

Marine Tourism Promotion and Local Business Participation in Konawe Kepulauan: Qualitative Evidence

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ABSTRAK

The study purpose was to analyze marine tourism promotion and local business participation in Konawe Kepulauan, Indonesia. This small-island regency has coastal and nature-based attractions, including Pantai Kampa and Air Terjun Tumburano, yet destination competitiveness remains shaped by promotion capacity, infrastructure readiness, and community participation. Materials and methods. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach based on interviews with key local-government agencies and documentary data on visitor flows, tourism retribution, and destination development. Results. The findings show that visitor arrivals increased from 5,060 in 2025 to 7,308 by May 2026, indicating that destination development and promotion have begun to improve market visibility. Local participation appears through Pokdarwis-supported destination management, parking services, food and beverage activities, gazebo rental, and emerging homestay initiatives. However, facilities, road access, sanitation, information boards, accommodation readiness, and structured digital promotion still require stronger institutional support. Conclusions. The study proposes a participatory tourism-business pathway in which digital promotion, community-based services, and small-scale local enterprises are integrated to strengthen sustainable marine tourism competitiveness.

Keywords: marine tourism, destination promotion, local business, community participation, tourism competitiveness

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PENDAHULUAN

Tourism promotion and local business participation are essential for small-island destinations seeking to convert natural attractions into sustainable economic value. Coastal and marine destinations often possess strong natural assets but face weak market visibility, limited infrastructure, and fragmented local service ecosystems. Digital platforms, destination branding, and community-based services have become increasingly important because tourists now search, compare, and evaluate destinations through online information and social media before visiting (Tran & Rudolf, 2022; Cheung et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2013). At the same time, local residents and small businesses are not passive beneficiaries; they shape the visitor experience through transport, food, accommodation, guiding, cleanliness, and destination stewardship.

Konawe Kepulauan offers an important case for understanding this issue. The regency has marine and nature-based attractions such as Pantai Kampa and Air Terjun Tumburano, as well as other potential destinations including Kali Mosolo, Kampak, and Kelapa Kuning. Field evidence indicates that destination development has begun to produce results. Visitor arrivals increased from 5,060 in 2025 to 7,308 by May 2026. This increase suggests that promotion, accessibility improvement, and destination management have begun to improve tourism visibility. However, the same evidence also indicates that infrastructure, amenities, sanitation, information boards, and business readiness remain uneven.

The literature on digital destination branding shows that social media and online communities can shape tourist emotions, destination image, co-creation, and intention to visit (Tran & Rudolf, 2022; Cheung et al., 2021). Research on smart tourism and tourism big data also suggests that tourism

promotion is increasingly integrated with digital information, service innovation, and business ecosystems (Gretzel et al., 2015; Li et al., 2018). Meanwhile, community-based tourism studies emphasize that local participation can strengthen economic benefits, resident support, and sustainable destination management (Manaf et al., 2018; Nugroho & Numata, 2022; Han et al., 2019; Krittayarungroj et al., 2023). These bodies of literature are often discussed separately, yet small-island tourism requires their integration: promotion must attract visitors, while local business participation must ensure that visitor flows generate inclusive economic benefits.

This manuscript therefore analyzes marine tourism promotion and local business participation in Konawe Kepulauan. The study asks how promotion efforts and local participation support marine tourism development and what constraints must be addressed to strengthen destination competitiveness. The contribution of the study lies in connecting promotional visibility, community-based services, and local business development in a small-island destination context. This angle is important for digital business-oriented tourism research because online visibility only creates economic value when it is supported by on-site service capacity and local enterprises that can capture visitor spending.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The approach was appropriate because the research focused on interpreting promotion practices, local participation, destination constraints, and business implications based on field information and institutional documents. The study was conducted in Konawe Kepulauan, Southeast Sulawesi, in June 2026.

Data were collected from interviews with key local-government informants and from documentary sources. The Tourism Office provided information on destination development, promotion, visitor flows, homestay initiatives, and collaboration with community actors. The Regional Finance Agency provided tourism retribution data as an indirect indicator of destination use. The Fisheries Office provided contextual information on maritime economic development and the limits of fisheries-based revenue. Secondary data included visitor statistics for 2025 and January-May 2026, retribution data from 2022 to May 2026, and field documentation.

The data were analyzed through reduction, display, and verification. The analysis focused on four themes: destination visibility, visitor growth, local business participation, and constraints on tourism competitiveness. Source triangulation was conducted across the three agencies, while technique triangulation compared interview findings with official documents and field evidence. The study does not claim to measure digital marketing performance through platform analytics; digital promotion is discussed as a strategic implication supported by tourism marketing literature and by the need to expand destination visibility.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Destination assets and the need for stronger promotion

The core tourism assets of Konawe Kepulauan are coastal, marine, and nature-based attractions. Pantai Kampa and Air Terjun Tumburano are the two destinations currently contributing directly to tourism retribution. Other destinations such as Kali Mosolo, Kampak, and Kelapa Kuning are mentioned as potential assets that could be developed further. This indicates that the regency has a portfolio of attractions, but not all of them have reached the same level of management readiness. In destination marketing terms, natural attractiveness must be transformed into marketable experiences through access, amenities, information, and consistent promotion.

The field evidence shows that promotion is considered a central strategy by the Tourism Office. This is consistent with digital tourism research, which emphasizes that destination visibility is shaped by online information, social media content, user-generated narratives, and destination brand communities (Iran & Rudolf, 2022; Cheung et al., 2021; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013). For Konawe Kepulauan, promotion should not only introduce attractions but also communicate practical information such as access routes, safety, facilities, prices, local services, and available

experiences. Without this information, potential visitors may perceive the destination as attractive but uncertain.

Visitor growth as evidence of emerging market visibility

Visitor statistics indicate that the destination has begun to gain stronger market visibility. Table 1 shows that total visitor arrivals increased from 5,060 in 2025 to 7,308 by May 2026. Local visitors remained dominant, but domestic visitors increased sharply from 964 to 3,085. International arrivals remained small, increasing from five to eight visitors. The data imply that the immediate opportunity is domestic and inter-regional market expansion rather than international tourism.

Table 1. Visitor growth and emerging market visibility

Category	2025	2026*	Change
Local	4,091	4,215	+124
Domestic	964	3,085	+2,121
International	5	8	+3
Total	5,060	7,308	+2,248

Note: 2026 data are recorded until May. Source: Tourism Office of Konawe Kepulauan, 2026.

Local business participation and community-based services

The findings show that tourism development is not conducted solely by the government. The Tourism Office collaborates with Pokdarwis and local communities in destination management. Local participation appears in parking services, gazebo rental, food and beverage sales, informal retail, and the emerging development of homestays. Homestay training is particularly important because it can transform households into tourism service providers and create a more immersive visitor experience. This is relevant to community-based tourism theory, which emphasizes local benefits, resident involvement, and destination stewardship (Manaf et al., 2018; Nugroho & Numata, 2022; Han et al., 2019; Dangi & Jamal, 2016).

The local business role remains small-scale but strategically important. In small-island tourism, visitor spending can circulate through micro-enterprises, family-based services, and informal businesses around destinations. When local residents participate in destination management, tourism is more likely to produce direct income for communities rather than only increasing government retribution. However, this requires basic service standards, cleanliness, safety, hospitality skills, transparent roles, and coordination among government, Pokdarwis, and village-level actors.

Table 2. Thematic evidence on local business participation

Theme	Evidence	Implication
Pokdarwis	Community role in destination management	Shared stewardship
Microbusiness	Food, drinks, parking, gazebo services	Direct local income
Homestay	Training and village tourism potential	Longer visitor stay
Facilities	MCK, waste bins, access, signage gaps	Service quality risk
Promotion	Tourism Office promotion strategy	Wider market reach

Digital promotion readiness and business ecosystem integration

The study indicates that promotion is important, but future competitiveness will depend on whether promotion becomes systematic, digital, and connected to local business services. Digital promotion should not be limited to posting attractive images. It should provide reliable information about routes, opening hours, ticket prices, sanitation facilities, local foods, homestay options, safety instructions, and contact points. For emerging destinations, this type of information reduces

uncertainty and increases visitor confidence. It also helps local businesses become visible before tourists arrive.

A destination website, official social media accounts, short-form video content, Google Maps optimization, and digital visitor feedback can be developed gradually. The most important principle is consistency. Digital tourism promotion becomes valuable when it is connected to real service quality at the destination. If online content promises beautiful experiences but the site lacks basic amenities, visitors may respond negatively through electronic word-of-mouth. Therefore, digital promotion and destination upgrading must move together.

Local business participation can be integrated into this digital ecosystem. Food sellers, parking managers, gazebo renters, homestay owners, boat operators, and local guides can be introduced through official destination content. This strategy helps tourists plan their trip while allowing local businesses to gain visibility. Over time, digital promotion can support more formal local tourism packages, including beach visits, waterfall experiences, local cuisine, cultural stories, and homestay-based village tourism.

Participatory development pathway for marine tourism business

The findings suggest that a participatory pathway is more appropriate than a purely government-centered model. The local government has responsibility for infrastructure, regulation, and promotion, but the daily quality of visitor experience is shaped by community actors. Pokdarwis can function as a bridge between government programs and local residents. Through this role, Pokdarwis can help organize cleanliness, parking, visitor information, safety awareness, and microbusiness coordination.

The development of homestays is a strategic opportunity. Homestays can extend visitor stay, increase household income, and differentiate Konawe Kepulauan from destinations that only offer short visits. However, homestays need training in hospitality, hygiene, booking communication, simple financial records, and guest safety. The same applies to food and beverage businesses, which require basic product quality, pricing transparency, and cleanliness. These small service improvements are essential for transforming visitor flows into sustainable local business outcomes.

The proposed pathway consists of five stages. The first stage is basic destination readiness through minimum facilities and cleanliness. The second stage is community service capacity through Pokdarwis and microbusiness training. The third stage is digital visibility through coordinated content and online information. The fourth stage is business packaging through integrated local products, homestays, and visitor services. The fifth stage is feedback-based improvement through visitor reviews and monthly evaluation.

Table 3. Participatory tourism-business pathway

Stage	Core action	Business effect
Readiness	Minimum facilities, access, cleanliness	Improved satisfaction
Capacity	Pokdarwis and microbusiness training	Better services
Visibility	Digital content and visitor information	Wider market reach
Packaging	Homestays, food, local products, guiding	Longer spending chain
Feedback	Visitor reviews and monthly evaluation	Continuous improvement

Constraints on destination competitiveness

Despite positive visitor growth, destination competitiveness remains constrained by infrastructure and amenity gaps. Several sites still require better road access, sanitation facilities, waste bins, gazebos, information boards, parking organization, and visitor safety arrangements. These constraints reduce

the quality of the tourism experience and may weaken repeat visits. In addition, limited local budgets mean that destination upgrading must be phased and prioritized.

The most important managerial issue is that promotion may increase demand faster than the destination can serve visitors. This is a common risk in emerging destinations. If promotion succeeds but facilities remain poor, visitor dissatisfaction can spread quickly through social media and online word-of-mouth. Therefore, digital promotion should be synchronized with service readiness. Another constraint is the absence of an integrated business map. Tourists need to know not only where to visit but also what services are available around the destination.

The local government can develop a simple inventory of local businesses, including food stalls, transport providers, parking managers, homestays, local guides, and product sellers. This inventory can become the basis for digital content, visitor information boards, and community training. It also enables policymakers to see which parts of the visitor economy are still weak.

Tourism business model for small-island competitiveness

The findings suggest that Konawe Kepulauan needs a tourism business model that combines destination promotion, community participation, and service standardization. Promotion creates awareness, but awareness must be converted into visits. Visits create spending, but spending must be captured by local businesses. Local businesses generate income, but income must be accompanied by environmental stewardship so that destination quality is maintained. This chain shows that promotion is not a separate activity; it is part of a broader tourism-business ecosystem.

The first component of the model is digital visibility. The Tourism Office and community actors should build a consistent digital identity for priority destinations. The second component is local service readiness. Pokdarwis, homestays, food sellers, parking services, and facility managers should be trained to provide basic hospitality and transparent pricing. The third component is experience packaging. Tourists should be offered clear experiences, such as beach recreation, waterfall visits, local culinary products, village stay, and cultural storytelling. The fourth component is feedback-based improvement. Visitor complaints and reviews should be recorded and used to improve infrastructure and services.

This model is suitable for emerging destinations because it does not require large-scale investment at the beginning. It starts with basic facilities, clear information, and community service readiness. As visitor numbers grow, the local government can increase investment in more complex facilities. The approach also reduces the risk of unequal benefit distribution because local enterprises are included from the early stage of destination development. Therefore, marine tourism promotion should be treated as a business ecosystem strategy rather than merely a communication activity.

Research contribution and limitations

This study contributes to tourism business research by showing that promotion, local participation, and business readiness must be analyzed together. A destination can attract attention through promotion, but sustainable economic outcomes depend on whether local actors can provide services and capture spending. In Konawe Kepulauan, visitor growth is a positive sign, but the business ecosystem still needs stronger organization. This finding supports the view that tourism competitiveness is not only about natural beauty; it is also about service networks, information quality, and community capacity.

The study also contributes to the practical discussion of digital tourism in emerging destinations. Digital promotion should be adopted, but it must be realistic. The first step is not advanced artificial intelligence or complex analytics; it is accurate destination information, consistent social media identity, updated maps, visible local services, and responsive communication. Once these basic elements are available, the destination can gradually move toward more advanced digital tools such as visitor databases, feedback dashboards, and data-driven promotional campaigns.

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The data were collected primarily from government informants and official documents. Direct perspectives from tourists, Pokdarwis members, homestay owners, food sellers, transport providers, and youth content creators were not included. The study also did not measure online engagement metrics. Future studies should combine

qualitative interviews with social media analytics, visitor surveys, and local business income data to provide a more comprehensive assessment of how promotion and community participation affect destination competitiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that marine tourism promotion and local business participation have begun to strengthen destination development in Konawe Kepulauan. Visitor arrivals increased significantly from 5,060 in 2025 to 7,308 by May 2026, indicating emerging market visibility. Local participation through Pokdarwis, parking services, food and beverage activities, gazebo rental, and homestay initiatives shows that marine tourism can generate local business opportunities beyond public retribution. However, destination competitiveness remains constrained by road access, sanitation, waste facilities, information boards, accommodation readiness, and limited promotion capacity. The study recommends an integrated strategy that connects infrastructure readiness, community-based service standards, digital promotion, and local enterprise development. Future research should include direct interviews with tourists, Pokdarwis, homestay owners, and micro-enterprises to measure the business impact of marine tourism more comprehensively.

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