



From Information to Social Change: Communication, Community Networks, and Tourism Development in Berau Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

Tourism development depends not only on economic resources and institutional arrangements but also on how information circulates among governments, tourism organizations, businesses, workers, and local communities. Yet communication is often treated as a neutral process of transmitting development information, overlooking the network relations through which access, voice, and participation are differentially structured. This study examines how community communication networks shape access to information, participation, and emerging agency in tourism development in Berau, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Using a qualitative and interpretive approach, the study re-analyzes empirical material from interviews, observation, documentary sources, and online information through a communication-centered analytical framework. The analysis draws primarily on Castells' concept of communication power and network society, complemented by Habermas' theory of communicative action and perspectives from Development Communication and Communication for Social Change. The findings indicate that tourism-related information is frequently mediated through organizational and interpersonal networks, including tourism associations and local institutional relationships. Network connectivity facilitates information circulation, access to programs, and opportunities for participation, but these networks also create boundaries that may limit access for less-connected actors. The study therefore conceptualizes community networks as both infrastructures of inclusion and mechanisms of communicative exclusion. It argues that communication contributes to social change not automatically through information transmission, but through a contingent pathway from access to information toward voice, participation, and community agency.

Keywords: Development Communication; Communication For Social Change; Community Networks; Communication Power; Participation; Tourism Development; Berau

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism development is increasingly understood as a multidimensional process that extends beyond the expansion of visitor numbers, infrastructure, and tourism businesses. In destinations where tourism involves governments, private enterprises, local organizations, and communities, development depends on the capacity of diverse actors to coordinate interests, exchange knowledge, negotiate priorities, and participate in decision-making. Stakeholder collaboration has consequently become an important concern in tourism research, particularly because the relationships among actors shape how tourism destinations are governed and how development benefits and responsibilities are distributed (Wondirad et al., 2020; Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019). Research on tourism collaboration has further demonstrated that destinations are constituted by networks of relationships rather than isolated organizations, with different actors occupying different positions within these networks and contributing differently to collaborative processes (Cehan et al., 2021; Perkins et al., 2020).

Within these processes, communication is fundamental because tourism development requires the continuous circulation of information across institutional and community boundaries. Information about policies, programs, regulations, opportunities, standards, and tourism initiatives must move between governments, tourism organizations, businesses, workers, and residents. Yet communication in development contexts has often been approached instrumentally, with emphasis placed on how information is transmitted from institutions to intended recipients. Recent scholarship in development communication and ICT4D¹ suggests that participation involves more than simply providing access to information or communication technologies. Kim and Lee (2023), for example, show that participation in development communication has frequently been conceptualized in terms of access and empowerment, while questions of social justice and unequal participation remain comparatively less developed. This suggests that the analytical problem is not simply whether information is available, but whether different actors possess meaningful opportunities to access, interpret, circulate, and use that information.

This distinction is particularly important in community-oriented tourism development. Communication does not take place in a social vacuum; it is embedded in organizational memberships, interpersonal relationships, institutional connections, and increasingly digital communication environments. Consequently, the movement of information is shaped by the networks through which actors are connected. Research on tourism networks has shown that the configuration of relationships among stakeholders can produce formal interaction spaces in which some institutions emerge as hubs or influential nodes within destination governance (Restrepo et al., 2021). Similarly, Cehan et al. (2021) demonstrate that tourism destinations contain multiple overlapping layers of collaboration, indicating that relationships among stakeholders are structured through different forms of interaction rather than through a single undifferentiated network. These insights invite a further question: when information travels through such networks, do all actors obtain comparable access to the communication flows that support participation in tourism development?

¹ ICT4D (Information and Communication Technologies for Development) refers to the use of information and communication technologies in development processes, including the expansion of access to information, communication, participation, and development opportunities. In this article, ICT4D is considered as part of the broader development-communication context rather than as the primary theoretical framework.



The question of unequal access becomes even more important when communication is considered as a dimension of power. Network connections can provide access to information, institutional resources, and opportunities, but they can also establish boundaries between more connected and less connected actors. Tourism scholarship increasingly recognizes that collaboration and community participation are shaped by power relations. Dolezal and Novelli (2022), for example, show that community-based tourism can create opportunities for empowerment and inclusion through partnerships, while the hierarchical organization of local relationships continues to shape who can benefit from such processes. Likewise, Vongvisitsin et al. (2024) demonstrate that community networks can facilitate cooperation and resource mobilization while also generating conflict and exclusion. Rather than treating networks as inherently beneficial, these studies point to their ambivalent character: networks can connect actors to valuable resources while simultaneously reinforcing differentiated positions within a community.

A similar concern emerges in research on participatory communication. Participation cannot be reduced to the presence of communication channels or invitations to engage. Molale and Fourie (2023) argue for a participatory communication framework in which meaningful participation is connected to dialogue and empowerment rather than simply fulfilling institutional requirements. Their approach, informed by Freirean and Habermasian perspectives, emphasizes the importance of communication as an interactive process in which actors can express views, deliberate, and influence collective processes. This perspective provides an important distinction between being a recipient of information and becoming an actor capable of participating in communicative processes. Development communication research has likewise increasingly moved away from technologically deterministic understandings of communication toward questions of participation, power, and social change (Hamidi & Mielke Möglich, 2021).

This distinction is particularly relevant to tourism development because community participation is frequently presented as a central condition of sustainable and inclusive tourism, while the communicative mechanisms that make such participation possible receive less explicit attention. Wondirad et al. (2020) emphasize community participation and stakeholder collaboration as important dimensions of sustainable ecotourism, while Moayerian et al. (2022) demonstrate that community capacity can strengthen participation and local ownership in community-based tourism. More recent work on community inclusion further shows that different social groups hold different positions of power in tourism discussions and decision-making and that increasing the diversity of voices is important for more inclusive tourism development (Partanen et al., 2025). Taken together, this literature indicates that participation depends not only on institutional willingness to involve communities but also on the social conditions through which different groups gain access to information, communication, and opportunities to articulate their interests.

Despite these advances, an important conceptual gap remains. Tourism network studies have provided valuable insights into stakeholder collaboration, institutional relationships, governance structures, and social capital, while development communication studies have emphasized participation, access, empowerment, and social change. However, these literatures are not always brought together to examine communication itself as a networked distribution of access and power. Existing tourism network research can identify who collaborates with whom, but it does not necessarily explain how communication flows through these relationships or how network position shapes access to development information. Conversely, communication for social change literature provides important conceptual resources for understanding participation and agency, but it can pay

less attention to the network structures through which information becomes accessible in the first place. This creates an analytical space for connecting network theory with communicative participation.

This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing communication in tourism development as a socially embedded network process. Rather than asking only how effectively information is transmitted from development institutions to communities, the study asks who is connected to information flows, through which organizational and interpersonal networks, and with what implications for participation and agency. Drawing primarily on Castells' perspective on communication power and network society, the study conceptualizes communication networks as spaces through which information flows are organized and through which differential forms of communicative access may emerge. Habermas' theory of communicative action is used as a complementary perspective for examining the movement from information transmission toward dialogue, voice, and participation. Development Communication and Communication for Social Change further provide conceptual resources for considering how communication may create pathways toward collective agency without assuming that social transformation automatically follows from information access.

The empirical context of Berau Regency, East Kalimantan, offers a useful setting for examining these relationships because tourism development involves interactions among government institutions, local authorities, tourism associations, tourism businesses, workers, and community actors (Hidayah, 2021; Hidayah et al., 2025; Hidayah & Singh, 2021). The underlying empirical material demonstrates that tourism-related organizations and interpersonal relationships function as channels through which information is obtained and shared. Organizations such as HPI², PHRI³, ASITA⁴, and local institutional networks appear in the empirical material not simply as economic or professional associations but also as relational spaces through which actors gain access to information and opportunities. The empirical material also shows that information concerning tourism-related programs, including CHSE⁵, circulated through organizational groups and personal networks, while access to forms of institutional support differed among actors depending on their organizational and relational connections.

These patterns suggest that the central issue is not merely whether communities communicate, but how communication networks structure the possibilities of access, voice, participation, and action. An actor may receive information without possessing the institutional or relational position necessary to act upon it. Conversely, actors embedded in relevant organizational or institutional networks may encounter information through multiple channels and gain greater opportunities to connect with programs, support, or decision-making processes. The analytical

² Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia (HPI) is a professional tourism organization identified in the empirical material as one of the networks through which tourism actors build relationships and obtain and exchange information.

³ Perhimpunan Hotel dan Restoran Indonesia (PHRI) is an organization that connects tourism business actors and serves as a channel for information exchange. One informant explicitly identified a PHRI group as a source of information about CHSE registration.

⁴ ASITA is one of the organizations identified in the empirical material, alongside HPI and PHRI, as a formal or professional network through which tourism actors establish relationships and exchange information. In this article, such organizations are analyzed primarily as components of communication networks through which information circulates

⁵ CHSE refers to Cleanliness, Health, Safety, and Environmental Sustainability, a tourism-related certification program promoted by Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy during the period examined in the original study. In the empirical material, information about CHSE circulated through tourism organizations and interpersonal networks.



challenge, therefore, is to trace the pathway between information and agency, while recognizing that this pathway is neither linear nor universally available.

Accordingly, this study makes four contributions. First, it conceptualizes communication as an infrastructure of access, rather than merely a mechanism for transmitting development messages. Second, it advances a networked understanding of communication power by examining how actors' positions within communication networks shape their access to information and participation. Third, it conceptualizes community networks as ambivalent infrastructures that can simultaneously facilitate inclusion and reproduce communicative exclusion. Fourth, it develops an analytical pathway linking information access to voice, participation, and emerging agency, positioning social change not as an automatic consequence of communication but as a contingent possibility shaped by network connectivity and opportunities for participation.

This study situates itself within the social, cultural, and development communication strand of communication scholarship, treating development communication, community communication, and communication for social change as its three organising concepts. Its contribution is also distinct from participatory-communication, empowerment, and social-capital frameworks, which typically treat participation as the variable to be explained, and from network-governance frameworks, which typically treat collaboration among recognised stakeholders as the unit of analysis. This study instead traces backward from participation to communicative access as a prior condition that can fail before participation becomes a question, treating information, access, voice, participation, and agency as separately verifiable steps rather than an automatic sequence.

Based on this framework, the study asks: How do community communication networks shape access, participation, and agency in tourism development in Berau, Indonesia? More specifically, it examines how tourism-development information circulates through institutional, organizational, interpersonal, and digital networks; how actors' network positions shape their access to information and opportunities; and under what conditions communication may move from information exchange toward participation, agency, and pathways toward social change.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Development Communication and Participation

Development communication studies how communication operates within development processes. Its modernisation and diffusion strands treated information as a resource that flows from knowledgeable sources to populations that lack it (Rogers, 1995). Melkote and Steeves (2015) and Mefalopulos (2008) trace the shift toward two-way models in which communication builds shared understanding between institutions and communities (Mefalopulos, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Freire et al. (2018) supplies the philosophical core of that shift: dialogue treats people as subjects who name their own world. The participatory turn kept questions of access alive. Kim and Lee (2023) review participation across research on communication technologies for development, and their review places participation beside concerns about digital inequality. Tourism examples make the point at the level of technology. Information and communication technologies widen or narrow access to services and relationships depending on stakeholder collaboration (Nigg & Peters, 2022), and smart governance depends on how destination organisations involve communities and stakeholders (Mandić & Kennell, 2021).



Participation also has an institutional shape. Governance research on destination management organisations examines how such organisations internalise participation and coherence as dimensions of governance (Bono i Gispert et al., 2023). Where structures for participation are thin, participation depends on the channels that happen to exist. This article reads development communication as the field where the question of channels becomes visible. It does not treat the field as a grand theory that competes with the network and communicative theories below.

Communication for Social Change

Communication for social change starts from dialogue, community ownership, and collective action (Servaes, 2008, 2020; Tufte, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2014). The path from communication to change contains steps that scholarship often compresses. Couldry (2010) separates the act of speaking from the recognition that gives voice its value: voice needs an audience that listens and responds. Tourism studies show why the steps matter. Collective art making has been linked to capacity building and community-based tourism (Moayerian et al., 2022), and engagement and trust have been linked to community empowerment (Pang et al., 2024). Power shapes both. Research on Bali examines how power shapes empowerment and partnership in community-based tourism (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022), and justice-oriented scholarship treats inclusion as an ethical question for tourism (Jamal & Higham, 2021). Zhang (2026) reframes local participation as a matter of willingness and capability. On that reading, an actor who wants to participate still needs channels and capacities to do so (Zhang, 2026).

This article uses “pathways toward social change” for sequences that could alter relations, practices, structures, or collective capacities. It uses “social change” for demonstrated alteration only.

Community Communication as a Meso-level Arena

Community communication names the arena between individual interaction and national policy. Information travels there, relationships operate, dialogue occurs, coordination takes place, and participation becomes possible or constrained. Tourism studies place several such arenas in view: community capacity and local planning in homestay tourism (Pasanchay & Schott, 2021), community and stakeholder perceptions of tourism in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Izurieta et al., 2021), local involvement through associations around the Petra World Heritage Site (Alrwajfah et al., 2021), collective response to overtourism in Sagada (Loverio et al., 2023), and supportive local networks in Thai community-based tourism administration (Na thongkaew et al., 2025). Inclusion in these arenas varies. Young people’s social innovation propositions expose unequal power positions and the need for diverse voices in tourism development (Partanen et al., 2025).

Digital media add a further layer. Engagement with destination posts on Instagram varies with the characteristics of the post and its sender (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024). Online travel communities build legitimacy through discourse (Johnson & Buhalis, 2025). Supplier engagement in smart destinations reflects relational and organisational influences (Johnson et al., 2023). Platforms shape which local claims gain visibility, credibility, and convertibility into economic participation (Manoli, 2026).



Castells: Communication Power and the Network Society

Castells (2010) describes contemporary societies as organised around networks, sets of interconnected nodes that include what has value for their goals and exclude what does not. Connection to a network conditions access to the flows that circulate through it. In *Communication Power*, Castells (2013) defines power as the relational capacity to influence the decisions of others from an asymmetric position and argues that power in the network society operates through the shaping of communication. He distinguishes four forms. Networking power belongs to actors inside a network over those outside it. Network power arises from the protocols and standards that govern inclusion. Networked power is the power of some actors over others within a network. Network-making power is the ability to program networks and to switch between them. Castells (2015) adds mass self-communication and counter-power as the means by which actors outside dominant networks contest them. Burt (1995) and Wasserman and Faust (1994) supply the vocabulary of positions, brokers, and structural holes that lets an analysis speak of network position without measuring it.

Castells wrote about global networks. Applying his forms of power to a tourism village extends his argument, and the extension rests here on a small set of cases. The extension can be tested by asking of each case who sits inside, who sets the protocol of entry, who brokers, and who programs.

Habermas: Communicative Action, Voice, and Participation

Habermas (1984, 1987) distinguishes communicative action, which aims at mutual understanding through claims to truth, rightness, and sincerity that participants can contest, from strategic action, which aims at effects on others. He locates the two in a lifeworld of shared meanings and in systems steered by money and administrative power. Administrative instruments such as circulars work as system communication: they steer conduct and expect compliance. Communication among peers in an association can approach lifeworld communication, in which members interpret their situation together. Habermas et al., (1994) adds the public sphere, the space where private persons reason about matters of common concern, and access to it decides who takes part. The Habermasian question in this article is when receiving information becomes voice. Voice exists when an actor can raise a claim, hear a reply, and see the claim weigh in a decision. Freire (2018) and Couldry (2010) support the same test from the side of dialogue and recognition.

Toward an Integrated Communication–Network–Agency Framework

The four perspectives answer different questions. Castells asks which actors connect to the flow of information. Habermas asks whether communication becomes dialogue and voice. Development communication asks how communication operates within development processes. Communication for social change asks under what conditions communication contributes to agency and wider change. Community communication supplies the arena in which the four questions meet. The synthesis holds that network structure, communication flow, communicative interaction, and participation combine to produce differentiated agency.

Castells and Habermas answer at different analytical levels rather than as steps in one process: network structure sets the ceiling on who can receive information and support, and



communicative interaction determines whether receipt inside that ceiling converts into voice. Agency requires both conditions together, not one after the other.

Figure 1 states the sequence. Tourism development generates development communication, which produces information flows. Flows travel through community networks that place actors in different positions. Connected actors gain greater access and communication power, and peripheral actors face limited access and communicative exclusion. Access shapes voice and dialogue, voice shapes participation, and participation shapes agency. A parallel pathway runs from unequal network access through limited voice and limited participation to constrained agency. Both pathways feed the conditions for social change. The figure is an analytical sequence and states no causal model. Each arrow marks a question that the evidence has to answer. Communication serves as an infrastructure that carries information and as an arena in which power operates.

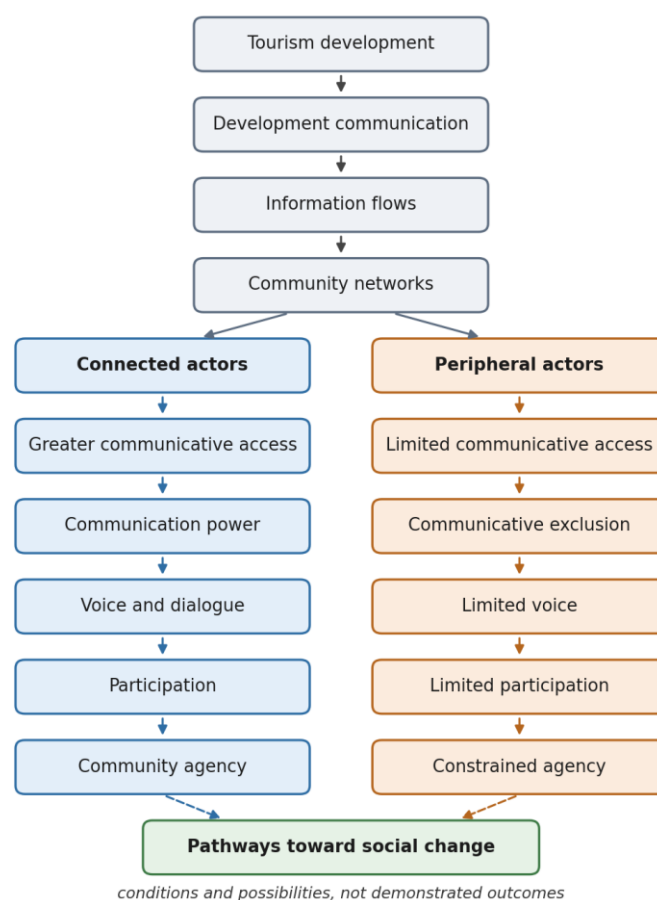


Figure 1. From Information to Agency: Communication Networks, Communicative Power, and Participation in Tourism Development

METHODS

Research Design and Analytical Orientation

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach to examine how communication and community networks shape access to information, participation, and agency in tourism development in Berau Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The manuscript was developed

through a communication-centered re-analysis of qualitative empirical material collected in an earlier study of marine tourism dynamics in Berau. The original research employed observation, interviews, documentation, and online/virtual data collection, with direct fieldwork and interviews conducted in December 2020. The article therefore does not report new fieldwork in 2026; 2026 represents the period of data auditing, re-coding, analysis, interpretation, manuscript development, and finalization.

Unlike the original study, which focused primarily on changes in the tourism industry, survival strategies, and the operation of economic, social, and cultural capital, this article re-orientes the analysis toward communication processes. Particular attention is given to how information circulates, through which networks it moves, how actors' network positions shape communicative access, and how access may become associated with participation and agency.

Research Setting

The study is situated in Berau Regency, East Kalimantan, within the context of marine tourism and the social relations connecting government institutions, local authorities, tourism organizations, workers, and tourism businesses. The original field research included direct observation in Pulau Derawan and Biduk-Biduk in December 2020, while the broader research also incorporated information obtained through media and online sources during the earlier period of observation.

Participants and Informant Selection

Participants in the original study were selected purposively according to their relevance to the research focus, with additional informants identified through recommendations from key informants. They included government and local administrative actors, such as representatives of the local tourism authority, sub-district officials, and village authorities, as well as community members working in or operating businesses in the marine tourism sector. These included guides, accommodation operators, travel agents, restaurant and food-business operators, souvenir sellers, boat operators, and other tourism workers.

The lists 33 informant entries in two groups. Five hold government roles: two subdistrict heads (Pulau Derawan and Biduk-Biduk), one village head (Pulau Derawan), and two officials of the regency tourism and culture office. Twenty-eight work or run businesses in marine tourism: travel-agency owners, tour guides, cottage, lodging, and restaurant owners, souvenir sellers, traders, speedboat and ferry operators, site managers in Biduk-Biduk, and one lodging employee. Three pairs of informants share initials, so I cite initials with role. Selection was purposive, using two criteria: a government post in a marine-tourism area, or work or ownership of a business in marine tourism (Patton, 2015). Key informants recommended further informants. This article draws on excerpts attributed to eight informants: HG, SA, RA, AG, and DW among tourism actors, MA for digital use, and MT and AM among officials. The interview dates for these excerpts fall between 10 and 22 December 2020.

For the present manuscript, the dataset was selectively re-examined to identify evidence related to communication channels, information flows, organizational membership, network relations, access to information and support, participation, and experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

Data Collection

The original study employed non-participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, documentation, and online/virtual data collection. Direct observation was conducted in Pulau Derawan and Biduk-Biduk in December 2020. Earlier observations also followed developments through television, print media, online news, and social media.

Interviews used semi-structured and unstructured formats, allowing questions to be developed in response to participants' accounts and experiences. Documentary materials included government regulations, reports, and other relevant documents. Online/virtual data included social media, online news, and the official Facebook account of the Berau local government to trace policy and tourism-related information.

Data re-Analysis and Thematic Analysis

The original study analyzed data inductively through coding, classification, interpretation, and thematic organization. For this manuscript, the existing dataset was re-analyzed using a communication- and network-oriented analytical framework. First, relevant segments were coded according to communication sources and channels, information flows, organizational and interpersonal networks, network position, access, participation, voice, inclusion, exclusion, and agency. Second, related codes were grouped into broader analytical categories. Third, the categories were organized into four main themes: (1) information flows in tourism development; (2) community networks as communication infrastructure; (3) unequal communicative access; and (4) movement from information toward participation and emerging agency.

The final stage involved theoretical interpretation. Manuel Castells' perspective on communication power and networks was used to examine communication flows, connectivity, network position, and power, while Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action supported analysis of dialogue, voice, and participation. Development Communication and Communication for Social Change were used as complementary conceptual frameworks. The analytical sequence was therefore structured as **information** → **access** → **network position** → **communicative power** → **voice** → **participation** → **agency**, while recognizing that the available evidence does not necessarily establish long-term social change.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was supported through source triangulation. Accounts from government actors, tourism workers, and tourism-business operators were compared across participants and cross-checked with observational, documentary, and online materials. This process enabled the analysis to identify convergent and divergent accounts and assess consistency across sources and actor positions. The original study explicitly used source triangulation by comparing information from different categories of informants and observations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Information Flows in Tourism Development

The empirical material shows that tourism-related information in Berau did not circulate through a single, linear channel from government institutions to individual community members. Instead, information moved through multiple institutional, organizational, and interpersonal pathways. Tourism organizations and local relationships functioned as important intermediaries through which information concerning tourism programs, assistance, and changing tourism requirements reached workers and business operators. The original dataset identifies several formal and informal organizations, including the Association of Indonesian Tour Guides (HPI), the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI), ASITA, and village-owned organizations (BUMK), as spaces in which tourism actors established relationships and exchanged information.

This pattern is particularly visible in the circulation of information about tourism-related programs. Information was not necessarily accessed directly from government institutions by individual actors. Instead, organizational groups and interpersonal relationships frequently became the practical channels through which relevant information was received. One informant, HG, explained that information about the CHSE registration program was obtained through a PHRI group, while KW stated that information concerning CHSE was largely obtained through “our networks.” These accounts indicate that development-related information was embedded in existing communication relationships rather than distributed evenly across all tourism actors.

The function of these networks extended beyond receiving information. Once information entered an organizational network, it could be circulated among other tourism actors. The thesis material indicates that information about CHSE was shared among tourism businesses because the program was considered relevant to their efforts to meet new tourism standards and resume tourism-related activities. Thus, communication operated through a process of reception and redistribution: an actor first accessed information through a particular network and subsequently became part of the circulation of that information to others.

The empirical material therefore reveals a layered information environment. Formal institutions remained important sources of tourism-related programs and policies, but access to these messages was frequently mediated by organizations, interpersonal relationships, and local communication networks. Communication in this setting was consequently not a simple institutional transmission process. It involved intermediate actors who connected formal information sources with particular groups of tourism workers and businesses.

Community Networks as Communication Infrastructure

The findings further indicate that community and organizational networks functioned as a form of communication infrastructure. Prior to the disruption of tourism activities, tourism workers and business operators had already established relationships through professional and community organizations. These networks were initially described by participants as spaces for maintaining relationships and obtaining and exchanging information.

When tourism-related activities were disrupted, the practical value of these networks became more visible. Organizational membership created channels through which actors could learn about available programs, assistance, and opportunities. The empirical material indicates that



HPI and PHRI membership, for example, was associated with access to particular forms of assistance and information. HG reported receiving financial assistance because of formal membership in HPI and receiving food assistance through PHRI membership. Similarly, RA indicated that his position as a neighborhood administrative officer enabled him to become aware of available social assistance programs.

These experiences suggest that communication networks performed more than an informational function. They connected actors to institutional opportunities. Information about programs became meaningful because it was attached to relationships that enabled actors to identify, access, and respond to those opportunities. In this sense, the network did not simply carry a message; it connected individuals to the institutional environment surrounding that message.

Three things co-occur in HG's case and are analytically distinct. Institutional access refers to membership and office, such as HG's standing in HPI and PHRI and his role as coordinator. Informational access refers to knowledge that a scheme exists and its terms, such as HG's awareness of the ministry scheme's amount and its regency-wide cap. Resource access refers to the assistance itself, such as the cash and food package HG received. The three moved together in this case, but the discussion below concerning communication power addresses the second of the three, informational access, and notes where the other two align with it in the evidence and where they do not.

The role of networks was also evident in the circulation of information concerning CHSE. Information from tourism-related institutions was communicated through organizational groups and personal networks, allowing tourism actors to learn about the requirements and registration process. The same networks therefore connected different levels of the tourism system: government and tourism institutions at the formal level, associations at the organizational level, and individual tourism workers and businesses at the community level.

This pattern demonstrates that communication infrastructure in the tourism sector consisted of both formal and informal arrangements. Formal organizations created recognizable channels of communication, while interpersonal relationships sustained the circulation of information within and beyond those organizations. The result was a networked communication environment in which access depended partly on the existence of relationships linking individuals to relevant information sources. Table 1 summarises the channels and their functions.

Table 1. Communication Channels and Network Functions in Tourism Development in Berau

Communication channel	Main actors	Type of information	Network function	Access pattern	Participation implication
Regency government instruments (circulars, decisions, joint circulars, publication letters)	Regent, regency task force, tourism and culture office, regional parliament, security and religious institutions	Health protocols, travel and entry restrictions, closure and reopening of destinations	Vertical channel to institutions, villages, and businesses	Issuance documented; reception by individual tourism actors not documented	Compliance; no documented route for reply

Communication channel	Main actors	Type of information	Network function	Access pattern	Participation implication
Tourism associations and village enterprise (HPI, PHRI, ASITA, BUMK)	Members; coordinators such as HG; ministry and legislator programmes	Assistance schemes; information shared among members	Intermediary between programme sources and members	Members reported assistance (HG); outsiders reported none (AG)	Coordinator role (HG); sector initiative by travel agents (HG)
Local administrative office and village authority (RT board, village head)	RA; village head and circle (as described by DW)	Social assistance	Local holder of information; perceived gatekeeper (DW)	RA knew of assistance; DW perceives proximity to the village head as the criterion	Local knowledge held; onward circulation not documented
Official regency social media (Facebook)	Regency government	Regional regulations	Public broadcast	Use by tourism actors not documented	Not established
Informants' own social media and online selling	MA, DW	Food offers and orders	Outward channel to customers	Depends on skill and household help (MA); reach limited to buyers in Derawan and Biduk-Biduk (thesis)	Individual action in the market; no documented link to decisions

Source: Author's (2026)

Unequal Communicative Access

While networks facilitated information circulation, the findings also reveal substantial differences in access. The empirical material does not suggest that all tourism workers and business operators were equally connected to the communication channels through which tourism-related programs and assistance were disseminated. Rather, actors occupied different relational positions, and these differences had practical consequences.

The contrast is particularly apparent in the distribution of information and assistance. HG reported receiving assistance associated with membership in HPI and PHRI, while RA stated that his administrative position enabled him to know about available social assistance. These experiences contrast with the accounts of AG and DW, who described more limited access to assistance. AG reported that although an application had been submitted, assistance was not received and that those associated with HPI appeared to have greater access. DW similarly described a situation in which people who were close to the village head or connected through family relations were more likely to receive assistance.

Importantly, these accounts should not be interpreted simply as evidence that some actors possessed “more social relationships” while others possessed fewer. The empirical material points to a more specific mechanism. The relevant issue was whether actors possessed relationships that connected them to particular organizational or institutional channels through which information and resources circulated. A person could therefore have a broad range of social relationships while

remaining peripheral to the network associated with a particular tourism program or assistance mechanism.

SA's case, a tour guide who reported receiving government assistance without stating an association membership or a specific informational channel, illustrates the same point from the opposite direction: resource access can appear in the record without documented institutional or informational access alongside it. This is a further reason to treat institutional membership, informational access, and resource receipt as three distinct layers rather than a single bundle, even though they moved together in HG's case.

The findings also reveal that the distinction between connected and less-connected actors was not necessarily formalized through explicit rules. Instead, differences emerged through everyday communication practices: membership in organizations, participation in groups, administrative positions, and proximity to local authorities. These relationships shaped who became aware of an opportunity, who was able to follow up on it, and who remained outside the relevant communication pathway.

This pattern is also visible in the circulation of CHSE information. Actors with access to PHRI groups or established tourism networks were able to obtain information through those channels, whereas actors outside such networks were less clearly connected to the same flow. The result was not necessarily a complete absence of information among peripheral actors, but a differentiated capacity to access particular forms of timely and actionable information.

The findings therefore point to unequal communicative access rather than simply unequal communication frequency. The critical difference lies in whether an actor is connected to the particular network through which information, institutional opportunities, and support are made accessible. Table 2 sets the cases side by side without ranking them.

Table 2. Network Connectivity and Communicative Access: Accounts of Five Informants

Actor position	Relevant network	Information access	Institutional access	Support opportunity	Participation implication
HG: cottage entrepreneur; HPI member and coordinator for Pulau Derawan; PHRI member	HPI; PHRI	Reports assistance information through both memberships	Ministry scheme and legislator programme reached HG through the associations	Cash assistance (IDR 750,000 every three months; 80 recipients regency-wide); food package	Holds coordinator office; speaks of travel agents as "us"
RA: food trader and lodging owner; RT board member	Neighbourhood administration (RT)	Knew of social assistance through the board	Local administration	Receipt not stated in the excerpt	Holds information; circulation to others not documented
SA: tour guide and snorkelling-gear owner, Pulau Derawan	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Reports government assistance two or three times (IDR 750,000; 600,000; 300,000)	Channel undocumented; receipt without a documented association tie

Actor position	Relevant network	Information access	Institutional access	Support opportunity	Participation implication
AG: position and location not stated in the excerpt	Not stated	Knew of the scheme and applied	Application submitted	Reports assistance despite applying; perceives recipients as “like HPI”	no Voice as grievance; no forum documented
DW: restaurant owner	Village authority (as perceived)	Not stated	Perceives the village head’s circle as the entry point	Receipt stated in the excerpt	not Voice as criticism; moved to Tanjung Redeb to sell food online

Source: Author’s (2026)

From Information to Participation and Emerging Agency

The final empirical pattern concerns what actors were able to do with information once they obtained it. The findings suggest that communication sometimes moved beyond passive reception toward information sharing and practical coordination, but the transition from information to participation was uneven.

The CHSE case provides a clear example. Information obtained through PHRI and other tourism networks was subsequently circulated among tourism actors because it was considered necessary for adapting tourism practices to new requirements. In this process, actors were not merely recipients of information. They became intermediaries who transmitted information to other tourism participants. Communication therefore generated a modest but observable form of communicative agency: actors used their network connections to circulate information that was considered relevant to collective tourism activity.

A similar pattern appears in relation to assistance information. Actors connected to organizational or administrative networks were more likely to become aware of available support mechanisms. HG linked his access to assistance to HPI and PHRI membership, while RA connected his awareness of assistance programs to his neighborhood administrative role. Such experiences indicate that access to communication could influence actors’ ability to identify and pursue available opportunities.

However, the findings do not support the conclusion that information automatically translated into broad or equal participation. AG and DW’s accounts demonstrate that actors outside relevant organizational or relational channels could remain excluded from opportunities even when they were aware that assistance existed or had attempted to access it. Communication therefore produced differentiated possibilities rather than a uniformly empowering outcome.

The empirical sequence can consequently be summarized as follows:



Yet each transition depended on network connectivity. Access to information created possibilities for action, but the ability to move from information to action was shaped by the relationships through which actors were connected to institutions, organizations, and other community members.

Overall, the findings reveal that tourism communication in Berau operated as a networked process with differentiated consequences. Information traveled through formal institutions but was frequently mediated by community and organizational networks. These networks created channels for information exchange, support, and coordination, while their uneven reach generated differences in communicative access. Actors embedded in relevant networks obtained greater opportunities to receive and circulate information, whereas less-connected actors encountered more constrained access. Communication therefore created possibilities for participation and emerging agency, but these possibilities were conditioned by the structure of the networks through which information moved.

Discussion

Communication is Not Neutral

The Berau material shows communication moving through channels that differ in what they carry and to whom. Instruments from the regency travel wide and instruct. Information about assistance travels narrow and reaches members. Castells (2010) expects this pattern, since networks select what enters. Habermas (1987) supplies a second reading: the wide flow steers conduct through administrative power, and the narrow flow works inside relationships. One tourism actor can stand in both flows, complying with a closure order received through general channels and depending on an association for information about support.

A multilayer view fits the case. Cehan et al. (2021) show that a destination holds several layers of collaboration, and Restrepo et al. (2021) show that organisations occupy differentiated positions in institutional networks. In Berau one layer links associations to ministries and legislators, and another links village authority to residents. Each layer carries different resources under different entry rules, and an actor's access to one layer does not carry over to the other. Studies of destination governance describe stakeholder roles (Roxas et al., 2020) and structures for participation (Bono i Gispert et al., 2023). The Berau material adds that roles are communicative positions, and that structures for participation give little help to actors who stand outside the layer carrying the information they need. The implication for tourism governance is that a map of stakeholders shows who is present and leaves open who can hear what.

Network Position and Communication Power

The vocabulary of position, brokerage, and structural holes is applied here as a sensitizing lens rather than as a measured property of the network, consistent with the qualitative, non-social-network-analysis design stated in the Methods. Consistent with the distinction drawn in the Results, the argument below concerns communication power over the informational layer specifically; where institutional membership or resource receipt is doing the work instead, the text says so.

Castells' four forms of power (2013) give the Berau cases a vocabulary, with the caution stated in section 2.4. Networking power appears in the contrast between association members and outsiders: HG's memberships opened programmes that AG's application did not. Network power



appears in protocols of entry. Membership, listing, and application are protocols, and AG's experience shows that satisfying a protocol by applying differs from standing inside the network that the protocol guards. Networked power appears in HG's coordinator position, which resembles the broker of Burt (1995): an actor who links a local group to programme sources and holds a position that others lack. Network-making power raises the question of who defined eligibility categories and who linked ministry, legislator, and association. The source does not identify those actors, so this form remains an open question and not a finding.

Vongvisitsin et al. (2024) distinguish bonding, bridging, and linking ties in a networked social capital model. HG's ties to a ministry and a legislator resemble linking ties to institutions of power. AG and DW describe a lack of such ties and do not describe a lack of local relations. This distinction protects the analysis from the shortcut that non-members are isolated. Díaz Rocca & Zielinski (2022) place peripheral communities inside multilevel governance, and Sun et al. (2022) report heterogeneous effects of network strength on household tourism outcomes. Both support reading network position as a differentiated resource. The Berau material adds a communicative mechanism: position appears to shape who learns of a scheme and who can claim it.

Position in this analysis conditions access. It does not equal power in a general sense, and the four forms of power need evidence of actors' capacity to affect others, which the excerpts supply in part. HG's position gave access to information and support in this instance, and the material does not show HG exercising power over others.

From Communicative Access to Voice and Participation

The mechanism stated in the theoretical framework predicts a specific pattern here: network position should explain who has access, and communicative interaction should explain whether access becomes voice, with neither alone sufficient.

Access does not deliver voice. Receiving an instruction places an actor in the position of a target of administrative steering (Habermas, 1987). Membership in an association gives actors a setting in which they can interpret their situation together, and the travel agents' initiative hints at that. The same associations serve as the doorway to programme resources, which joins peer communication to system resources through a narrow gate.

AG's statement that the tourism and culture office should be sensitive to conditions is a claim of normative rightness in Habermas' terms. Such a claim needs an arena in which participants can contest it and redeem it (Habermas, 1984), and the material shows no such arena. Couldry (2010) reaches the same point through voice as a process that needs uptake. Molale and Fourie (2023) describe institutionalised participation as a sequence of designed steps. Their municipal case suggests what the Berau material lacks: a designed step through which a non-recipient's claim reaches a decision. Partanen et al. (2025) show that unequal power positions restrict diverse voices, and Jamal and Higham (2021) frame the exclusion of voices as a question of justice.

Zhang (2026) helps to read AG's case. AG showed willingness by applying, and the account describes a lack of capability in the sense of a route to the resource. Willingness without a channel does not become participation. Kim and Lee (2023) place participation next to digital inequality in development communication research, and the Berau material illustrates the link at community scale: connection to a channel came before any deliberation.

In most scholarship Castells and Habermas answer separate questions, and in the Berau material each answer needs the other. Network position helps to explain why some actors received



information and others did not. Communicative interaction helps to explain why receipt did not turn into voice. Network structure without communicative interaction predicts access and stops there. Communicative interaction without network structure describes a dialogue that few actors can enter. Read together, the two describe differentiated agency: actors with a place in the network and a forum in which to speak can act, actors with one of the two act in limited ways, and actors with neither depend on individual means.

Communication, Agency, and Pathways Toward Social Change

Agency in Long's (2003) sense combines knowledge and capability. The Berau material shows both in limited form. Actors used what they knew: travel agents priced packages to stimulate demand, and food sellers used Facebook. Manoli (2026) proposes visibility, credibility, and convertibility as dimensions of platform-mediated local power. MA's advertisements illustrate visibility and convertibility at household scale, since orders turned into deliveries, and the thesis reports that reach stayed local, which limits both. Blanco-Moreno et al. (2024) show that engagement with destination posts depends on the post and its sender, which suggests that small sellers without established accounts face an uphill task. This is an inference, and the Berau material does not test it.

Communication for social change expects collective action (Tufte, 2017). The travel agents' initiative is the nearest case, and it addresses demand in the market. Moayerian et al. (2022) link collective activity to community capacity, and Pang et al. (2024) link engagement and trust to empowerment. The Berau excerpts contain no equivalent evidence of capacity building or trust formation.

The cases allow the conditions for a pathway toward social change to be stated. An actor needs access to a relevant channel. A forum must give claims uptake. Actors need capacity to coordinate. Resources such as skills and platforms must let information convert into action. Institutions must stay open to reply. The Berau material shows the first condition present for some actors and absent for others, coordination present in one case, and the forum and institutional openness undocumented. Table 3 records the evidence status for each step. The pathway exists as a possibility, and the article does not show that it produced change.

Table 3. Evidence Status along the Pathway from Information to Social Change

Step	What the Berau material shows	Evidence status
Information	Regency instruments and assistance information circulated through several channels	Documented
Access	Access to assistance information differed by association membership, local office, and reported proximity to the village head	Documented in a small set of accounts; perceptions; one contrary case
Voice	Claims and grievances addressed to the researcher; no forum, reply, or decision documented	Limited; voice without documented uptake
Participation	No participation of tourism actors in decisions on closure, reopening, or assistance documented	Not established



Step	What the Berau material shows	Evidence status
Agency	Sector-level initiative by travel agents; individual use of Facebook for sales	Emerging; market domain; coordination unspecified
Pathways toward social change	No change in relations, practices, or structures that traces to communication	Not established; conditions identified

Source: Author's (2026)

The Double Edge of Community Communication

Community networks in the Berau material connect and bound in the same operation. The associations that delivered assistance information to members are the associations whose boundaries left others outside. Studies that credit local networks with supporting community-based tourism (Na thongkaew et al., 2025), building capacity (Pasanchay & Schott, 2021), and enabling collective response (Loverio et al., 2023) describe the connective edge. Alrwajfah et al. (2021) show that local involvement operates through associations, and Izurieta et al. (2021) show that community and stakeholder relations shape acceptance of tourism. The Berau material adds the boundary edge.

A proposition follows for testing: the more a network serves as the route for scarce resources, the more consequential its boundaries become. In ordinary times a missed message costs little. When a scheme offers 80 places across a regency, a missed message costs a share of the scheme. Apak et al. (2025) link community commitment and emotional solidarity to support for tourism. Solidarity inside a network may or may not extend across its boundary, and the Berau material does not test this.

Practical implications follow from the mechanism. Programme designers can publish eligibility criteria and application routes through more than one channel, keep records of who applied and why applications failed, and create a stage at which applicants can query decisions. These measures address the boundary edge and keep the connective edge that associations provide. They are implications of the analysis and not findings.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined tourism development in Berau, Indonesia, by shifting attention from communication as a mechanism of information transmission toward communication as a socially embedded network process. The findings show that tourism-related information did not move through a single linear channel from government institutions to individual tourism actors. Instead, information circulated through a combination of institutional, organizational, interpersonal, and online channels. Tourism associations and local relational networks acted as intermediary nodes through which information concerning programmes, assistance, and tourism requirements became accessible to particular groups of actors. This finding demonstrates that the effectiveness and reach of development communication depend not only on the availability of information but also on the networks through which that information travels.

The study further demonstrates that community networks function as a form of communication infrastructure. Organizations such as HPI, PHRI, ASITA, and local institutional networks connected tourism actors to information and, in some cases, to institutional opportunities and support. At the same time, these networks were not universally accessible. The empirical accounts reveal differentiated communicative access associated with organizational membership,



administrative positions, and perceived proximity to local authorities. Importantly, this should not be interpreted simply as a difference in the quantity of social relationships. Rather, the critical issue concerns access to specific relational channels linking actors to information, programmes, and resources.

These findings contribute to an understanding of communication power by demonstrating that network position matters for the distribution of communicative opportunities. Actors positioned within relevant organizational or institutional networks were more able to receive and circulate information, whereas less-connected actors encountered more constrained access. Yet access alone did not guarantee voice or participation. The evidence shows instances of information circulation and emerging agency, but no documented institutional forum through which excluded actors could transform grievances into deliberation or influence decisions. Likewise, participation by tourism actors in decisions concerning closure, reopening, or assistance was not established in the available material.

The study therefore proposes a more cautious understanding of the relationship between communication and social change. Communication may create a pathway from information to access, voice, participation, and agency, but that pathway is neither linear nor universally available. The evidence identifies information access and emerging forms of communicative agency, while the conditions required for sustained participation and broader transformation remain uneven or undocumented.

Theoretically, the study brings together Castells' emphasis on networked communication power and Habermas' concern with communicative interaction, dialogue, and voice. Their combination suggests that network connectivity explains who can enter relevant flows of information, while communicative interaction explains whether information can become meaningful voice and participation. The central contribution of the study is therefore to conceptualize community networks as double-edged infrastructures: they connect actors to information and opportunities while simultaneously creating boundaries that may restrict access for others. This perspective invites tourism governance and development communication research to consider not only whether information is disseminated, but also who can access it, who can respond, whose voice receives uptake, and who remains outside the communicative network.

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