

Consumer Behavior in Advancing Circular Economy Practices at Dapur Tara Flores

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how circular economy practices are communicated and implemented by Dapur Tara, a community-based culinary enterprise in Liang Ndara Village, East Nusa Tenggara. Motivated by the Indonesian government's agenda for a sustainable economic recovery, the research addresses the gap between national circular-economy strategies and their adoption at the grassroots level. Employing a qualitative case study design under a constructivist paradigm, data were collected through direct observation and in-depth interviews with the business owner and selected consumers. The findings demonstrate that Dapur Tara operationalizes circular principles through practices such as organic sourcing, eco-conscious waste management, and the use of reusable packaging, while simultaneously embedding these practices into its marketing communication strategies. Communication is delivered through interactive, culturally rooted experiences and digital platforms, effectively resonating with environmentally conscious tourists. The study highlights the potential of experiential and participatory communication to influence sustainable consumer behavior and strengthen the impact of circular economy models at the local level, while also identifying infrastructure limitations as key challenges to scalability.

KEYWORDS
consumer;
behaviour;
marketing;
communication;
sustainability;

INTRODUCTION

The global disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has brought renewed attention to the structural vulnerability of national economies and the urgent need to transition toward more resilient and sustainable development models. The pandemic not only exposed weaknesses in global supply chains but also underscored the fragility of local economic systems, particularly those heavily dependent on tourism and small-scale enterprises. In Indonesia, the imposition of large-scale social restrictions and lockdowns to mitigate viral transmission led to a significant economic contraction, affecting both formal and informal sectors (Megaartha, 2021). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially those operating in tourism-dependent regions, experienced sharp declines in demand, labor disruption, and operational instability. In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government introduced the “new normal” policy as a pathway to economic recovery while simultaneously embedding long-term transformation goals within the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan. This policy framework

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emphasizes inclusive growth, environmental sustainability, and community resilience as central pillars of post-pandemic development (Muhyiddin, 2020).

Within this strategic framework, the promotion of a circular economy has emerged as a key approach to balancing economic recovery with environmental responsibility. The circular economy is designed to maximize resource efficiency by minimizing waste generation, encouraging reuse and recycling, and reducing dependence on virgin raw materials (BSN, 2022). Globally, the circular economy has gained increasing recognition as an operational model capable of advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to responsible consumption and production, climate action, and sustainable communities (Arruda et al., 2021). Unlike the conventional linear economic model of “take–make–dispose,” the circular economy promotes closed-loop systems that integrate environmental protection, social inclusion, and economic value creation (Velenturf & Purnell, 2021). In the Indonesian context, circular economy principles are increasingly being incorporated into national development discourse and policy initiatives, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism (Kementerian PPN, n.d.).

Despite growing policy support and academic interest, much of the existing literature on the implementation of the circular economy remains macro-level, focusing on industrial systems, urban infrastructure, and large-scale production networks. Comparatively limited attention has been paid to micro-level applications, particularly within rural tourism destinations and small culinary enterprises that operate at the intersection of local culture, environmental stewardship, and community livelihoods. Moreover, the success of circular economy initiatives at the micro level is determined not solely by production practices but also by consumer participation and acceptance. In this regard, marketing communication plays a crucial role in translating sustainability values into meanings that are understood, internalized, and acted upon by consumers. However, the role of marketing communication in fostering consumer engagement with circular economy principles—especially in hospitality and food-related businesses—remains underexplored. As noted by Alfakihuddin et al. (2022), consumer behavior is a critical determinant of the successful adoption of circular practices; however, empirical studies examining how communication strategies influence consumer awareness, attitudes, and behaviors toward sustainability remain limited.

Addressing this research gap, the present study focuses on Dapur Tara, a traditional restaurant located in Liang Ndara Village, West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. Operating in a rural tourism setting, Dapur Tara integrates circular economy principles into its daily operations through organic permaculture systems, processing organic waste into compost, using biodegradable packaging, and active collaboration with local communities. These practices reflect a commitment to environmental sustainability while simultaneously supporting local livelihoods and cultural preservation. Beyond operational practices, Dapur Tara also engages in environmental communication through informal interactions, storytelling, and community-based engagement with its consumers. However, the extent to which these communication

efforts effectively influence consumer behavior and contribute to the long-term sustainability of circular economy practices has yet to be systematically examined.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies across various sectors and contexts. Turner (2017) highlighted the role of IMC in enhancing audience engagement and brand coherence in international sporting events, while Tomasila and Vanel (2023) examined its contribution to strengthening the public image of broadcasting institutions. Similarly, Milke and Vanel (2024) explored how word-of-mouth communication enhanced brand awareness in environmental education institutions. While these studies confirm the strategic value of integrated communication approaches, they have not sufficiently addressed how IMC can be adapted and optimized for small-scale, sustainability-oriented culinary businesses, particularly those operating in rural tourism destinations. Furthermore, the relationship between IMC strategies and consumer behavior in supporting circular economy initiatives at the micro-enterprise level remains largely unexplored.

Building on these gaps, this study proposes an in-depth analysis of Dapur Tara's marketing communication strategies and their role in shaping consumer engagement with circular economy values. By examining how communication practices inform, persuade, and influence consumer behavior, this research seeks to contribute empirically to the intersection of marketing communication and sustainability studies. Specifically, the study aims to offer insights into how community-based tourism enterprises can leverage communication strategies to foster sustainable consumption patterns and strengthen the viability of circular economy practices.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to analyze the marketing communication strategies employed by Dapur Tara in introducing and promoting circular economy concepts to its consumers; (2) to identify consumer behaviors that emerge in response to these communication efforts; and (3) to evaluate the impact of consumer behavior on the effectiveness and sustainability of Dapur Tara's circular economy implementation.

This study is positioned at the intersection of the implementation of the circular economy, consumer behavior, and marketing communication in small-scale, community-based culinary enterprises within rural tourism destinations. Unlike prior research that predominantly examines circular economy models at the macro or industrial level, this study advances a micro-level, practice-oriented perspective by focusing on a single local restaurant operating within a peripheral tourism region. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on consumer behavior as both an outcome and a driving force of circular economy implementation, rather than merely a supporting variable. Furthermore, this study extends the application of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) by examining its informal, community-based, and experiential forms, which are often overlooked in conventional marketing communication studies. By empirically analyzing how sustainability values are communicated and enacted in everyday consumer interactions, this research contributes new insights into how circular economy principles can be embedded and sustained through marketing communication in small tourism-

related enterprises. The findings are expected to enrich scholarship on sustainability and communication while offering practical implications for policymakers and practitioners seeking scalable, bottom-up approaches to circular-economy development.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study to examine how marketing communication strategies influence consumer behavior within the circular economy practices implemented by Dapur Tara. The research was conducted from October 27th, 2024, to January 8th, 2025, at Dapur Tara Restaurant, located in Liang Ndara Village, West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia.

The research is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which is appropriate for studies seeking to understand social phenomena through individuals' lived experiences. As emphasized by Irawati et al. (2021), reality is viewed as a mental and social construct shaped by local context and individual interaction. This perspective enables a rich, nuanced understanding of how circular economy practices are perceived and interpreted by both business actors and consumers.

A case study design was employed to conduct an in-depth investigation of Dapur Tara as a single, bounded case in a real-world setting. The case study approach is particularly useful for exploring complex social and organizational phenomena in detail (Rusandi & Rusli, 2021), especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are blurred.

The novel contribution of this research lies in its illustration of how a small-scale, community-driven culinary enterprise in a rural setting can successfully operationalize principles of the circular economy. While many studies on circular economy focus on urban or industrial contexts, this study provides empirical insights into how such principles can be implemented effectively at the grassroots level through local entrepreneurship and culturally rooted practices. This approach offers an alternative model for sustainable development that is adaptable to rural tourism contexts.

Data were collected through two key techniques: non-participant observation and structured interviews. Direct observation was conducted during field visits to Dapur Tara to record consumer interactions, the implementation of sustainable practices (such as permaculture gardening, composting of organic waste, and biodegradable packaging), and the immersive culinary experience offered to guests. Observations were documented systematically using structured observation checklists.

Structured interviews were conducted with two groups of participants to obtain comprehensive insights into the circular-economy practices at Dapur Tara. The first interview was conducted with the business owner, Elisabeth Yani Tararubi, focusing on how circular-economy initiatives were designed and communicated through the restaurant's operations and brand narrative. The second group consisted of selected consumers—both domestic and international tourists—who were interviewed to examine their awareness, perceptions, and behavioral responses to Dapur Tara's

marketing communication strategies. All interviews were conducted using a standardized interview guide, recorded with permission, transcribed, and translated to ensure accurate analysis. The goal was to capture diverse perspectives related to the impact of marketing communication on sustainable consumption behavior.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, in which qualitative data were coded and grouped into recurring themes. This process involved identifying key elements of marketing communication (e.g., messaging, media, engagement), consumer behavior patterns, and the perceived environmental and cultural impacts of the circular-economy model implemented by Dapur Tara.

To ensure validity and credibility, this research employed source triangulation, which involves comparing data from different informants and sources to confirm findings (Susanto et al., 2023). Following Alfansyur and Mariyani (2020), the triangulation process was used to identify converging and diverging viewpoints and to draw reliable conclusions based on cross-referenced evidence. All research participants provided informed consent, and ethical principles were upheld throughout the research process, including participant confidentiality and transparency about the study's purpose. Ethical approval was obtained from the affiliated academic institution prior to fieldwork.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that Dapur Tara successfully integrates community-based and environmentally sustainable practices into its circular economy approach. The restaurant actively engages local community members in its daily operations, thereby contributing to capacity building and the empowerment of the surrounding Flores community. This integration illustrates that circular economy practices at the micro-enterprise level are not merely technical or operational choices, but are deeply embedded in social relations and local contexts.

Several sustainable practices were identified during interviews and observations. These include: (1) the use of ingredients sourced from the restaurant's own organic garden; (2) the utilization of natural spring water from Mount Mbeliling; (3) the implementation of an environmentally friendly waste management system using wastewater filters and natural drainage; (4) the conversion of kitchen waste into organic fertilizer or livestock feed; (5) the reuse of charcoal residues from wood-burning stoves as plant fertilizer; and (6) the use of reusable food packaging to minimize single-use plastic waste. These practices not only contribute to environmental goals but also enhance the customer experience, becoming a core element of the restaurant's marketing communication. In this sense, sustainability functions simultaneously as an operational principle and a communicative value proposition.

As part of its community-based approach, Dapur Tara fosters a welcoming and homely atmosphere for guests. Hospitality practices are aligned with local cultural values, creating meaningful connections with customers through informal interactions, such as friendly conversations during meals. These direct interactions serve as a platform for

communicating the values of sustainability and local wisdom in an organic and non-intrusive manner. Additionally, the restaurant offers slow-cooking classes that introduce customers to local foods and sustainable culinary practices through hands-on learning, thereby reinforcing experiential engagement with circular-economy values.

Digital platforms also play a significant role in reaching and engaging customers. Dapur Tara actively uses Instagram (@dapurtara.flores) to share stories about local culture, food, and sustainability through themed campaigns such as *Back to Nature*, *Slow Living*, and *Love Your Island*. Within a 90-day observation period, the account reached 3,712 followers, with 2,357 users actively engaging with the content. In addition, WhatsApp Business is used to facilitate customer communication and reservations, although internet connectivity issues occasionally disrupt these efforts. The restaurant's website (<https://dapurtara.com/>) receives an average of 50–100 daily visits, thereby extending the restaurant's visibility beyond the immediate locality and supporting broader consumer outreach.

The customer profile predominantly comprises international travelers from urban areas, typically in the middle to upper income brackets. These visitors often express interest in nature, sustainability, digital detox experiences, and tranquility. Many guests appreciate Dapur Tara's circular-economy practices, with several stating that their visit inspired them to adopt similar practices at home. The alignment between consumer values and the restaurant's sustainability narrative appears to strengthen emotional attachment and perceived authenticity. The combination of sustainability and local engagement creates a unique and memorable experience for customers.

The implementation of circular economy principles also has a transformative impact on consumer behavior. Visitors who were previously less aware of sustainability issues reported increased awareness and interest in eco-conscious consumption after dining at Dapur Tara. Some customers began critically evaluating the sources of their food and water consumption following their experience. These behavioral changes suggest that the restaurant's practices function not only as a service offering but also as an informal educational mechanism that shapes consumer values and decision-making.

Furthermore, many guests described their visit as emotionally and intellectually enriching. They reported a stronger connection to nature and the local community, as well as a sense of calm and authenticity rarely found in conventional dining experiences. The farm-to-table transparency and visible ingredient sourcing added further value to the experience. Customers consistently indicated that the price paid was justified by the quality of service and experience, as well as the environmental impact of the restaurant's operations. The positive experience also encouraged guests to share their stories with others, contributing to strong word-of-mouth marketing. Visitors often recommend Dapur Tara to friends and colleagues, thereby serving as advocates for sustainable practices and the circular economy.

Despite these successes, the restaurant faces logistical challenges, particularly during the rainy season when poor road access can limit visitor numbers. These constraints highlight the vulnerability of rural tourism enterprises to infrastructural limitations, even when sustainable practices are well established. Nevertheless, the

overall findings suggest that Dapur Tara exemplifies how a small-scale rural enterprise can operationalize circular economy principles while navigating contextual constraints, delivering tangible environmental, social, and economic benefits.

This study examined how a small, community-driven culinary enterprise in a rural context operationalizes circular economy principles and how these efforts influence consumer behavior. The findings indicate that Dapur Tara's approach to the circular economy extends beyond environmental goals and contributes meaningfully to social empowerment and business resilience. These findings support the broader claim made by Purba et al. (2024), who argue that circular economy practices are effective in reducing carbon emissions and fostering environmental awareness. However, this study goes further by illustrating how such practices, when implemented through a community-based model, can strengthen local identity and foster a green lifestyle—an angle less emphasized in previous literature.

Compared to Yulistina et al. (2025), who highlight the macro-level benefits of the circular economy across economic, environmental, and social performance, this study offers a micro-level perspective by showing how these benefits manifest within a small-scale enterprise operating in a rural, tourism-dependent area. This adds nuance to existing research by demonstrating that circular economy strategies are not only feasible for large corporations or urban initiatives but also adaptable and effective within localized community settings.

The community-based model employed by Dapur Tara is consistent with the empowerment framework proposed by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), which stresses participatory approaches in enhancing collective well-being. While prior studies, such as those by Khoiruman et al. (2024), emphasize the role of community engagement in sustainability projects, this study provides empirical evidence that sustained participation—ranging from resource planning to consumer interactions—enhances the long-term viability of circular practices. This is particularly relevant in rural areas, where institutional support may be limited and social cohesion becomes a critical resource.

In terms of marketing communication, this research shows that when sustainable marketing is implemented with a clear strategy, it not only informs consumers but also strengthens brand positioning. At Dapur Tara, campaigns such as *Slow Living* and *Love Your Island* go beyond mere promotion—they articulate an authentic value system that aligns with the beliefs of environmentally conscious customers. Rather than appearing superficial or opportunistic, these initiatives are grounded in everyday practices and locally rooted narratives, which enhances credibility and trust.

Moreover, experiential marketing plays a significant role in influencing consumer behavior. Dapur Tara offers hands-on experiences such as cooking classes and opportunities to interact with local producers, allowing visitors to form emotional connections with sustainable values. While experiential marketing is commonly examined in urban hospitality contexts, this study highlights that in rural and resource-limited settings such experiences can be particularly impactful, as authenticity and direct engagement become central to value creation.

However, challenges remain. Poor infrastructure and limited digital access during the rainy season present clear barriers to enhancing customer experience and scaling communication efforts. These findings confirm Ompusunggu's (2018) assertion that infrastructure is critical for enabling sustainable tourism growth in remote areas. Yet, unlike existing research that often treats infrastructure as a macroeconomic issue, this study highlights its direct and immediate impact on the delivery of circular economy experiences at the enterprise level.

The novelty of this research lies in its empirical illustration of how circular economy principles can be localized and humanized through community empowerment and narrative-driven marketing in a rural tourism context. While previous studies have predominantly addressed the circular economy at the policy or corporate levels, this study adds value by focusing on grassroots implementation dynamics—specifically, how small enterprises such as Dapur Tara can integrate environmental objectives, community development, and consumer engagement into a coherent and sustainable business model. Future research should conduct comparative studies across rural enterprises to assess the scalability of such models. It would also be beneficial to investigate how improvements in infrastructure and digital access might amplify the positive outcomes observed in this study. Finally, longitudinal research designs are needed to evaluate the sustained behavioral and environmental impacts of circular economy initiatives over time.

Collectively, the findings underscore that the effectiveness of circular economy implementation in small-scale enterprises is highly contingent upon the integration of operational practices, community participation, and meaningful communication with consumers. In the case of Dapur Tara, sustainability is not framed as a technical compliance mechanism, but as a lived experience co-produced by business actors, local communities, and visitors. This relational approach enables consumers to internalize circular economy principles through everyday interactions, sensory experiences, and narratives of place. As a result, consumer behavior emerges not only as a response to sustainable practices but as an active component that reinforces and sustains the circular business model itself.

From a broader perspective, this study demonstrates that rural tourism enterprises can serve as strategic sites for advancing sustainable consumption and production, particularly in regions where large-scale industrial interventions may be impractical. By embedding circular economy values within culturally grounded hospitality practices and experiential marketing, enterprises such as Dapur Tara contribute to shifting sustainability from an abstract policy discourse into a tangible, personal, and socially shared experience. This reinforces the argument that bottom-up, community-based initiatives play a critical role in achieving long-term sustainability goals, complementing top-down policy frameworks and offering replicable insights for similar rural and tourism-dependent contexts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of circular economy principles at Dapur Tara Flores is strongly influenced by consumer behavior that supports sustainability. Environmentally conscious consumers tend to be more receptive to the circular practices adopted by the business, such as the use of locally sourced organic ingredients, responsible waste management, and eco-friendly packaging.

The marketing communication strategies employed by Dapur Tara—through both community-based interactions and digital platforms such as social media and websites—have proven effective in increasing consumer awareness and engagement. Direct interaction with guests, storytelling rooted in local culture, and digital campaigns emphasizing slow living and sustainability have successfully attracted tourists who share similar values.

However, the research also highlights several challenges faced by Dapur Tara, including limited internet access that affects digital outreach, difficult road conditions during the rainy season, and a market reach that remains heavily reliant on on-site visitation. To address these challenges and further expand its impact, Dapur Tara can explore innovative marketing strategies such as virtual culinary experiences, QR code-based traceability storytelling, integrated sustainable tourism packages, and sustainability-driven loyalty programs. Additionally, strategies such as content co-creation with local stakeholders, participation in urban green markets, and limited-edition collaborations with sustainable chefs offer promising avenues to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement.

This study reaffirms the essential role of consumer behavior in supporting circular economy practices in the culinary sector. It also emphasizes that well-designed, value-driven marketing communication strategies can strengthen the relationship between businesses and consumers in fostering more sustainable food systems

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