

Unlocking Sustainable Ecotourism: Insights from Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) in Indonesia

Stefanus Rumangkit¹, Yan Aditiya Pratama², Ardhi Khairi³, Antonius Satria Hadi⁴

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the idea, implementation, and impact of community-based ecotourism (CBET) in the context of community empowerment. This study uses a qualitative method to focus on numerous ecotourism locations in Indonesia that use the CBET concept. It is recommended to collect qualitative data through in-depth interviews with stakeholders such as local community members, ecotourism managers, and local government representatives. Document analysis and direct observation were also used to understand CBET implementation and its impact better. The results of this study are that the CBET governance ecosystem must be carried out well to support sustainable ecotourism performance. Based on the results of data analysis and discussion, in order for CBET to have good performance, it is necessary to pay attention to several factors.

Keywords: *Community-Based Ecotourism, Entrepreneurial Marketing, Co-Creation, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Leadership Empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a developing country that relies on the tourism sector to be a source of foreign exchange, create employment opportunities, education, protected forests, and preserve cultural activities and customs (Kunjuraman, 2022; Aman et al., 2024). From 2015 until now, the tourism sector is the third largest contributor to the country's foreign exchange after coal and oil. Even though 2020 there was a decline due to the Covid-19 pandemic, by the end of 2023, the tourism sector contributed US\$ 28.9 million in foreign exchange, three times the target that had been set. However, the rapid progress of tourism can also have negative impacts, such as ecological damage, contamination of the values and culture of the surrounding area, community relocation, and economic inequality (Das & Chatterjee, 2015).

The community-based ecotourism (CBET) concept can reduce these negative impacts. CBET refers to tourism that aims to preserve the natural environment and biodiversity. Implementation of the CBET concept shows consistency in the coverage of areas of community involvement in local tourism development, planning, implementation, and benefit values and evaluation. CBET aims at environmental conservation but is also a way to empower communities by giving them control over nature tourism projects and their impacts. Ecotourism itself is a nature-based tourist spot where tourists who come can enjoy the cool, unpolluted air and water and can enjoy the surrounding natural

¹ Bina Nusantara University, Indonesia

² Informatics & Business Institute Darmajaya, Indonesia

³ Widya Mataram University, Indonesia

⁴ Widya Mataram University, Indonesia

scenery. Studies regarding CBET have been conducted (Akbar et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). However, existing CBET research only takes the tourist perspective, such as motivation and desire to visit, emotional experience, and tourist satisfaction (Buccieri et al., 2023; Teshome et al., 2021). However, studies regarding the impact of CBET on local community life, values and culture, customs, and governance still need to be addressed (Polas & Raju, 2021; Setiorini et al., 2022).

To fill the gaps in previous studies, this research will examine in depth the CBET governance ecosystem, which has a positive impact on the lives of local communities, as well as environmental, social, cultural, and economic sustainability. Apart from that, this research will also investigate CBET's interest in entrepreneurship in local communities, seen from opportunities, conditions, motivation, and cognitive factors. The contribution of this research is to provide a model that explains the critical components of CBET related to community involvement, local community quality of life, economy, society, and culture, as well as effective marketing of CBET to support sustainable tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Ecotourism Society (1990) established the original definition of ecotourism as a type of travel to natural places to save the environment and maintain the lives and well-being of the local inhabitants. Initially, ecotourism was undertaken by nature-loving visitors who desired that the tourist destination region stay pristine and sustainable, as well as that the culture and welfare of the inhabitants be preserved (Das & Chatterjee, 2015).

However, as it develops, this ecotourism is gaining popularity since it is well-liked by tourists. Tourists like to visit the natural region, which can lead to economic activity. Ecotourism is then characterized as a new type of ethical travel to natural and adventurous locations that could develop into a tourism business (Samal & Dash, 2022). Understandably, the ecotourism industry has expanded rapidly. Some national park destinations have been successful in fostering ecotourism. Ecotourism can be defined as a type of tourism that adheres to the conservation principle. Conservation strategies are used in tourist development initiatives as well (Xu et al., 2023). Thus, ecotourism is highly precise and helpful in preserving the integrity and authenticity of the environment in a natural region. The insistence and expectations of eco-tourists can even improve the quality of ecotourism environmental preservation.

Ecotourism is founded on a widespread interest in the natural environment and the significance of maintaining and protecting it from negative impacts and deterioration in every manner feasible. Ecotourism differs slightly from natural tourism. Ecotourism is a low-impact natural tourism that directly or indirectly contributes to the preservation of species and their habitats through its role in conservation for local communities to value and protect natural tourism and other forms of life as a source of income (Thompson, 2022). Ecotourism is a naturally and environmentally responsible tourism activity that contributes to environmental conservation while also considering the welfare of local communities. Ecotourism is one component closely linked to the environment; development is anticipated to maintain natural resources and the environment. Much research on ecotourism has been undertaken, but in general, the development of ecotourism is intimately tied to the preservation of an area's ecology and culture (Baloch et al., 2023; Tuxtayeva, Egamova, & Hamroyeva, 2022). Ecotourism is a tourist travel activity that takes place in areas that are still natural or are managed according to natural rules to educate, understand, and support environmental conservation efforts, as well as involving local communities in managing the ecotourism destination area.

Community-based ecotourism is an ecotourism business that emphasizes the active role of the community. This is based on the fact that people know about nature and culture, which has potential and selling points as a tourist attractions, so community involvement

is absolute. The community-based ecotourism pattern recognizes the rights of local communities to manage tourism activities in areas they own customarily or as managers (Arif et al., 2022). Having a community-based ecotourism pattern does not mean that the community will run its own ecotourism business. Ecotourism is an essential sector in development. Good ecotourism management will produce several benefits in various aspects, such as creating job opportunities, increasing income while accelerating the distribution of community income, increasing government tax revenues and regional levies, and encouraging increased investment from the tourism industry sector and other economic sectors (Huang, Chan, & Hsieh, 2022).

The economic sector for the lower middle class, namely micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), is also a matter of great concern. Because MSMEs are small-scale business activities that encourage the development of the Indonesian economy. MSMEs have an essential and strategic role in national economic development. In Indonesia, the MSME sector is considered capable of being the backbone of economic growth (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2022). Based on data from the Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives and MSMEs in 2020, 98.7 percent of businesses in Indonesia are micro-enterprises. Currently, businesses face uncertainty, competition in a competitive environment, and unfavorable conditions, so it becomes a challenge for MSMEs. MSMEs are more influential on any changes in their environment compared to large companies. MSMEs, in a sustainable manner, must be able to find ways to survive, grow, and be competitive (Nuvriasari, Suyanto, & Azman, 2022).

Common marketing activities are unsuitable for MSMEs, and they must change their marketing methods from standard marketing to entrepreneurial marketing as a new idea and activity in marketing. Entrepreneurial marketing is a marketing activity that has limited resources, and the company must survive with creativity. Entrepreneurial marketing combines the concepts of entrepreneurship and marketing (Nijssen & Mullick, 2023). Every marketer can take opportunities in the market, for instance, how to increase revenue and market share. Amid the uncertainty of environmental factors, the government should encourage the strengthening of MSME management by improving the quality of human resources through entrepreneurship promotion, vocational training, business development services, use of technology, quality standards, and product certification (Amjad, 2022). MSMEs are significant in national economic development, especially for developing countries like Indonesia. Its essential role is evident in the ability of MSMEs to absorb productive workers. In addition, the income of MSMEs is one of the pillars of GDP, which is very significant for the national economy. For this reason, the government always focuses on developing MSMEs.

In principle, entrepreneurship is not only intended for those who open a business. However, the basic concept can be used in all aspects of social life. Indeed, many perceptions that juxtapose the concept of entrepreneurship are only limited to individuals who open businesses (Cunningham et al., 2023). Broadly, entrepreneurship includes the entire process of life in identifying, developing, and bringing a vision to life in the form of innovative ideas and the ability to see opportunities to implement them in everyday life. Small entrepreneurs widely use this approach in seeking new opportunities based on limited resources to deal with this uncertain and even unreliable situation. The results of the research paper also show that only the fifth hypothesis is rejected. This means that environmental factors, especially internal ones, must go through entrepreneurial marketing to positively influence the business performance of MSMEs (Putra & Darmawan, 2022; Chandrika & Setyawati, 2023).

Despite growing interest in the study of the co-creation concept in the service sector, developments in the field of sustainable tourism have been limited to date, and the need to investigate the factors that influence customers' decision to participate in activities related to sustainable practices of co-creation remains present. Value is co-created when the customer defines the service offered through knowledge exchange, co-design, and

shared service processes or when the client utilizes the same service twice and shares the experience. According to the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) theory, Hadi (2023) describes co-creation in tourism as the evaluation of the relevance of the service by the interested parties based on what is contributed and what is done through collaboration. As a result, value is co-created from a sustainability standpoint when tourists participate in sustainable practices, valuing their relevance and contribution and getting active in their implementation through cooperation.

METHOD

Qualitative research was used as an approach in this research. Qualitative research is a method to understand and explain in-depth social phenomena or human behavior (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The paradigm used in this research is constructivist, also known as the interpretative research paradigm. This paradigm aims to capture subjective norms and realities that occur in society (Kunjuraman et al., 2022).

Data collection methods used in-depth interviews and field observations. The data source used is primary data, or data sources obtained directly from sources. Kaur and Kumar (2020) stated that to conduct in-depth interviews, the smallest sample can be used is one source. However, it is recommended to conduct more than one in-depth interview because it helps provide more meaningful insights and achieve research objectives. Therefore, this research conducted in-depth interviews with seven sources heads of tourism awareness groups (POKDARWIS) from seven community-based ecotourism (CBET) tourist destinations in western and central Indonesia. The CBETs used as samples can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Research Location

Location	Province	Ecotourism	Award
Western Part of Indonesia	Yogyakarta	1. Nglangeran Ancient Volcano Karst Ecotourism	Best Tourism Village from UNWTO in 2021
		2. Nglingsgo Pine Forest Ecotourism	Pesona Indonesia Award for Ecotourism Category in 2018
		3. Pancoh Ecotourism Village	Third Place in Ecotourism Village in Yogyakarta in 2016
	Malang	4. Bamboo Forest Ecotourism Boonpring	Malang City's Leading Ecotourism Village in 2022
Middle Part of Indonesia	Bali	1. Wanasari Mangrove Ecotourism	Labdha Kertya Award from the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education in 2019
		2. Tegalalang Ecotourism Village	BCA Tourism Village Award in 2022
	West Nusa Tenggara	3. Rinjani Flora Fauna Ecotourism	UNESCO Global Geopark in 2018

The measuring instrument used in conducting interviews refers to the measuring instrument recently developed by Rumangkit et al. (2023). The questions refer to the factors: proactive orientation, customer intensity, innovation, risk management, value creation, meaningful work, tourist happiness, revisit intention, community resources identification, etc. Data analysis used in this research used NVIVO version 14 software.

Result and Discussion

This research explores the critical factors of CBET governance so that these factors become an essential concern for CBET managers. The results of coding and extraction from in-depth interviews and analysis using NVIVO 14, found that nine key factors are the focus of CBET managers, namely Entrepreneurial Marketing, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Environmental Management, Local Hero Leadership (Leadership Empowerment), Smart Tourism, Sustainability Tourism Performance, Technology Infrastructure, Co-Creation Behavior, and Ecotourism Management. The NVIVO 14 coding results can be seen in Figure 1.

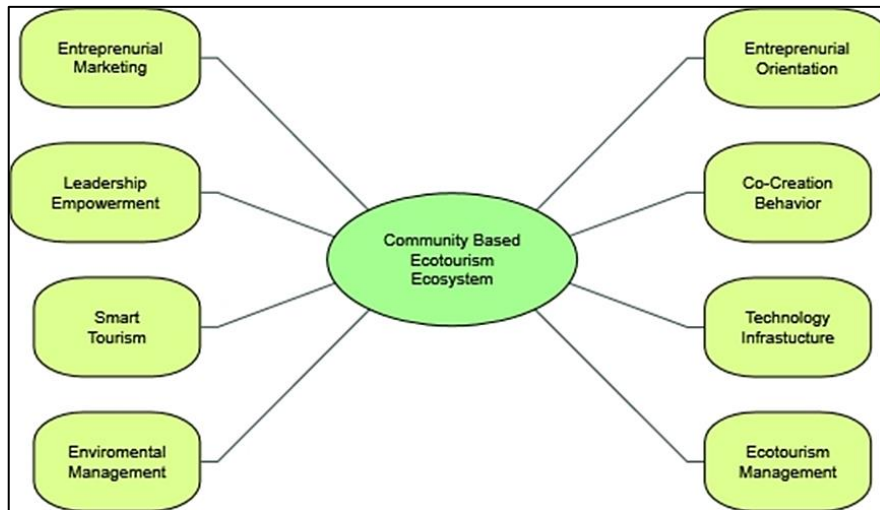


Figure 1. Importance Factors Ecosystem Management CBET

The first finding shows that entrepreneurial marketing is an important factor in sustainable CBET management. Entrepreneurial marketing refers to a marketing approach adopted by entrepreneurs or companies that is highly innovative, flexible, and growth-oriented (Sarwoko and Nurfarida, 2021). This approach often includes more experimental marketing strategies, emphasizing creativity, adaptability, and orientation to business opportunities (Buccieri et al., 2023). The results of data analysis show that in the CBET context, there are several dimensions that form entrepreneurial marketing, namely product innovation, edutourism, local art, and new destinations.

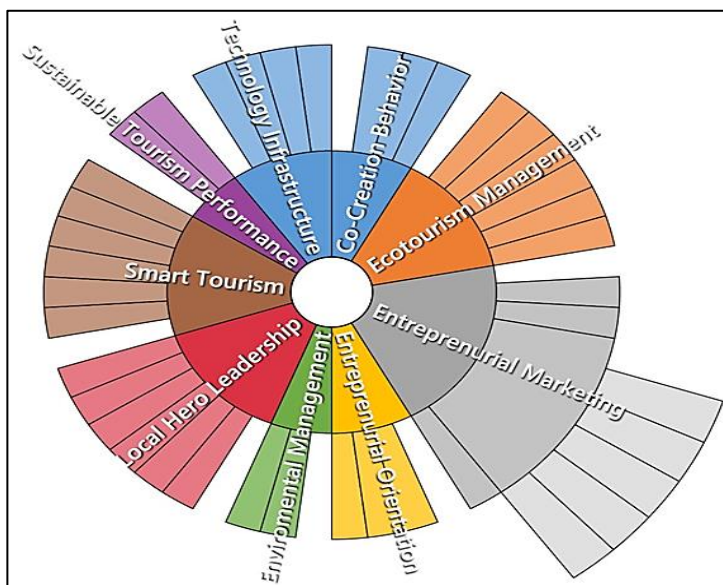


Figure 2. Output Image from nVivo 14

CBET is able to offer something unique through product innovation, traditional art, building new tourist destinations, and the educational side of tourism, which will provide positive emotions and deep memorable memories for tourists. For example, in Nglangeran Ancient Volcano Karst Ecotourism, Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta, the tourism awareness group built a new destination in the form of a chocolate house and batik house, where apart from tourists being offered products based on local wisdom, tourists can also make their own batik and chocolate, so there are activities or educational activities that can provide a unique experience for tourists.

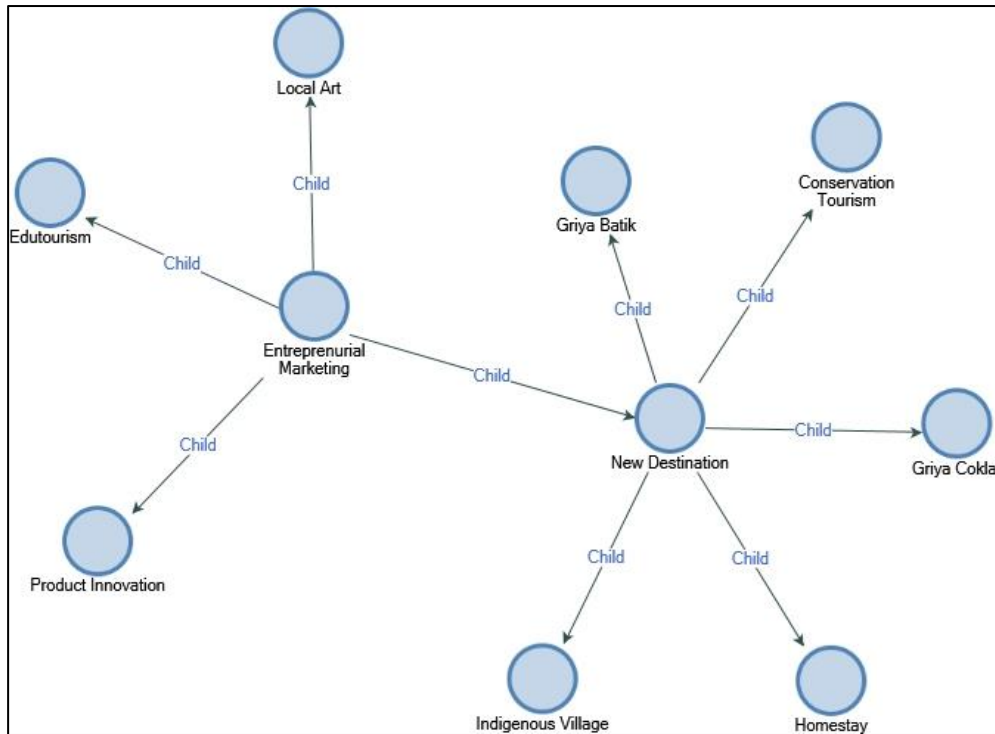


Figure 3. Factors Forming Entrepreneurial Marketing

Another finding from this research is that leadership empowerment or local hero leadership is an important factor for the sustainability of CBET. Leadership is a concept that refers to efforts to empower organizational members or employees. Leadership empowerment emphasizes equipping members with the knowledge, skills, authority, and support to make effective decisions. Empowerment leaders tend to be more confident and can influence others more effectively. The results of data processing show that leadership empowerment in the CBET context consists of several dimensions, namely Deliberation, Nurturing, Training, Comparative Study, Distribution Justice, and Learning Motivation.

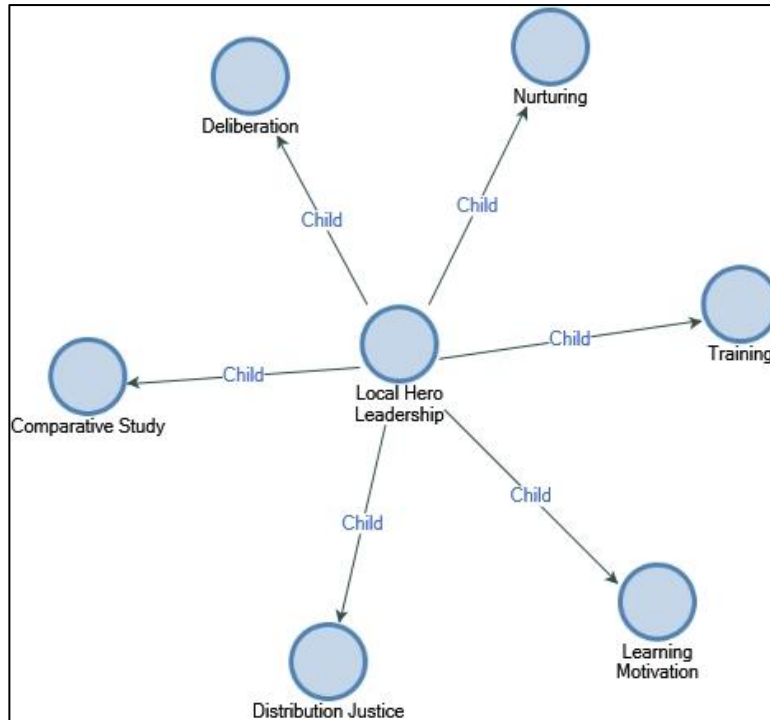


Figure 4. Factors Forming Local Hero Leadership

Leadership plays a very important role in the development and sustainability of CBET (Yulianeu et al., 2021). Effective leadership in this context can help ensure that community-based ecotourism runs well, providing maximum benefits for local communities and protecting the natural environment (Elbaz & Haddoud, 2017). Strong leadership will facilitate important decision-making processes regarding CBET development and management. Additionally, leaders can help develop a shared vision and long-term goals for CBET that can motivate the community and other stakeholders to work together. This vision can include the development of sustainable ecotourism and have a positive impact on local communities (Kunjuraman, 2022).

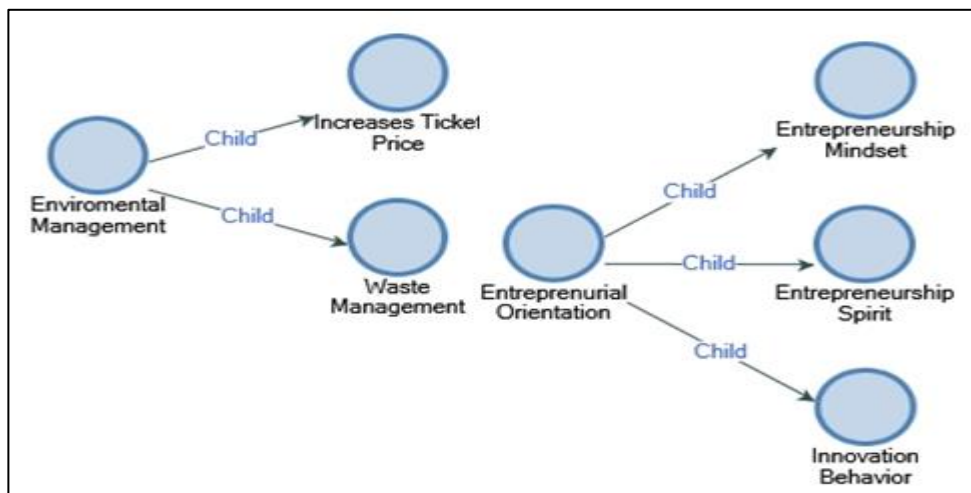


Figure 5. Factors Forming Environmental Management and Entrepreneurial Orientation

Other findings show that environmental management and entrepreneurial orientation are essential to CBET governance. Environmental management refers to strategies carried out to protect, preserve, and care for the natural environment and the natural resources contained therein. In the context of CBET, environmental management is formed by two dimensions, namely waste management and increasing ticket prices. Apart from that,

another essential factor that needs to be considered in managing CBET is entrepreneurial orientation, which is formed by an entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial spirit, and innovative behavior (Rumangkit & Hadi, 2023).

Environmental management will have an impact on the development and sustainability of ecotourism. Environmental management is essential in protecting and preserving the natural environment and resources, which are attractive for ecotourism (Liu et al., 2022). Through sustainable environmental management practices, ecotourism can ensure that destinations remain intact and beautiful for current and future generations to enjoy (Ouyang et al., 2019). In addition, ecotourism can reduce negative impacts on local ecosystems. This includes reducing pollution, environmental damage, and excessive use of resources (Sun et al., 2021).

Apart from that, entrepreneurial orientation is a concept that refers to the attitudes, behavior, and direction needed to develop a business. It includes several factors such as innovation, risk-taking, proactiveness, opportunity orientation, and results orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation influences various businesses and industries, including ecotourism (Tang et al., 2020). Ecotourism managers with solid business orientation will be more likely to develop innovative ideas in natural resource management and sustainable tourism development (Luu, 2021). They can create unique and sustainable travel experiences that attract environmentally-conscious travelers (Roy and Chowdhury, 2021). Entrepreneurial orientation encourages ecotourism businesses to proactively seek new opportunities, including opportunities to develop nature conservation programs, environmental education, or differentiated ecotourism experiences. They may be more inclined to adapt to environmental and market changes (Ruiz-Ortega et al., 2021).

Another critical factor in the CBET governance ecosystem is smart tourism. The concept of smart tourism is a concept that prioritizes the intensive use of technology to improve travel experiences and improve the quality of services provided by tourist destinations to tourists. Based on the results of interviews conducted and data analysis, six dimensions make up smart tourism, namely cashless, e-ticketing, digital marketing, data security, data integration, and big data.

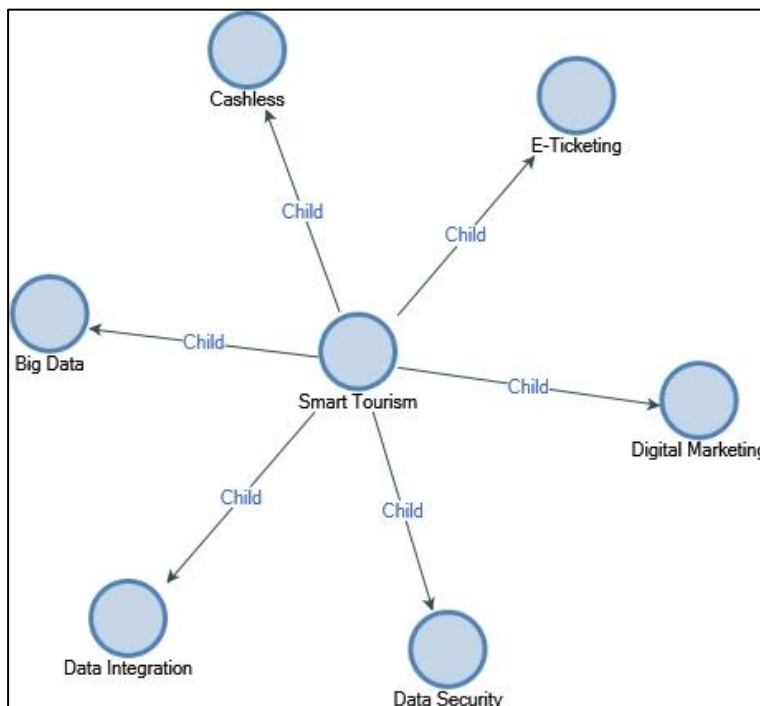


Figure 6. Factors Forming Smart Tourism

Smart Tourism in ecotourism refers to using intelligent technology and innovation to enhance travel experiences in natural and sustainable environments (Shafiee et al., 2019). The aim is to preserve natural beauty and ecosystems while providing economic and social benefits for local communities and tourists (Gelter et al., 2021). For example, one implementation of smart tourism is e-ticketing. E-ticketing systems will make it easier for travelers to plan and pay for their trips, reducing bureaucracy and minimizing the environmental impact of paper printing. Applying the smart tourism concept to ecotourism can help preserve natural ecosystems and improve travel experiences. However, the use of technology in ecotourism must be carefully integrated to minimize negative impacts on the environment and local culture.

The research results show that other factors that are key for CBET to achieve sustainability are co-creation behavior and technology infrastructure. In the co-creation factor, there are three forming dimensions, namely collaboration with governance, collaboration with universities, and community collaboration. Apart from that, the technology used in smart tourism is server, tower, provider, and network.

Co-creation in ecotourism is an approach in which various stakeholders, such as tourists, local communities, government, and tourism entrepreneurs, actively collaborate in planning, developing, and managing ecotourism destinations (Chan and Saikim, 2022). The co-creation concept aims to create an ecotourism experience that is more sustainable, interesting, and beneficial for all stakeholders (Buhalis and Sinarta, 2019). One form of Co-Creation in the CBET context is where tourism awareness groups collaborate with universities to develop technology in ecotourism destinations. For example, in the Boonprong Ecotourism Village, Malang, the management collaborates with private and state universities to create a new destination in the form of freshwater fish cultivation, which can become a unique destination for tourists.

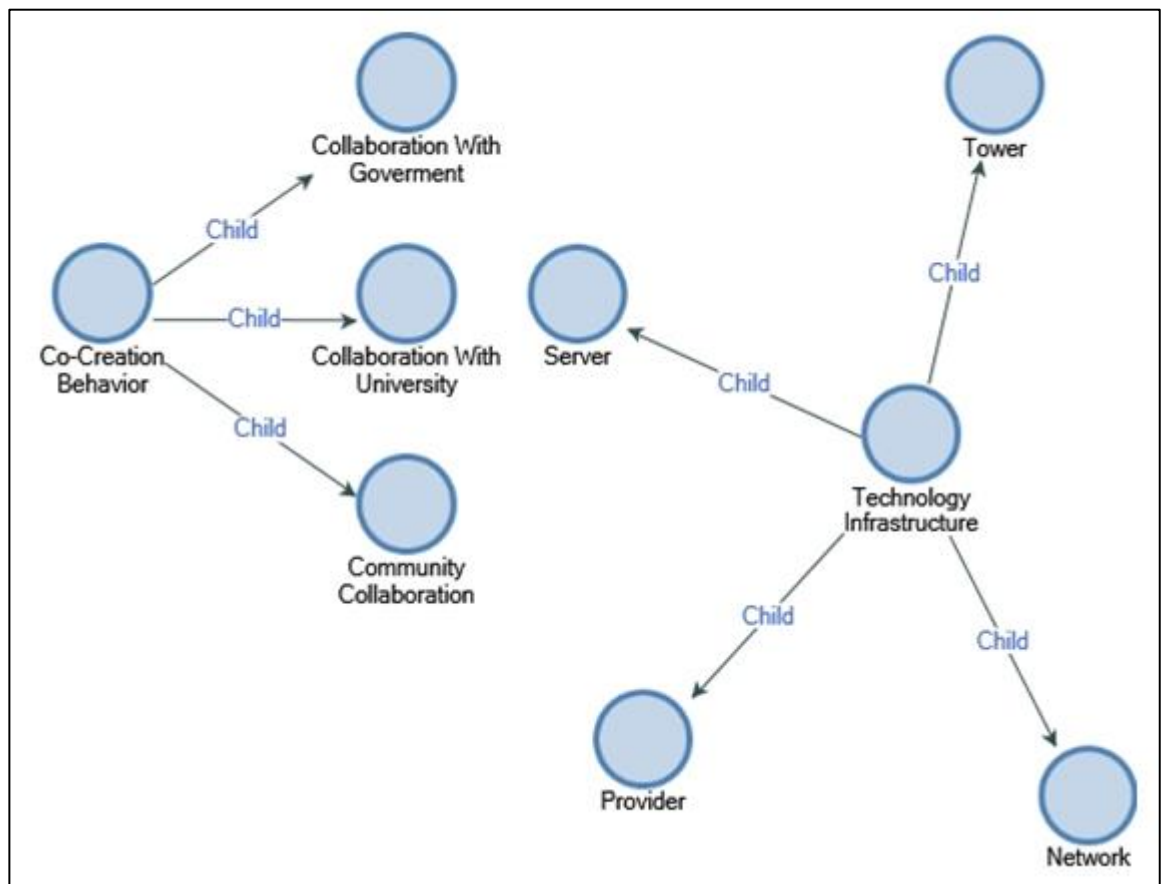


Figure 7. Factors Forming Co-Creation and Technology Infrastructure

The final finding in this research is that ecotourism management is an essential factor in CBET governance. Several dimensions that form ecotourism management are Accessibility, Hub Tourism, Profit Sharing, Self-Help Community, Product Certification, and Community Empowerment. Through ecotourism management, it is hoped that CBET will achieve sustainable performance because, with good ecotourism management, it can improve the quality of services provided to tourists and improve the image of CBET destinations.

Ecotourism Management is essential for the sustainability of ecotourism. By regulating tourism activities, ecotourism management can help protect the natural ecosystem, wildlife, and flora of ecotourism destinations (Fallah & Ocampo, 2021). This is important to prevent environmental damage due to excessive exploitation. In addition, ecotourism management can bring economic and social benefits to local communities. By ensuring that ecotourism revenues are shared relatively and local communities are involved in decision-making regarding ecotourism destinations, ecotourism management can help empower local communities (Fistiningrum & Harini, 2021). Ecotourism management can help create meaningful and sustainable travel experiences for visitors (Bouwer et al., 2022). This includes organizing activities that allow visitors to interact with nature and local culture in a way that respects and supports conservation.

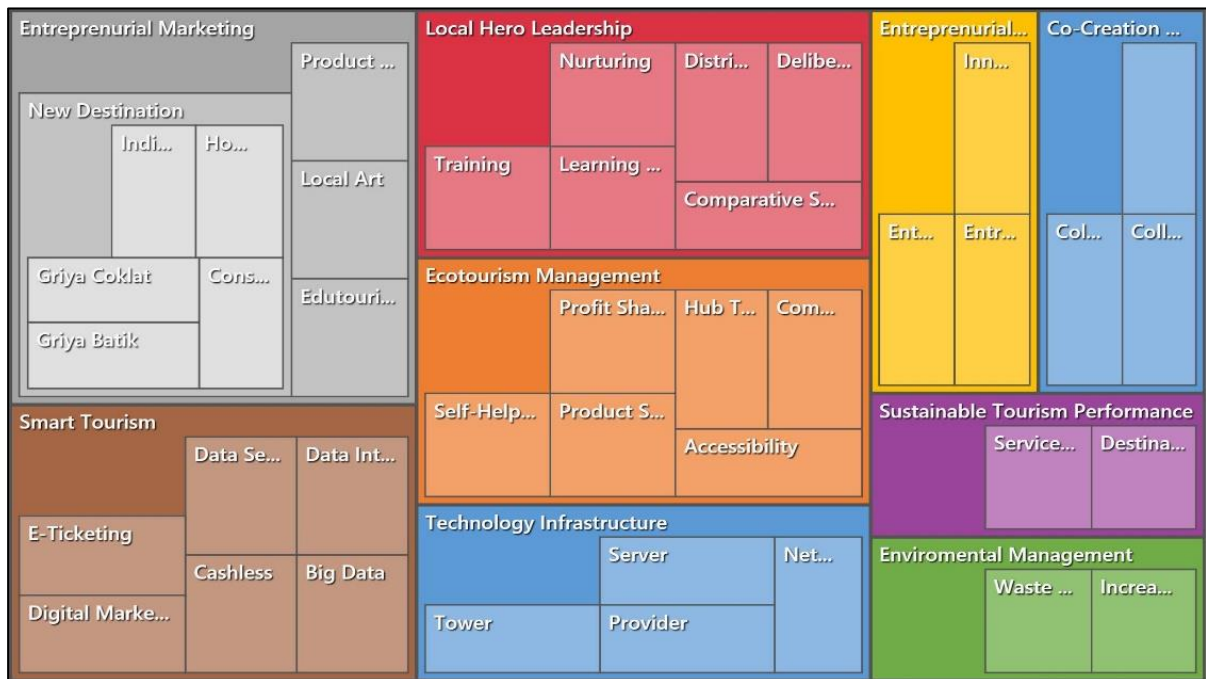


Figure 8. Memos Management CBET Framework

CONCLUSION

Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) is one of the tourist destinations that the country can rely on to increase foreign exchange. Therefore, the CBET governance ecosystem must be carried out well to support sustainable ecotourism performance. Based on the results of data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that in order for CBET to have good performance, it is necessary to pay attention to factors, namely Entrepreneurial Marketing, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Environmental Management, Local Hero Leadership (Leadership Empowerment), Smart Tourism, Sustainability Tourism Performance, Technology Infrastructure, Co-Creation Behavior, and Ecotourism Management. Through these factors, ecotourism is expected to have a good business ecosystem so that it attracts tourists to come to visit or encourages revisit intention by these tourists.

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