

Encouraging Pro-Environmental Behavior Through Environmental Communication Based on Tri Hita Karana

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Abstract

Tri Hita Karana (THK), a core Balinese philosophy emphasizing harmony between religious, human, and environmental values, is a guiding principle in tourism development and environmental communication. This study analyzed the effectiveness of environmental communication practices rooted in THK at Melasti Beach. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data collection methods included observation, document analysis, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders such as the customary leader of Ungasan Village, Melasti Beach managers, local community members, and tourists. Data triangulation was used to validate findings and ensure reliability. The research findings reveal that environmental communication based on THK principles has effectively fostered pro-environmental behaviors among stakeholders. By integrating spiritual reverence, social cohesion, and ecological care, implementing THK-oriented communication strategies at Melasti Beach has preserved the natural environment and strengthened community engagement and cultural integrity. This study underscores the potential of local wisdom like THK to inspire sustainable tourism practices and environmental stewardship in Bali and beyond.

Keywords: Local Wisdom, Tri Hita Karana, Environmental Communication, Pro-environmental Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's rich cultural diversity has given rise to a wealth of local wisdom values that define the unique characteristics of each region. Local wisdom encompasses the knowledge and values communities preserve and is a guiding principle for their way of life (Setyaningsih et al., 2020; Uspayanti et al., 2021). In Bali, one such philosophy that underpins the daily lives of its people is Tri Hita Karana (THK). Rooted in the principles of harmony, THK comprises three interconnected aspects: *Parahyangan* (spiritual connection with God), *Pawongan* (human relationships), and *Palemahan* (environmental balance). (Wibisana & Dewi, 2023; Primayanti & Puspita, 2022) noted that implementing THK fosters welfare and sustainability, making it a vital framework for addressing contemporary challenges such as environmental preservation.

Environmental communication, which involves delivering messages aimed at environmental conservation, is an essential tool for fostering awareness and action. Humans consciously and unconsciously engage in environmental communication daily (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018). (Wu et al., 2021) highlight that this form of communication emerges in response to environmental crises, providing a means to raise awareness about the importance of protecting natural resources. It encompasses principles and techniques to prevent environmental degradation and promote sustainable management (Chandrabuwono & Atika, 2019; Zikargae, 2018). Integrating local wisdom into environmental communication strengthens individual beliefs and encourages collective action for environmental sustainability. Studies have shown that environmental communication rooted in local wisdom preserves natural ecosystems and mitigates disaster risks (Yasir et

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al., 2022; Suryandari & Wijayani, 2021), demonstrating its effectiveness in addressing pressing environmental issues

Environmental challenges are particularly prominent in nature-based tourism, where irresponsible human behavior often leads to ecosystem degradation (Martin-Ortega et al., 2022). However, (Han, 2020) argues that these issues can be mitigated through strategies that promote environmentally friendly or pro-environmental behavior—defined as conscious actions to protect and sustain the environment (Tian & Liu, 2022). In this context, environmental communication serves as a catalyst, inspiring individuals to adopt sustainable practices in tourist destinations. By conveying educational and persuasive messages, environmental communication can encourage all stakeholders to embrace pro-environmental behaviors, contributing to the long-term sustainability of natural attractions (He et al., 2023). When grounded in local wisdom, environmental communication further facilitates tourism managers in guiding stakeholders toward a shared vision of environmental stewardship.

Melasti Beach, a natural tourist destination in Bali, exemplifies the application of environmental communication based on THK. The implementation of THK at Melasti Beach has been instrumental in rehabilitating its ecosystems and promoting sustainable tourism development (Julyantara & Sunarta, 2019). While the destination has attracted significant domestic and international tourists, irresponsible environmental behavior remains a pressing concern (Guo & Pesonen, 2022). This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of environmental communication at Melasti Beach in fostering pro-environmental behavior among stakeholders. The findings will offer actionable recommendations for optimizing environmental communication practices based on local wisdom, providing a model that can be replicated in other natural tourist destinations across Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local Wisdom

Local wisdom reflects communities' culture and knowledge (Ramanta & Samsuri, 2020; Widanita et al., 2021). It is an essential source of guidance and ethical standards, fostering harmonious relationships among individuals and nature (Eko & Putranto, 2021). Embedded in a profound respect for the natural environment, local wisdom is often regarded as a key component of community identity and environmental harmony (Rahayu et al., 2024). These values frequently resolve issues by prioritizing mutual interest and respecting local customs (Diab et al., 2022; Khosyi'ah & Rusyana, 2022). For instance, in Bali, local wisdom is deeply rooted in strong customs and culture, creating a balance between ethical, religious, humanitarian, and environmental values (Primayanti & Puspita, 2022).

Tri Hita Karana (THK)

Balinese culture is founded on Tri Hita Karana (THK), or the "Three Causes of Prosperity," which emphasizes harmonious relationships across three dimensions: Parahyangan (spiritual connection with God), Pawongan (human connections), and Palemahan (environmental harmony) (Kertih & Widiana, 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2022; Sriartha et al., 2023). This philosophy reflects the Balinese pursuit of balance between material and spiritual aspects, aligned with the "Moksartham Jagadhita ya ca iti Dharma" principle, meaning prosperity in worldly and spiritual realms (Dewi et al., 2024).

THK extends to the relationship between humans and nature, as expressed through macrocosm (*bhuwana agung*) and microcosm (*bhuwana alit*), which signify the interconnectedness of individuals and the universe. In Balinese Hinduism, nature is considered sacred—a manifestation of the Almighty—and is thus respected and protected (Suryono, 2021). The systematic application of THK principles has been instrumental in the planning and developing of sustainable environmental practices (Astuti et al., 2019). As such, THK serves as a framework for environmental communication to preserve natural resources and foster sustainability.

Environmental Communication

As conceptualized by (Milstein, 2009), environmental communication focuses on improving the relationship between humans and the environment. It encompasses pragmatic and constitutive functions that shape individuals' perceptions and behaviors toward nature (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018). The pragmatic function involves verbal and non—verbal communication strategies that inform, educate, persuade, and warn individuals to protect the environment. For example, campaigns or interpretive signage in tourism destinations serve this purpose. Meanwhile, the constitutive function evokes beliefs, perspectives, and emotions, inspiring individuals to connect with and act on environmental issues through social media content that encourages environmental stewardship.

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of environmental communication based on local wisdom in enhancing environmental conservation. Incorporating cultural values, religious principles, and community traditions fosters deeper engagement and trust (Primayanti & Puspita, 2022; Yasir et al., 2022). Integrating local wisdom into communication reinforces environmental sustainability through binding customary laws and regulations (Yasir et al., 2023). Tools such as symbols, electronic guides, and interpretive signs further support environmental communication in nature tourism (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018). Persuasive communication tailored to local contexts has proven effective in shaping pro-environmental attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors (Fernández-Llamazares et al., 2020; Kidd et al., 2019).

Pro-Environmental Behavior

Pro-environmental behavior refers to actions that consciously protect and sustain the environment. These behaviors, driven by individual responsibility and awareness, aim to reduce negative impacts and promote sustainable resource use (Brown et al., 2019; Li et al., 2022). (Jiang et al., 2021) highlighted the close link between pro-environmental behavior and sustainable tourism development, noting that such behavior fosters compliance with sustainability principles and regulations.

In nature-based tourism, pro-environmental behavior enhances the destination's image as environmentally friendly and contributes to its long-term appeal (Bilynets & Knezevic Cvelbar, 2022). (Bilynets et al., 2023) observed that effective environmental communication increases the likelihood of stakeholders adopting pro-environmental practices. This highlights the need for collaboration among all stakeholders to ensure that communication strategies rooted in local wisdom are successfully implemented to support sustainability goals.

METHODS

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to understand environmental communication based on Tri Hita Karana (THK) at Melasti Beach. According to (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019), the case study method effectively provides a comprehensive perspective on a specific situation by collecting data from multiple viewpoints. Melasti Beach, located in Ungasan Village, Bali, was chosen as the research focus due to its implementation of THK principles in environmental communication and its success in attracting significant domestic and international tourist visitation, with an average of 3,000 to 10,000 tourists daily. Initially used for the Melasti Ceremony, a traditional Hindu prayer ritual conducted before Nyepi (the Balinese Day of Silence), the beach was developed as a tourism destination on July 1, 2018. Integrating THK principles in its development has transformed Melasti Beach into a clean and safe tourist destination, contributing positively to the local economy.

Data Collection Methods

This research collected data using observation, documentation, in-depth interviews, and document studies. To ensure relevance and reliability, a purposive sampling technique was applied to select informants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2019). The informants were categorized into three groups: 1) Key Informants: These are individuals with expert knowledge in tourism and governance, including the customary leader of Ungasan Village and the manager of Melasti Beach; 2) Main Informants: The primary subjects of this study, comprising entrepreneurs and tourists involved in or impacted by environmental communication based on THK; and 3) Supporting Informants: These informants provide additional perspectives, including local community members such as security personnel (*Pecalang*) and janitors.

Informant Profiles

The study involved 12 informants divided across the three categories. Their demographics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1	Informants	Profile
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Initials	Gender	Age	Occupation	Origin			
Key Informants							
DA	Male	53	Customary Leader of Ungasan Village	Ungasan			
WK	Male	43	Melasti Beach Manager	Ungasan			
Main Informants							
WS	Female	58	Micro/small/medium enterprise (MSME)	Ungasan			
KW	Female	55	Micro/small/medium enterprise (MSME)	Ungasan			

Initials	Gender	Age	Occupation	Origin
KA	Male	38	Entrepreneur	Ungasan
SR	Female	25	Tourist	Bekasi
RR	Female	19	Tourist	Indramayu
DB	Female	29	Tourist	Australia
Supporting Informants				
WS	Male	42	Pecalang (Local Security)	Ungasan
BY	Male	57	Pecalang (Local Security)	Ungasan
KT	Male	30	Janitor	Ungasan

Source: Author's finding (2024)

Data Validation

To ensure the validity of the data, this study used triangulation techniques as proposed by (Hair et al., 2019). This method requires corroborating data from multiple sources or periods to ensure reliability. For instance, data obtained from one informant were reconfirmed with others to avoid inconsistencies (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). This triangulated approach validates the data and enriches the study by capturing diverse perspectives.

RESULT

Tri Hita Karana As A Guidance For Tourism Development

Tri Hita Karana (THK), a philosophical concept deeply rooted in Balinese culture, is a foundational guideline for tourism development in Bali (Ginaya et al., 2019). At Melasti Beach, THK is fully integrated into its tourism development, involving all stakeholders in its implementation. This approach fosters a harmonious balance across its three core principles: *Parahyangan* (spiritual harmony), *Pawongan* (social harmony), and *Palemahan* (environmental harmony). The Parahyangan aspect is reflected in the religious practices centered around two temples within the Melasti Beach area, namely Pura Segara and Pura Dalem Palangka. On religious days, prayers are conducted at these temples, and all involved parties, including entrepreneurs and visitors, must wear traditional Balinese attire. During prayer times, business activities are temporarily suspended to honor the spiritual significance of the rituals, ensuring respect for cultural and religious values.

The Pawongan aspect emphasizes harmonious social relationships among stakeholders, including entrepreneurs, management, local security (*pecalang*), janitors, and tourists. Collaboration is fostered through effective communication systems, such as walkie-talkies and messaging groups, to ensure smooth operations. Food and beverage pricing regulations are also implemented to promote fairness among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), preventing conflicts and supporting equitable economic practices. The Palemahan aspect prioritizes environmental conservation. Stakeholders actively maintain the beach's cleanliness, with entrepreneurs responsible for the areas surrounding their businesses. A team of 16 janitors works in two shifts, ensuring the entire beach remains clean and welcoming for visitors. These concerted efforts contribute to Melasti Beach's reputation as a pristine and sustainable tourist destination.

The successful integration of THK at Melasti Beach highlights its pivotal role in achieving balanced and sustainable tourism development. By harmonizing spiritual, social, and environmental values, THK has preserved the cultural and natural heritage of the destination while fostering collaboration among stakeholders. This model offers valuable insights for other destinations seeking to implement sustainable and community-driven tourism practices.

The Implementation of Environmental Communication Based On Local Wisdom

Local wisdom, as a guiding principle for environmental preservation (Yasir et al., 2023), forms the foundation for environmental communication practices. At Melasti Beach, the Palemahan aspect of Tri Hita Karana (THK), which emphasizes harmony between humans and nature, is a reference for implementing effective environmental communication. This approach integrates various strategies to ensure visitors' safety and the beach ecosystem's sustainability. One key method of environmental communication at Melasti Beach is using information boards and symbolic cues. Information boards throughout the area warn tourists about potential natural disasters, while red flags indicate areas with high waves, cautioning visitors against swimming in unsafe zones. These nonverbal messages are strategically placed to promote visitor safety and encourage adaptation to the dynamic natural environment, fostering harmony between humans and nature.

Environmental communication at Melasti Beach also aims to prevent ecosystem degradation. The management has established regulations to ensure that tourism activities do not harm the beach environment.

For example, water sports that involve fuel usage are prohibited to protect the coastal ecosystem's quality. As stated by the manager of Melasti Beach:

"Based on the regulations made by the Ungasan Village, we do not allow water sports activities that use fuel." – WK

This regulation reflects the Palemahan principle, emphasizing the need to protect natural environments from exploitation. By conveying this message to entrepreneurs and stakeholders, the beach management reinforces the importance of sustainable practices to preserve the area's authenticity and ecosystem health.

In addition to preventative measures, environmental communication addresses existing environmental issues. One such issue at Melasti Beach is the lack of adequate waste disposal facilities, which creates challenges for MSME actors operating in the area. The absence of an independent waste processing facility has accumulated temporary waste, causing unpleasant odors near the MSME zone. To address this, MSME actors communicate their concerns to the beach management through messaging platforms like WhatsApp.

"If we have a problem or complaint, we usually communicate it through WhatsApp. Lately, we have had complaints about garbage that has piled up." - WS.

Upon receiving these complaints, the Melasti Beach management collaborates with the customary leader of Ungasan Village to find solutions. This collaboration aligns with Yasir et al. (2023), who emphasize that environmental communication requires mutual understanding and cooperation between communities and local governments. As part of the solution, Ungasan Village has budgeted to develop a Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Waste Management Site (TPS3R) to process waste sustainably.

"In the context of existing complaints, we have budgeted for the creation of TPS3R so that the waste will be managed there." – DA.

This mutual effort to address environmental problems demonstrates the effectiveness of environmental communication based on local wisdom. The collaborative approach not only resolves pressing issues but also strengthens the relationship between stakeholders, ensuring the sustainability of Melasti Beach as a tourist destination. Integrating cultural values, community involvement, and practical strategies highlights the vital role of environmental communication in achieving harmony between human activities and natural preservation.

The Role of Environmental Communication Based On Local Wisdom In Encouraging Pro-Environmental Behavior

Environmental communication is crucial in fostering pro-environmental behavior among stakeholders in tourism destinations. Hawley et al. (2023) assert that environmental communication motivates individuals to engage in environmentally friendly practices. At Melasti Beach, pragmatic environmental communication based on local wisdom, involving informing, requesting, and educating stakeholders (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018), has been implemented effectively by the management to encourage pro-environmental behavior among entrepreneurs. For instance, the management directs entrepreneurs to clean the beach area before their businesses and ensure daily industrial waste disposal. These directives encourage compliance and instill a sense of environmental responsibility among entrepreneurs.

One beach club entrepreneur highlighted the effectiveness of these directives:

"To maintain the cleanliness of the beach environment, we are given directions by the manager to clean the beach area in front of our beach club. Besides that, we also dispose of business waste every day." – KA.

The management's proactive approach has successfully influenced entrepreneurs to adopt sustainable practices, such as transitioning to environmentally friendly equipment made from cassava to minimize pollution. This shift demonstrates how pragmatic environmental communication can inspire behavioral change and promote environmental preservation.

In addition to influencing entrepreneurs, environmental communication at Melasti Beach also targets tourists, encouraging them to adopt pro-environmental behavior during their visits. Nature-based tourism destinations like Melasti Beach offer a unique opportunity to deliver substantial environmental messages that shape tourists' perspectives and actions (He et al., 2023). Constitutive environmental communication—invoking beliefs and values—has been particularly effective in influencing tourists' attitudes and behaviors.

A tourist visiting Melasti Beach shared their perspective:

"I am amazed by Melasti Beach. Looking at the clean beach area and the trash bins everywhere makes me unwilling to contaminate the environment. Since Bali is also known as holy and sacred, I think respecting the environment is a must." – RR.

These sentiments reflect how the cultural and environmental management practices at Melasti Beach foster environmentally responsible behavior. (Hoshyar et al., 2022) noted that tourists' personal beliefs and values significantly influence their pro-environmental behavior. The integration of Balinese cultural values into environmental communication has created a powerful impact on tourists, encouraging them to act responsibly towards the environment. The dual application of pragmatic and constitutive environmental communication by Melasti Beach management has successfully motivated entrepreneurs and tourists to engage in proenvironmental activities. This aligns with the findings of (Tian & Liu, 2022), who emphasize that fostering proenvironmental behavior leads to long-term environmental sustainability. By leveraging local wisdom and culturally grounded communication strategies, Melasti Beach has become a model for sustainable tourism development, demonstrating how environmental communication can harmonize human activities with natural preservation.

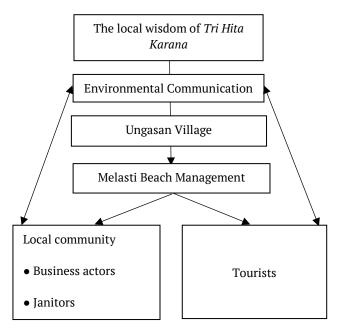


Figure 2. Model of Environmental Communication Based On Tri Hita Karana At Melasti Beach Source: Author's Finding, 2024

The model illustrates the implementation of Tri Hita Karana (THK), the Balinese local wisdom, as the foundation for environmental communication at Melasti Beach. This framework showcases a harmonious integration of cultural values and practical management strategies to promote pro-environmental behavior among stakeholders. At the core of this model lies Tri Hita Karana, which embodies harmony across three aspects: Parahyangan (spiritual relationship with God), Pawongan (social relationship among humans), and Palemahan (relationship with nature). These principles guide all actions and interactions within the ecosystem of Melasti Beach, ensuring sustainable and balanced tourism practices.

The Environmental Communication layer demonstrates how these values are translated into actionable communication strategies. Messages are conveyed both pragmatically, through regulations and directives, and constitutively, by invoking cultural and emotional connections to nature. This dual approach fosters greater awareness and commitment to environmental sustainability. The Ungasan Village and Melasti Beach Management serve as key facilitators in implementing THK-based environmental communication. Ungasan Village plays a regulatory and supportive role, ensuring that community values and customary laws are upheld. Meanwhile, Melasti Beach Management oversees operational aspects, engaging directly with stakeholders to encourage compliance with environmentally friendly practices.

The model identifies two primary groups of stakeholders influenced by this communication system: First, the local community, which comprises business actors, janitors, and other local participants, actively contributes to maintaining the cleanliness and sustainability of Melasti Beach. Through directives and collaboration facilitated by the management, they adopt pro-environmental behaviors such as waste management and the use of eco-friendly materials. Secondly, tourists are influenced by constitutive environmental communication, such as symbolic messaging rooted in Balinese culture. These messages inspire

tourists to adopt responsible behaviors, such as respecting the sacredness of the environment and maintaining its cleanliness.

This model highlights the interconnected roles of cultural values, environmental communication, and stakeholder engagement in fostering sustainable tourism at Melasti Beach. It underscores the importance of integrating local wisdom like THK into tourism management to achieve harmony between human activities and natural preservation, ensuring the long-term sustainability of natural destinations.

CONCLUSION

Tri Hita Karana (THK), a philosophical concept deeply rooted in Balinese culture, serves as a guiding framework for implementing environmental communication that fosters pro-environmental behavior at Melasti Beach. With its three core aspects—Parahyangan (harmony with God), Pawongan (harmony among people), and Palemahan (harmony with nature)—THK promotes a balanced integration of religious, social, and environmental values.

The findings of this study reveal that the application of THK-based environmental communication at Melasti Beach significantly influences stakeholders to adopt environmentally friendly practices. Pragmatic environmental communication, such as directives and regulations, combined with constitutive communication that evokes cultural and emotional connections, raises awareness, and motivates individuals to engage in environmental preservation actively. These pro-environmental behaviors directly contribute to the development of sustainable tourism, particularly in natural destinations like Melasti Beach.

However, this case study is limited in its generalizability, as the findings are specific to the cultural and contextual characteristics of Melasti Beach. The outcomes may differ in regions with varying cultural practices and local wisdom. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore the implementation of environmental communication based on local wisdom in other areas, providing a broader understanding of its impact on pro-environmental behavior across diverse cultural contexts.

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