



## The resilience strategies of tourism SMEs in Bengkulu's coastal ecotourism zone

Rahmat Putra Ahmad Hasibuan<sup>1</sup>, Maulida Khairani<sup>2</sup>, Nur Fadhilah Ahmad Hasibuan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Islamic Economics and Business Faculty, UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Islamic Economics and Business Faculty, UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Islamic Economics and Business Faculty, UIN Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism SMEs in Bengkulu's coastal ecotourism areas frequently face environmental and economic disruptions that challenge their business sustainability. This study explores how these SMEs build and maintain organizational resilience amidst uncertainty. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with selected SMEs from the culinary, souvenir, homestay, local fashion, and transportation sectors. Thematic analysis revealed that resilience among tourism SMEs is shaped through three interrelated dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and contextual resilience. Cognitive resilience emerges from local awareness, anticipation, and collective understanding that enable SMEs to recognize and respond to environmental changes. Behavioral resilience is demonstrated in adaptive practices, flexibility, and innovation that transform limited resources into creative responses. Contextual resilience is rooted in social networks, partnerships, and informal cooperation that strengthen collective adaptive capacity despite limited institutional support. These findings highlight that resilience in coastal tourism SMEs is not a static trait but a cyclical process of learning, adaptation, and collaboration. This study contributes to the understanding of resilience in the tourism context of developing countries and offers insights for strengthening the sustainability of coastal based SMEs through locally embedded adaptive strategies.

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### Corresponding Author:

Rahmat Putra Ahmad Hasibuan,  
Islamic Economics and Business Faculty,  
UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu,  
Raden Fatah Street, Pagar Subdistrict, Selebar District, Bengkulu, 38211, Indonesia,  
Email: [rahmatputrahasibuan@mail.uinfasbengkulu.ac.id](mailto:rahmatputrahasibuan@mail.uinfasbengkulu.ac.id)

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is a major driver of the global economy, contributing nearly 10% to global GDP and creating substantial employment across various sectors. Within this industry, coastal tourism is a key component, contributing a significant portion of international travel, economic output, and job creation. Coastal tourism plays a vital role, accounting for approximately 30% of global tourism activities (Kabil et al., 2021). However, the attractiveness of a tourist destination is

directly linked to the quality of its environment, making the sector sensitive to ecological change and degradation. Currently, Climate change has become a major challenge for the global coastal tourism sector. Rising global temperatures and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events have substantially transformed the landscape of coastal destinations (Ye, 2023). Moreover, this uncertainty has changed tourist behavior, making them more selective and risk-averse when choosing destinations. Tourists more concern about natural disasters, environmental degradation, and declining comfort levels reduce the attractiveness of vulnerable coastal areas. This behavioral change has economic consequences for regions dependent on tourism, as the decline in tourist numbers leads to a decline in local economies and reduced investment in the tourism sector (Atzori et al., 2018; Enríquez & Bestard, 2020).

Coastal tourism plays a vital role in Indonesia's tourism development and regional economic growth, contributing approximately 6% to national GDP and generating extensive employment opportunities, particularly through SMEs in the hospitality, crafts, and transportation sectors (Hasibuan et al., 2025; Mun'im, 2022). As key supporters of the tourism industry, SMEs significantly enhance the attractiveness of coastal destinations by engaging local communities in tourism-related entrepreneurship, including the development of distinctive local products, ecotourism initiatives, and cultural experiences (Aprilia et al., 2025). Bengkulu, located on the west coast of Sumatra, has emerged as an ecotourism destination due to its natural coastal resources and environmental conservation efforts, such as those at Panjang Beach. This case illustrates the close interconnection between coastal tourism and the local economy, where numerous SMEs not only enrich visitor experiences but also serve as an important source of household income for local communities (Julika et al., 2024). However, coastal tourism in Bengkulu faces significant environmental and economic challenges, including coastal abrasion, erosion, waste-related pollution, and unstable tourist arrivals, which limit revenue generation and constrain long-term innovation and workforce development among SMEs (Darmi & Aryanti, 2022). These challenges underscore the importance of integrated coastal management and sustainable tourism practices to maintain environmental integrity and ensure the long-term economic resilience of coastal tourism destinations (Ardilafiza et al., 2021).

Previous research has identified several resilience factors in tourism SMEs such as effective internal resource management, social network development, and innovation capacity. Resource-based initiatives and organizational learning can enhance adaptive and innovative capacity, enabling SMEs to better navigate the dynamics of the business environment (Ardilafiza et al., 2021; Hoa et al., 2021). Moreover, resilient leadership and stakeholder collaboration are recognized as crucial drivers of long-term organizational resilience. They are also seen as strategic foundations for sustainable development that integrate economic viability, social inclusiveness, and environmental responsibility (Afwa et al., 2024; Prayag et al., 2023; Suriyankietkaew et al., 2022). However, research is still limited in understanding the context of ecotourism SMEs, especially in coastal areas, by understanding how to develop and maintain resilience in practice. Most existing studies focus on destination-level analysis rather than the experiences and adaptive strategies of SMEs supporting tourism destinations. The conceptual gaps in tourism resilience literature highlight the need to focus on the SME level, rather than macro-level tourism destinations or institutions, overlooking the unique challenges faced by SMEs in the tourism sector (Osiako & Szente, 2024; Prayag et al., 2023; Suriyankietkaew et al., 2022). SMEs are often more vulnerable to crises due to limited resources, restricted access to funding or training, and dependence on local factors such as weather and tourist behavior. Moreover, their resilience is largely based on local knowledge, adaptive innovation, and collaboration within social networks, which are often overlooked in macro-level studies. Resilience at the SME level, encompassing cognitive, behavioral, and contextual dimensions, is dynamic and closely tied to their daily experiences, yet it is rarely explored in macro-level research. This gap underscores the importance of expanding research to understand how SMEs manage resilience during crises and how their adaptive strategies

contribute to the sustainability and development of tourism at the local level (Badoc-Gonzales et al., 2022; Núñez-Ríos et al., 2021). To address this gap, a study of Tourism SME Resilience Strategies in the Bengkulu Coastal Ecotourism Area, which examines how local tourism businesses respond to environmental and economic pressures, is crucial. By examining these resilience strategies, this study offers valuable insights for strengthening SME sustainability and long-term coastal tourism development.

Ecotourism is a form of responsible tourism that balances environmental conservation with community well-being. The pillars of ecotourism are divided into environmental conservation, society, and cultural preservation, which responsible tourism practices balance environmental conservation, economic and social inclusiveness, and the preservation of local culture. It seeks to minimize ecological damage while promoting biodiversity protection and cultural preservation apart from economic outcomes (Machnik, 2021). This concept is a conservation effort and local participation, which communities and tourists collaboratively manage natural resources to support sustainable livelihoods. Unlike mass tourism, which prioritizes visitor volume and short-term economic gains, often at the expense of the local environment and culture, ecotourism encourages ethical engagement and sustainable coexistence between people and nature, integrating ecological integrity with economic and social inclusiveness (Baloch et al., 2022; Seervi, 2023; Thomas, 2022). Tourism SMEs play a crucial role in realizing sustainable ecotourism by strengthening local economies and promoting destination resilience. Representing over 80% of the tourism industry, SMEs drive regional development through job creation and by embedding local culture and creativity into the tourism value chain. In coastal areas, these businesses are typically community-based and family-run, creating strong social cohesion and a sense of shared responsibility for the environment. Tourism SMEs offer products ranging from culinary services to handicrafts and homestays, generating inclusive economic potential and enhancing local resilience. By integrating local wisdom with sustainable business practices, SMEs contribute to poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and the long-term sustainability of coastal tourism (Ahmad & Alsuhaibany, 2025; Audina et al., 2024).

Organizational resilience describes an organization's ability to absorb disruption, adapt to change, and thrive through crises. Resilience reflects a learning process that transforms adversity into a driver of innovation and long-term success rather than simply restoring stability (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Resilience encompasses both reactive and proactive capacities that enable organizations to recover while enhancing adaptability. For tourism SMEs, this capability is crucial given their limited resources and high exposure to external shocks. Developing resilience requires a dynamic process that helps organizations detect change, reconfigure resources, and capitalize on new opportunities. Through such adaptation, SMEs transform rigid routines into flexible, learning-oriented systems that foster sustainability, agility, and competitiveness in volatile environments (Badoc-Gonzales et al., 2022). The organizational resilience framework comprises three interrelated dimensions: cognitive, behavioral, and contextual resilience (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Prayag et al., 2023). Cognitive resilience involves awareness, anticipation, and understanding that enable organizations to recognize and interpret emerging risks and opportunities. Behavioral resilience focuses on adaptive responses, flexibility, and innovation that sustain operations and foster creativity under pressure. Contextual resilience highlights the importance of networks, partnerships, and institutional alignment that strengthen external support systems. Together, these dimensions form an integrated cycle in which cognition informs action, behavior drives adaptation, and context fosters recovery. This multidimensional approach positions resilience as a continuous process of anticipation, adaptation, and transformation, extending beyond short-term survival to long-term renewal and innovation (Zeng et al., 2021).

This study presents three dimensions of resilience: cognitive, behavioral, and contextual, to enrich the understanding of resilience in coastal tourism SMEs. The cognitive dimension involves awareness and the ability to anticipate environmental changes that impact operations, such as

extreme weather events or shifts in tourist preferences. Behavioral resilience reflects the capacity of SMEs to adapt and innovate in the face of uncertainty, for example, by shifting to digital marketing or developing environmentally sustainable products. The contextual dimension highlights the importance of social networks and collaboration among SMEs and relevant institutions, which collectively strengthen resilience. By incorporating these dimensions, this research enhances the conceptualization of resilience in coastal tourism SMEs, emphasizing that resilience is not solely based on individual efforts but also on collective action and collaboration in addressing shared challenges.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate how tourism SMEs in Bengkulu's coastal ecotourism zone cultivate resilience strategies in response to environmental and economic pressures, enabling an in-depth and contextually grounded understanding of a complex phenomenon within its real-world setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Conducted in key coastal destination, Pantai Panjang Bengkulu, the research focuses on areas characterized by strong dependence on natural coastal resources, significant ecotourism potential, and heightened exposure to environmental pressures. The Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research focus. The study involved five SME owners operating in Bengkulu's coastal ecotourism areas, they are culinary SME, souvenir SME, homestay SME, local fashion SME, and transportation SME. Each participant met specific criteria: operating for at least three years, directly managing business operations, and engaging in tourism-related activities dependent on coastal resources. The sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, achieved when no new themes or insights emerged during the final interviews. By Involving informants from different sectors, this study offers a broad view of how MSMEs adapt and recover from disruptions. Each sector faces unique challenges and uses different sustainability strategies, such as diversification or community networks. This cross-sector approach highlights individual strategies and common resilience behaviors, providing a comprehensive and holistic understanding of resilience across coastal tourism MSMEs.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, guided by the Organizational Resilience Model of Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011), which delineates resilience across cognitive, behavioral, and contextual dimensions. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach guided by the organizational resilience (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). The process began with transcribing and reading the interview data to achieve familiarity and identify preliminary meanings. Initial coding was conducted by labeling relevant segments of text that reflected aspects of cognitive, behavioral, and contextual resilience. These codes were then grouped into broader themes corresponding to the study's theoretical dimensions. Throughout the process, comparison was applied between data segments and themes to refine interpretations and ensure internal consistency. To enhance validity, the researcher performed triangulation with observation notes and supplementary information obtained from field observations by confirming key findings with participants. Through this integration of methodological rigor and contextual depth, the study reveals how local enterprises perceive and respond to environmental and economic uncertainty, translating their experiences into adaptive learning processes that advance both theoretical discourse on organizational resilience and practical strategies for sustainable coastal tourism development (Creswell & Poth, 2018).



Figure 1. Methodological Stages

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### RESULTS

#### Informants Details

In this section, it is explained the results of research and at the same time is given the comprehensive discussion. Results can be presented in figures, graphs, tables and others that make the reader understand easily (Grieshaber, 2020). The discussion can be made in several sub-chapters. This study involved five participants representing diverse tourism-related SMEs operating in Bengkulu's coastal ecotourism area. The SMEs cover key sectors contributing to local tourism development, including culinary SME souvenir SME, homestay SME, local fashion SME, and transportation SME. Business experience among participants ranges from three to ten years, with workforce sizes between two and six employees.

Table 1: Informants Details

No	SMEs Types	Business Length	Number of employees
1	Culinary	8 years	5 Persons
2	Souvenir	5 Years	4 Persons
3	Homestay	10 Years	6 Persons
4	Local Fashion	7 Years	2 Persons
5	Transportation	8 Years	4 Persons

#### Cognitive Resilience

Tourism SMEs in coastal Bengkulu show strong awareness of their environment, particularly in responding to factors like weather, tides, and beach cleanliness that affect visitor numbers and income. This awareness allows them to adjust their operations based on environmental and market signals. For example, culinary SMEs relocate stalls during bad weather, while souvenir and fashion SMEs adapt to tourists' growing demand for eco-friendly products (Souvenir SME owner, 2025). These businesses also monitor trends on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok to stay connected with customers. Preparation for uncertainty is a key strategy. Culinary SMEs reduce perishable stock during adverse weather, while other SMEs use online promotions and social media to maintain customer relationships (Culinary SME owner, 2025). Homestay SMEs adjust prices and offer seasonal packages, and transportation SMEs ensure equipment safety during high tides (Homestay SME owner, 2025; Transportation SME owner, 2025). These strategies are based on experience, observation, and local knowledge, rather than formal training. When disruptions occur, SMEs quickly interpret the causes and adjust. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic led culinary SMEs to adopt online delivery services in response to declining sales (Culinary SME owner, 2025). Information sharing through WhatsApp groups helps businesses make informed decisions, reducing uncertainty (Souvenir SME owner, 2025). These practices show that cognitive resilience in coastal tourism SMEs is built on awareness, experience, and collective learning, supporting long-term business sustainability.

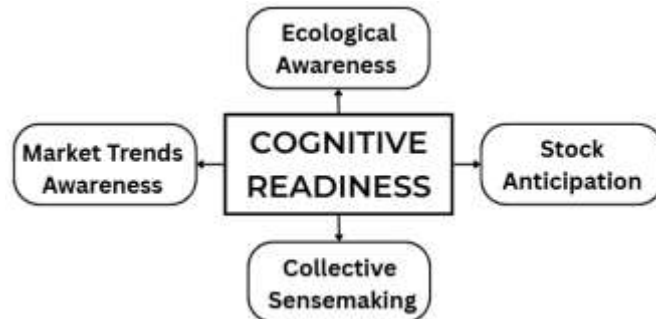


Figure 2: Cognitive Strategies

**Behavioral Resilience**

SMEs in Bengkulu’s coastal tourism sector display strong behavioral adaptability shaped by experience and situational demands. Rather than responding passively to disruptions such as declining tourist arrivals or weather variability, SMEs act quickly by adjusting operations and adopting technology to sustain business continuity. For example, online marketing through social media platforms has enabled SMEs to reach broader markets during downturns (Souvenir SME owner, 2025), while culinary SMEs reduce perishable stock and shift to preserved products in anticipation of heavy rainfall (Souvenir SME owner, 2025). Homestay SMEs respond to seasonal fluctuations by offering long-stay and seasonal packages, and transportation SMEs introduce alternative services, such as adjusted tour packages, when demand declines. Creativity further strengthens behavioral resilience, as SMEs develop innovations rooted in local identity and sustainability rather than advanced technology. Examples include the use of eco-friendly packaging in culinary businesses, the creation of locally inspired souvenirs, the adaptation of traditional Batik Besurek into modern fashion designs (Local Fashion SME, 2025), and experience-based homestay offerings that enhance a sense of place. Transportation SMEs also integrate new services, such as drone photography, to appeal to digitally oriented tourists. These adaptive and innovative practices demonstrate that resilience among Bengkulu’s coastal tourism SMEs is both reactive and generative, driven by improvisation, collaboration, and local knowledge, enabling SMEs to remain flexible and sustainable under conditions of uncertainty.

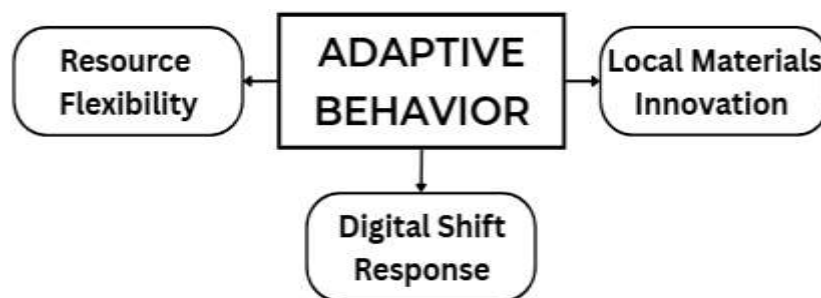


Figure 3: Behavioral Strategies

**Contextual Resilience**

The resilience of Bengkulu's coastal tourism SMEs is not built in isolation, but rather maintained through collective bonds and institutional relationships that provide support when businesses face disruption and environmental degradation. Informal solidarity networks of SMEs foster community well-being by maintaining local economic benefits relevant to the ecotourism pillars. SMEs rely on family members and fellow vendors in the surrounding area to share information, materials, and even customers. A culinary SME mentioned how local vendors “often exchange food ingredients when supplies run out or inform each other about upcoming events on

the beach” (Culinary SME owner, 2025). This informal collaboration creates a safety net and opportunities that allow businesses to continue operating even when resources are limited. More than just economic transactions, these relationships foster a sense of solidarity and trust that strengthen emotional resilience during times of uncertainty. Homestay SME also collaborates with other SMEs such as food vendors, souvenir sellers, and local guides to create integrated information that offers greater convenience for visitors. “We work together to ensure that tourists have a seamless experience by sharing information and resources” (Homestay SME owner, 2025). In the transportation sector, this SME maintains close coordination with homestay providers and fishermen to organize tour schedules and ensure safety. Participation in community festivals and government-organized events such as the Tabut Festival or regional tourism exhibitions also opens up opportunities to increase revenue. This collaboration blurs the boundaries between SMEs and transforms them into a mutually beneficial ecosystem. This kind of collaboration not only increases market visibility but also fosters a form of trust between adaptive SMEs embedded in local tourism networks.

Formal institutional support complements these informal resilience networks, although its presence is uneven. Some SMEs acknowledge the importance of training programs provided by government agencies and educational institutions, particularly in packaging development, branding, and digital marketing. These initiatives have increased professionalism and market competitiveness. However, SMEs also emphasize that financial assistance and ongoing mentoring remain limited. A homestay SME explained that while training is beneficial, “support for equipment or capital is still difficult to access” (Homestay SME owner, 2025). Despite these constraints, knowledge gained from institutional engagement can lead to more effective practical improvements. Contextual resilience among Bengkulu tourism SMEs emerges from the interplay of informal social solidarity, collaborative partnerships, and selective institutional engagement. While formal structures offer knowledge and legitimacy, their primary strength lies in community-based cooperation and interdependence. These collective practices form a social infrastructure that supports SMEs' adaptability, enabling them to withstand repeated shocks and maintain livelihoods that directly contribute to the resilience of the broader coastal tourism ecosystem.

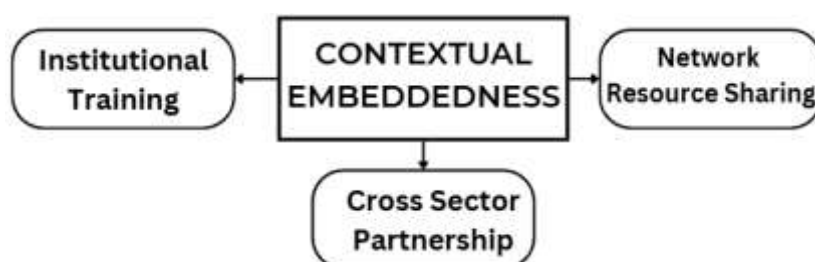


Figure 3: Contextual Strategies

### Integrative Pattern of Resilience

Findings from Bengkulu's coastal tourism SMEs indicate that organizational resilience is not a static trait, but rather a dynamic and iterative process shaped by the interaction of cognition, behavior, and social context. The three dimensions of resilience operate as a continuous cycle in which awareness, adaptation, and collaboration mutually reinforce each other. This cyclical process enables SMEs to transform everyday vulnerabilities into sustainable capabilities. At the cognitive level, awareness of environmental signals and market shifts serves as the foundation for all adaptive behaviors. SMEs' sensitivity to changing weather, travel patterns, and social media trends triggers proactive anticipation and meaning-making. This cognitive vigilance becomes the seed of adaptation: when entrepreneurs perceive early warning signs, they interpret their meaning

and prepare concrete responses that minimize risk. This preparedness explains how even SMEs with limited resources are able to remain operational amidst repeated disruptions.

Behavioral resilience demonstrates the transformation of this vigilance into action. Adaptive responses such as product diversification, digitalization, and flexible operations are forms of cognitive insight. These behavioral strategies are not uniform but rather situational, shaped by the entrepreneur's judgment, available resources, and collective learning from the community. Behavioral resilience serves as a practical expression of cognitive understanding, beginning as awareness and anticipation, evolving into strategic innovation and improvisation. Over time, these behavioral adjustments generate feedback that further enriches SMEs' cognitive capacities and creates a mutually reinforcing learning cycle. Contextual resilience acts as the glue that binds and sustains the entire process. Social networks, partnerships, and institutional relationships provide external support that enables SMEs to collectively face pressures. Institutional interventions foster new knowledge and legitimacy, strengthening the system as a whole, despite their limited frequency and number. These contextual factors ensure that resilience is not only individual but also communal within an ecosystem of shared interdependence.

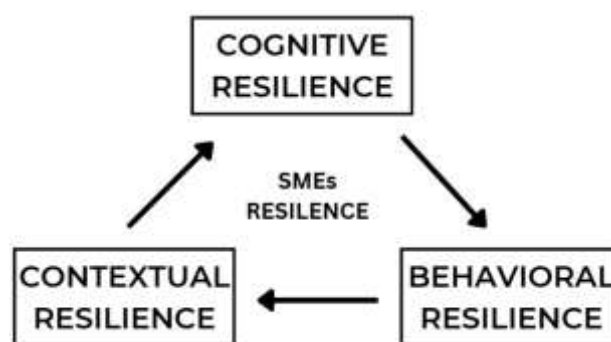


Figure 4: Resilience Dimensions Relationship

## Discussion

The findings challenge conventional views of resilience by showing that resource-constrained SMEs develop adaptive capacity through informal, experience-based, and community-driven mechanisms rather than formal preparedness systems. These practices reflect “emergent resilience,” where cognition and behavior evolve through continuous interaction with environmental feedback, enabling SMEs to anticipate disruptions through practical awareness and local knowledge (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Resilience across SME sectors is therefore improvisational and situational, as entrepreneurs experiment with products, services, and digital tools in response to changing conditions. This aligns with Weick’s (1988) notion that organizations “act to understand,” where learning emerges through action. Adaptation in this context is necessity-driven innovation, characterized by creative recombination of limited resources shaped by local culture, representing a form of bricolage-based resilience (Baker, 2012). The contextual dimension highlights the role of social embeddedness in shaping resilience. The finding that MSME resilience is supported more by social solidarity than government policy challenges traditional resilience frameworks, which often emphasize formal institutions. It suggests that resilience in MSMEs relies significantly on informal, community-based networks. Social capital, such as trust and mutual support, plays a key role in strengthening resilience. This implies that future resilience theories should integrate local networks and collective action as essential components. Furthermore, the finding indicates that government support may not always be timely or sufficient, highlighting the need for policies that strengthen both institutional and community-driven resilience.

This study reconceptualizes resilience as a cyclical interaction of cognition, action, and social relations, rather than a linear recovery process. Resilience thus involves “reconfiguring forward” through local knowledge, adaptive behavior, and collective interdependence, contributing to the decolonization of resilience theory. Practically, this model integrates three key dimensions to show how MSMEs build resilience over time. The cognitive dimension focuses on risk awareness and preparation, while the behavioral dimension highlights adaptability, innovation, and operational adjustments. The contextual dimension emphasizes the role of external support, like social networks and community collaboration. Together, these dimensions create a continuous cycle where awareness leads to proactive actions, adaptation drives learning, and external support enhances long-term sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

The resilience of Bengkulu's coastal tourism SMEs is shaped by the ongoing interaction of cognitive awareness, adaptive behavior, and social context. SMEs demonstrate a strong capacity to sense environmental and market shifts, anticipate risks, and interpret crises through collective learning. These cognitive abilities are demonstrated in pragmatic behaviors such as diversification, flexibility, and innovation, enabling businesses to maintain operations despite recurring uncertainties. Thus, their resilience is not an individual attribute, but rather a socially grounded process that combines experiential knowledge, intuition, and collaboration. Furthermore, contextual dimensions strengthen this adaptive capacity through community networks, cross-sector partnerships, and limited but meaningful institutional support. These dimensions create a cyclical resilience model in which awareness informs action, and collaboration sustains renewal. These findings highlight that the resilience of SMEs in coastal tourism is not about returning to normal, but rather about evolving toward new forms of stability. Therefore, policies should focus on empowering local networks, promoting trust, and encouraging community-driven approaches that build adaptability, while addressing the unique challenges of coastal ecotourism to ensure long-term sustainability. To test the transferability of this resilience model to other coastal areas, future research should examine how local environmental, economic, and social factors shape resilience strategies. Comparative studies across different coastal regions will help refine the model, ensuring it is adaptable to varying institutional support, infrastructure, and environmental challenges, such as climate change and shifting tourist behaviors.

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