outward to shape external actors, specifically regulating tourist compliance in ecotourism settings.
10.	(Uktolseja et al., 2026)	Indigenous Island Ecotourism Sociology: Customary rituals as media for cultural resilience against tourism's ecological pressures.	Provides empirical proof that integrating customary rituals into coastal governance mitigates environmental damage.	Theoretical Integration Gap: While establishing that rituals build cultural resilience, the study analyzes rituals in isolation. It lacks an integrative theoretical framework (such as Habermas's Communicative Action) to explain how ritual symbolic actions convert into rational dialogic consensus with external tourists.
11.	(Arico et al., 2023)	Erosion of indigenous environmental knowledge in coastal traditions (<i>khanduri laot</i>) due to weak value transmission.	Serves as a critical warning and justification for formulating structured local communication models to prevent value erosion.	Constructive Gap: Arico et al. diagnose the failure of knowledge transmission and traditional decay. However, the study remains purely evaluative and fails to propose a preventative, reconstructive communication model to revitalize local wisdom in modern tourism settings.
12.	(Carr et al., 2016)	Challenges and opportunities for indigenous involvement in achieving sustainable tourism.	Positions indigenous communities as primary active subjects and rights-holders in environmental policy communication	Operational Gap: Carr et al. frame indigenous participation primarily in terms of legal rights and policy representation. The study omits the actual communicative action—such as dialogue, storytelling, and local consensus-building—required to operationalize that participation on the ground.
13.	(Hidayat et al., 2022)	Development of an internatural communication model (communication between humans and natural elements) for tourism conservation.	Helps analyze how customary rituals communicate ecological messages between humans and natural elements	Target Audience Gap: Hidayat et al. focus almost exclusively on the metaphysical relationship between humans and nature (<i>internatural communication</i>). They overlook the human-to-human communicative dimension—specifically how these spiritual insights are translated into interpersonal persuasion to regulate tourist behavior.
14.	(Saija & Pariela, 2024)	Analysis of coastal tourism management rights by indigenous communities based on village regulations (<i>Perdesa</i>).	Supports the legal-formal basis for custom-tailored policy recommendations for local Pokdarwis and regional government.	Process Gap: Saija & Pariela focus on the structural drafting and legal legitimacy of <i>Perdesa</i> . However, they neglect the communicative process—how local communities negotiate, build consensus (<i>Habermas's communicative action</i>), and communicate these legal norms to outside visitors.

15.	(Ramdas, 2021)	Investigates how Indigenous Ecological Knowledge is communicated intergenerationally to build tourist ecological compliance in community-based ecotourism.	Demonstrates that traditional communication alters tourist behavior more effectively than modern prohibition signage.	Analytical Framework Gap: Although empirically rich, Ramdas provides a largely descriptive account of knowledge transfer. The study lacks integration with formal communicative action theories (such as Habermas), leaving unexamined how validity claims and dialogic consensus function to alter tourist cognition.
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Despite existing literature on tourism, a distinct research gap remains, establishing the originality of this communication study at Sawarna Beach. Most prior studies, including contemporary tourism research in the INCOSTE forum (Ahmadi et al., 2026) and global ecotourism studies (Fletcher, 2020), focus primarily on macro-management, governance, or economic impacts without examining micro-level interactions. A theoretical and practical gap exists because no prior study has examined how oral interaction strategies, customary rituals, and environmental message delivery patterns operate within the Sawarna indigenous community. This research addresses this gap by analyzing the contextual environmental communication model applied by the local customary community to mitigate environmental damage. This qualitative case study focuses on the internalisation process of South Banten local wisdom, transforming destructive tourist behavior into organic ecological compliance on the ground.

The urgency of this study is critical, given that environmental degradation at Sawarna Beach continues rapidly. Academically, this study offers a fresh contribution to communication to environmental communication by explicitly synthesizing Robert Cox's environmental communication concept with Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action and the framework of local wisdom. The original contribution and novelty of this study in addressing the micro level communication dynamics within the indigenous community a dimension largely overlooked by previous research that focused primarily on macro governance (Ahmadi et al., 2026). By demonstrating how customary rituals, oral traditions, and interpersonal interactions operate as a structured communicative mechanism, this study advance existing knowledge by explaining how deep rooted local wisdom builds consensus and actively enforces ecological compliance among external tourist. Practically, the findings provide actionable recommendations for the Sawarna Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) and the Lebak Regency Tourism Office to draft tourism communication guidelines. The communication model formulated through this research can serve as a replicable, community-based mitigation model for other coastal tourism destinations. Preserving Sawarna Beach through the reconstruction of customary communication is a necessity to ensure the future economic, social, and ecological sustainability of the Banten community.

METHOD

The research design selected to operationalize this environmental communication inquiry at Sawarna Beach is the intrinsic-instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995). A case study is defined as an in-depth investigation of a bounded system defined by specific space, time, and sociocultural boundaries. The selection of this case study framework is based on Sawarna Beach's unique and context-specific characteristics. This uniqueness stems from the dynamic interaction between modern global mass tourism and the enduring kasepuhan system of the local indigenous community. Case study design offers a framework to explore this environmental preservation phenomenon across multiple dimensions. Sawarna is positioned not merely as a geographic site for data collection, but as a complete sociological case entity. Through this study examines the internal mechanisms through which local wisdom operates under the pressure of coastal ecosystem degradation.

Data Collection Techniques. In accordance with case study protocols (Stake, 1995) and qualitative research traditions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), data collection employed a multimethod (bricolage)

approach to ensure data depth. The researcher acted directly as the primary instrument at Sawarna Beach to gather primary and secondary data via four primary techniques:

1. **Participant Observation:** Direct, engaged observations were conducted across the Sawarna Beach area. The researcher observed tour guides addressing tourists, the placement of customary advisory signs, tourist waste disposal behaviors, and the execution of coastal cultural rituals. All field observations were systematically logged in detailed field notes.
2. **In-depth Interviews:** Face-to-face, semi-structured, and conversational interviews were conducted using an interview guide. In-depth interviews were carried out with key informants and supporting informants to explore underlying motives, meaning constructions, and environmental communication barriers in the field. All interview sessions were digitally audio-recorded following informed consent procedures.
3. **Documentation Study:** Formal and informal documents relevant to Sawarna Beach management were retrieved. These included draft written regulations from Pokdarwis, historical records of the customary kasepuhan, draft regional tourism policies from Lebak Regency, and mass media publications.
4. **Physical Artifacts and Audio-Visual Documentation:** Data collection included photographs of physical beach conditions (coastal erosion, waste accumulation), video recordings of tour guide communication interactions, and visual documentation of local wisdom symbols positioned within the tourist zone.

Data Analysis Technique. Data analysis followed the continuous flow model (Miles et al., 2014):

1. **Data Reduction:** The process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data extracted from written field notes and interview transcripts.
2. **Data Display:** Organizing information into descriptive narratives and relational matrices to map key pillars and operational phases, enabling logical conclusion drawing.
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** From initial data collection, the researcher began identifying meanings, patterns, regularities, explanations, and causal flows to establish credible models.

Data Processing. Qualitative data processing was facilitated using Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), specifically NVivo. The application of this software was not intended to replace the researcher's role as the primary interpretive instrument, but rather to enhance efficiency, accuracy, and transparency in daily data management. Amid voluminous in-depth interview transcripts, observational field notes, and regulatory documents, NVivo functioned as a structured digital database. All textual and visual materials collected were integrated into a unified workspace to maintain analytical auditability. Software operation adhered to methodological guidelines regarding qualitative visual management (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) Through multi-layered node categorization, complex conceptual relationships between variables were systematically mapped.

Data Triangulation (Data Trustworthiness). To ensure the trustworthiness, credibility, and accuracy of the qualitative data collected from Sawarna Beach, triangulation techniques were implemented. As emphasized in methodological literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), triangulation seeks convergence among multiple perspectives. This case study operationalized three types of triangulation techniques:

1. **Source Triangulation:** The researcher cross-checked information regarding coastal environmental management across different sources. Interview data from the Head of the Customary Kasepuhan were cross-examined with input from the Head of Pokdarwis and validated against direct statements from tourists.
2. **Methodological Triangulation:** Consistency was verified across distinct collection techniques at the research site. Information regarding waste disposal rules gathered via in-depth interviews was verified through direct participant observation on the beach and supported by written customary documents.
3. **Time Triangulation:** Data collection occurred across varied timeframes (including peak weekends with high visitor density and quieter weekdays). This approach verified the consistency of environmental communication interaction patterns across differing social contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sawarna Beach, located in Bayah District, Lebak Regency, Banten Province, serves as the primary material object of this study because it represents a clear sociocultural encounter between modern mass tourism and the enduring customary system of the Kasepuhan. Geographically, this southern coastal zone possesses exotic natural characteristics that are vulnerable to erosion and ecosystem degradation driven by tourist-generated waste. Beyond its scenic value, Sawarna Beach is governed by the social institution of the Kasepuhan indigenous community, which upholds unwritten customary laws and forms of local wisdom aimed at maintaining environmental harmony. Through participant observation, the researcher identified that environmental management within the tourism area is guided primarily by the informal leadership structure of local customary elders rather than formal government bureaucracy alone. This communal framework renders Sawarna Beach a distinct case study locus rich in micro-level linguistic interaction data. The web of social relations among local residents, tour guides, lodging operators, and outside tourists constitutes a dynamic arena where commercial economic interests meet moral obligations of environmental conservation. Documents and cultural artifacts collected in the field confirm that Sawarna's public space contains environmental protection symbols rooted in ancestral teachings.

Qualitative data analysis conducted via NVivo software consistently indicates that the environmental communication strategy applied at Sawarna Beach is dominated by horizontal, dialogic interpersonal communication channels. The local indigenous community and the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) utilize a relational, face-to-face approach to convey coastal conservation messages to urban visitors. Based on interview transcript coding, five core humanistic qualities aligning with interpersonal communication theory (Devito, 2019) openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality—were identified as assertively operationalized in the field. Local tour guides avoid instructive or coercive communication when addressing tourists who litter plastic waste, choosing instead polite phrasing that appeals to moral awareness. As stated by a representative of the local Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis):

"We never shout at or reprimand tourists directly when they leave their trash on the beach. Instead, we approach them conversationally, hand them a waste bag, and explain that our customary tradition teaches us to honor the sea. When we speak to them politely as equals, they feel respected and usually clean up their surroundings without taking offense." (Informant 2, Pokdarwis Representative, Personal Interview).

This warm interpersonal communication pattern alters the individualistic and transactional orientations that urban tourists often bring from their home regions. Field observations demonstrate that empathetic verbal communication helps minimize horizontal friction between tourists acting as financial consumers and villagers providing tourism services. This micro-persuasive approach acts as an ecological buffer, slowing physical environmental damage along the southern coast of Banten.

The successful transmission of environmental preservation messages through interpersonal communication in Sawarna is closely linked to the reconstruction of internal attributions within tourists' cognitive frameworks. Concept mapping visualizations in NVivo revealed that exemplary conduct demonstrated by customary leaders can shift tourist compliance orientations. Visitors who initially exhibited external attributions—such as fear of monetary fines imposed by managers—gradually developed internal attributions rooted in moral awareness. This attributional shift occurs as tourists directly observe how local residents treat the sea during sacred coastal cultural rituals. This psychological phenomenon aligns with psychological insights (Heider, 2013) that human perceptions of obligation are heavily shaped by interpretations of a communicator's character. The moral credibility (ethos) of Sawarna's customary elders acts as a primary catalyst, inspiring respect among visitors to maintain cleanliness. As underscored by the Head of the Customary Kasepuhan:

"Laut kidul teh titipan nini aki, kedah dirawat ku basa nu lemes, ambeh nu sumping ge ngartos yen ulah nyampah didieu."

(Translation: *"The southern sea is a sacred trust from our ancestors; it must be cared for using gentle language so that visitors understand not to litter here."*) (Informant 1, Head of Customary

Kasepuhan, Age 81, Personal Interview).

This is reflected in a statement by the Head of the Customary Kasepuhan (81) during an interview: *"Laut kidul teh titipan nini aki, kedah dirawat ku basa nu lemes, ambeh nu sumping ge ngartos yen ulah nyampah didieu"* (The southern sea is a sacred trust from our ancestors; it must be cared for using gentle language so that visitors understand not to litter here).

An in-depth analysis using Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 2015a) reveals a contestation of meaning constructed by the indigenous community to shield their lifeworld (Lebenswelt) from colonization by market systems. The penetration of commercial mass tourism introduces instrumental rationality, treating Sawarna Beach primarily as an economic commodity to be exploited for material gain. In response to this threat, the customary kasepuhan employs local wisdom as an emancipatory instrument by satisfying four validity claims: truth, appropriateness, truthfulness, and comprehensibility. Informal dialogues in rural stalls between residents and homestay owners serve to build collective consensus regarding ecological boundaries. This communicative action helps democratize the tourism public sphere, ensuring that strategic decisions regarding nature conservation are not dictated solely by financial capital holders. This perspective is corroborated by the Head of Pokdarwis Sawarna (45) during an in-depth interview:

"We sit down together with homestay owners and emphasize using customary rules that tourism businesses here cannot pollute customary lands; everyone must agree to preserve the beach's integrity."

This study addresses an empirical and methodological gap present in previous Indonesian tourism literature. The empirical gap emerges from conflicting findings in prior research: while high multi-actor collaboration has been argued (Irawan, 2025) other studies identify vulnerability arising from residents' reluctance to correct tourist behavior due to social discomfort (ewuh pakewuh) (Ganiem & Pandjaitan, 2020). This study addresses that gap by demonstrating that standardizing assertive communication competencies within Pokdarwis helps bridge cultural tensions, ensuring conservation messages are communicated without creating economic friction. Meanwhile, the methodological gap is evident in the bias of studies relying primarily on positivist quantitative surveys to evaluate tourist ecological behavior (Badawi, 2024) and (Yudhana, 2023). Such approaches often miss spiritual motives and customary meanings underlying human actions. Using NVivo software, this study systematically analyzed verbatim interview transcripts, including testimony from a Local Tour Guide (29): *"If a tourist drops a cigarette butt on the sand, I approach them calmly and share the local lore of the 'Batu Layar' sacred rock; usually, they pick up their litter right away."*

At the macro level, these findings support Cultural Ecology Theory (Steward, 2014) which posits that indigenous communication patterns reflect adaptations to the physical environment. Historically, the ocean conditions of the southern coast have shaped the cultural core of the Sawarna community, fostering a spiritual connection to nature. Local myths and folklore concerning the sacredness of the sea, analyzed literary-wise (Hartanto et al., 2022), function effectively as media for social control. This institutionalization of customary values corresponds with environmental law case studies (Siombo et al., 2022) which document ecological resilience in Banten customary lands. Conversely, service modernization through digital room reservations (Zahra et al., 2025), introduces new dynamics to cultural interaction. This digital contestation aligns with findings advocating for ecological justice by maintaining interpretive authority within local indigenous communities (Fletcher, 2020) and (Walker, 2021).

Overall, this section outlines a model for tourism environmental communication grounded in Indonesian local wisdom. The theoretical framework derived from NVivo analysis indicates that protecting Sawarna Beach from mass tourism impacts requires integrating macro-, meso-, and micro-level approaches. This model positions the indigenous community not as passive subjects, but as primary communication actors with agency over their living space. The psychological impact of this customary micro-persuasive model was described by a Tourist from Jakarta (24) during a field interview: *"Initially, I didn't pay much attention, but after talking with the local guide about the philosophy and hearing how residents respect this beach, I felt embarrassed to litter."* Empirical validation from prior studies, including recent work in the INCOSTE proceedings (Ahmadi et al., 2026), supports these findings. In

alignment with sociological insights (Bahrudin & Zurohman, 2021), this study concludes that interpersonal communication rooted in customary ethics is central to ecotourism sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study on local wisdom-based environmental communication strategies in the Sawarna Beach tourism area demonstrates that protecting coastal ecosystems from the destructive impacts of mass tourism relies heavily on dialogic and emancipatory interpersonal relations. Through an interpretive-constructivist paradigm (Habermas, 2015a; Neuman, 2014), environmental preservation at this site emerges not merely as a top-down technical regulation, but as a shared construction of meaning actively produced by the Kasepuhan indigenous community alongside the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis). The horizontal interpersonal communication pattern applied by local actors—emphasizing role modeling, respectful dialogue, and sociocultural empathy—deconstructs the transactional, individualistic orientation often exhibited by urban tourists. The application of local wisdom, expressed through oral traditions and sacred coastal myths, functions as an educational instrument with strong persuasive influence in the field. This micro-level communicative interaction fosters a psychological shift within visitors' cognitive awareness, generating ecological compliance without reliance on coercive physical or formal legal sanctions.

Methodologically and theoretically, digital data analysis conducted via NVivo mapped the contested meanings within the tourism public sphere while addressing empirical gaps in prior literature. This study demonstrates that standardizing assertive communication competencies within Pokdarwis helps overcome local communication hesitations—specifically the reluctance to correct tourist indiscretions—without disrupting rural economic stability. These findings validate the Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 2015b), showing that the indigenous community effectively protects its lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) against colonization by instrumental market rationality. Furthermore, integrating case study methodology (Stake, 1995), highlights how the sociocultural context of Sawarna Beach contributes to contemporary environmental communication literature. The resulting environmental communication model demonstrates an integrative connection between macro-level cultural ecology adaptation (Steward, 2014), meso-level customary institutions, and micro-level attributional psychology (Heider, 2013) (in guiding human behavior toward nature).

The concluding insight of this field research indicates that the sustainability of rural ecotourism in Indonesia depends on recognizing the authority of local indigenous communities as primary communicators in interpreting and managing their environments. The presence of digital accommodation booking technologies does not automatically erode local cultural values, provided that customary kasepuhan social institutions continue to serve as moral touchstones in coastal management policy. The effectiveness of the micro-persuasive model at Sawarna Beach provides empirical evidence that cultural approaches engaging spiritual awareness offer sustainable resilience against environmental degradation compared to written laws alone. Synergy among authentic local wisdom, active participation from business operators, exemplary leadership from customary figures, and psychological openness among visitors forms a foundation for sustainable tourism policies. Consequently, the outputs of this research contribute to theoretical academic discourse while offering strategic applications for stakeholders designing blueprints for coastal ecosystem crisis mitigation across Indonesia.

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