

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Tourism development potential of the *Pacu Jalur* festival in Riau Province, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the potential for developing the traditional *Pacu Jalur* boat race festival as a cultural tourism attraction in Riau Province, Indonesia, within the framework of regional economic development. The research was conducted in Kuantan Taluk using a qualitative descriptive approach. Key informants consisted of local residents living near the event venue along the Narosa River. Data were analyzed descriptively to identify internal and external factors influencing tourism development. The findings reveal that internal factors such as event attractiveness, infrastructure, facilities, and management capacity play a crucial role in shaping tourism development. Among these, the festival's cultural appeal emerges as the strongest element, whereas infrastructure remains the main challenge. Externally, socio-cultural dynamics, political and governmental support, economic conditions, and technological advancements significantly affect the development prospects. Technological progress offers the greatest opportunities, while political support is relatively less prominent. Overall, the *Pacu Jalur* festival demonstrates substantial potential for further tourism development, supported by favorable internal and external conditions.

KEYWORDS

Pacu Jalur festival, tourism development, Kuantan Singingi, cultural heritage, Riau Province

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1. Introduction

Tourism development in Indonesia must be implemented across all regions through the establishment of tourism agencies that function as authorized institutions to issue regulations, provide guidance, and offer technical assistance to help investors and local communities enhance tourism in their respective areas (Wulandari, 2016).

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The tourism sector serves as a major source of economic potential that contributes significantly to improving community welfare and promoting regional development. This sector must be developed comprehensively and equitably through coordinated and systematic management. Moreover, the concept of tourism encompasses empowerment initiatives, tourism businesses, attractions, and various other tourism-related activities. The potential of this sector has a substantial impact on local livelihoods, including the emergence of vendors selling food, beverages, and souvenirs, as well as the provision of transportation and other supporting services.

Riau Province is among the regions in Indonesia where the tourism industry continues to grow. One of its leading destinations is Kuantan Singingi Regency, which possesses a rich cultural heritage and abundant natural resources. A prominent example of this cultural heritage is the *Pacu Jalur* festival, a traditional boat race that remains a strong symbol of local identity and pride.

Kuantan Singingi Regency preserves various traditional practices that form an integral part of the region's and nation's cultural heritage, one of which is the *Pacu Jalur* festival (Nasution et al., 2025). This rowing competition, unique to Kuantan Singingi, involves 40–60 participants and takes place on the Narosa River in Batang Kuantan. The *Pacu Jalur* tradition dates back to 1905 and has been preserved by the Taluk Kuantan community for generations. Initially, the race was organized to celebrate Islamic holidays such as Eid al-Fitr. However, during the Dutch colonial era, it was repurposed to commemorate Queen Wilhelmina's birthday on August 31. Today, the *Pacu Jalur* festival is held annually to celebrate Indonesia's Independence Day. In addition to the main event, preliminary races are also conducted beforehand to entertain the public and train participants for the final competition (Lestari, 2021).

Originally, traders only sold goods during the festival, but as the event's popularity grew, trading activities became a regular occurrence. Many residents now visit the Kuantan River area daily to enjoy the riverside atmosphere. The establishment of the river racing arena as a tourist attraction has further increased visitor numbers (Maharani & Hardi, 2023). The festival also contributes economically through the provision of parking areas, grandstands for spectators at Tepian Narosa, and the presence of food, beverage, and souvenir vendors, along with additional entertainment activities. Consequently, it is crucial for both the local community and the Kuantan Singingi Regency Government to formulate effective strategies for developing the *Pacu Jalur* festival into a sustainable tourism activity that generates optimal economic benefits (Susrianto, 2018).

Community empowerment plays an important role in promoting the *Pacu Jalur* festival. The community referred to in this study includes millennials who actively participate in disseminating information about the festival in Kuantan Singingi Regency. Millennials are considered particularly responsive to technological changes in the tourism sector (Harto, 2019).

Several strategies have been implemented by the Kuantan Singingi Regency Government to support the development of *Pacu Jalur* tourism. These include promoting broader public awareness, establishing strong place branding to enhance the regional tourism image, and positioning the festival as a key attraction in Riau Province. Proper conceptualization and branding of the *Pacu Jalur* festival are expected to strengthen the image of Kuantan Singingi Regency and provide added value compared to other regions. To achieve these objectives, capacity building and service quality improvement are essential components of community empowerment. Competent human resources are vital to ensuring the success of such events. With adequate training and coordination, the intended goals of tourism development can be effectively realized (Ramadhani et al. 2023).

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism development

Tourism development is a way to grow managed tourist attractions that involve various aspects of community life through transportation, accommodation, infrastructure, attractions, visitor facilities, and so on. Tourism development can be defined as a series of activities that, when observed, can have a significant effect on improving the quality of life of tourists. Tourism development can also be defined as a series of efforts to create a dynamic unity in the use of tourism resources, combining various components outside of tourism that are directly or indirectly related to the development of tourism (Choirunnisa & Karmilah, 2021).

Tourism development can provide many uses and benefits. Tourism development is intended to be a reliable defense. Thus, efforts to improve various tourism advantages can open up job opportunities, increase community income, and increase regional and national income (Choirunnisa & Karmilah, 2021).

2.2. *Community empowerment*

Empowerment is part of the notion of community development in the economic and political areas, defined by being people-centered, participative, empowering, and sustainable. Empowerment is the endeavor to enhance community capacity by inspiring, motivating, and increasing knowledge of their potential while fostering its positive development (Mardhani et al., 2024c). In development terms, it is essentially described as an endeavor to engage the community and delineate clear duties in managing development for the sake of welfare. Empowerment resides inside individuals, but external influences just operate as stimulants that foster excitement, emotions, or drive, prompting individuals to assert control over themselves and cultivate their potential. Thus, empowering the community aims to enhance the dignity of those now trapped in poverty and underdevelopment, facilitating their enablement and empowerment (Musa, 2020).

The goal of empowerment is to shape individuals and communities to become independent, including independent in their thinking, actions, and control over what they do. Community independence is a condition experienced by communities characterized by the ability to think, decide, and do what is considered appropriate to solve the problems they face by using their abilities, which consist of cognitive, conative, psychomotor, and affective abilities, with the mobilization of resources owned by the internal environment of the community (Rindi, 2017).

3. Research methods

After all the desired data has been obtained, conclusions are sought as answers to the research questions. Conclusions are drawn and verified by reviewing the data reduction and data display so that the conclusions drawn do not deviate from the analyzed data. This study uses the Likert Scale. The Likert Scale is a research scale used to measure attitudes and opinions. With this Likert scale, respondents are asked to complete a questionnaire that requires them to indicate their level of agreement with a series of questions. In creating a scale, research needs to assume the existence of a real continuum of certain characteristics. For example, in terms of agreement with something, where the continuum is strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree. Due to the necessity of a continuum in creating a Likert scale, unrelated items cannot be included in the same scale (Nazir, 2009).

The scores used for the qualitative analysis were based on a five-point Likert scale consisting of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Furthermore, the assessment for each aspect was calculated using both score values and mean scores.

4. Results

Pacu Jalur is a traditional watercraft used by the community of Kuantan Singingi Regency in Riau Province. These boats, carved from large logs, were originally utilized for transportation and trade but have since evolved into vessels for competition during the annual Pacu Jalur Festival, held every August 17 to commemorate Indonesia's Independence Day on the Kuantan River. The Pacu Jalur Festival is unique and has become a significant cultural event as well as an attractive tourism destination for both domestic and international visitors. The results of the internal and external environmental impact analysis are presented in [Table 1](#).

4.1. Internal environment (strengths and weaknesses)

4.1.1. Event attractiveness aspect

The score obtained for the scenery at the event attractiveness, which is still pristine, is 421 (4.30), which means that tourists consider the scenery of *Pacu Jalur* festival tourism to be very good because the scenery presented is still considered pristine.

The score obtained for the culture and traditions that are still preserved is 447 (4.56), which means that tourists consider the culture and traditions in *Pacu Jalur* festival tourism to be very well preserved because the local residents still uphold the culture and traditions there and hold cultural performances so that they are very well preserved.

The score obtained for unique tourist attractions is 455 (4.64), which means that tourists consider the uniqueness of *Pacu Jalur* festival tourism to be a reason to visit again because its attractions leave a lasting impression on tourists.

In terms of the aspects of event attractiveness, it is known that the scenery at tourist attractions is still beautiful, with a score frequency of 421, culture and traditions are still well preserved, with a score frequency of 447, and the unique tourist attraction has a score frequency of 455. From these three indicators of tourism appeal, a mean score above 4.21 was obtained, indicating that tourists strongly agree that the tourism appeal is very good.

Table 1. Likert scale evaluation results of internal and external environmental aspects

Aspects	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total Score	Mean
Internal environment (strengths and weaknesses)								
Event attractiveness aspect	The scenery at tourist attractions is still beautiful	0	0	30	196	195	421	4,30
	Culture and traditions are still well preserved	0	0	0	172	275	447	4,56
	Unique tourist attractions	0	0	3	132	320	455	4,64
Infrastructure aspect	The road conditions leading to the tourist attraction are good	1	4	39	224	130	398	4,06
	Clean water and toilets are available	2	16	54	184	120	376	3,84
	Parking is available	1	0	6	176	255	438	4,47
	There is a bus terminal	1	4	9	208	200	422	4,31
Facilities aspect	There is a bridge for crossing	1	0	0	148	300	449	4,58
	Availability of hospital pharmacies	0	0	0	176	270	446	4,55
	Availability of hotels, homestays, and guesthouses	0	0	0	184	260	444	4,53
	Availability of eateries and restaurants	0	0	0	164	285	449	4,58
	Availability of ATMs	0	6	6	156	270	438	4,47
	The availability of a prayer room or place of worship	0	0	0	156	295	451	4,60
	Availability of public transportation	0	16	36	192	150	394	4,02
	The availability of market stalls for selling goods to earn a living and boost the economy	0	0	0	152	300	452	4,61
	There are recreational facilities to make tourists feel at home	0	2	12	308	80	402	4,10
	A smooth transportation system to tourist attractions will make it easier for tourists to visit	1	2	27	176	215	421	4,30
Management capacity aspect	A security and surveillance system that provides convenience in various sectors for tourists	0	0	9	204	220	433	4,42
	Support from the Kuantan Singingi Regency Tourism and Culture Office	0	0	0	136	320	456	4,65
	Collaboration with the government and community	0	0	0	284	135	419	4,28
	Economic support	0	0	0	176	270	446	4,55
	Social and cultural support	0	0	0	172	275	447	4,56

Source: Authors calculation

Table 1. (continued)

Aspects	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total Score	Mean
External environment (opportunities and threats)								
Socio-cultural aspect	The existence of tourist attractions introduces unique cultures	0	0	0	144	310	454	4,63
	The existence of tourist attractions has an impact on businesses managed by the surrounding community	0	0	0	168	280	448	4,57
Politics and governmental aspect	The existence of cooperation between government agencies and the surrounding community in developing tourist attractions	0	0	0	212	225	437	3,88
	High government attention to developing tourist attractions	0	0	0	220	215	435	4,88
Economic conditions aspect	The existence of tourist attractions helps the local community to open up business opportunities	0	0	0	148	305	453	4,88
	The existence of these tourist attractions increases the income of the surrounding community	0	0	0	140	315	455	5,88
Technological progress	Information about tourist attractions can be easily accessed via the internet	0	0	0	172	275	447	5,88
	Information about tourist attractions can be obtained quickly and accurately	0	0	0	172	275	447	5,88

Source: Authors calculation

4.1.2. Infrastructure aspect

The score obtained for tourism infrastructure based on the condition of the road leading to the tourist attraction is 398 (4.06), which means that tourists consider the condition of the road leading to the tourist attraction to be good but not excellent because there are still potholes and the road is not wide enough as it is the only access road to the tourist attraction.

The score obtained for tourism infrastructure based on the availability of clean water in toilets was 376 (3.84), which means that tourists considered the availability

of clean water in toilets at tourist attractions to be not entirely good because there was often no water available to tourists during events at these locations.

The score obtained for tourism infrastructure based on the availability of parking spaces is 438 (4.47), which means that tourists consider the availability of parking spaces at the tourist attraction to be sufficient, even though it accommodates the cars and motorcycles of visiting tourists because the tourist area is located outside the field.

The score obtained for tourism infrastructure based on the availability of terminals is 422 (4.31), which means that tourists consider the terminals to be located not far from tourist sites, making it easy for tourists to access tourist sites from the terminals.

In terms of the above aspects of tourism infrastructure, it is known that the condition of the road leading to the tourist attraction is good, with a score of 398, there is clean water in the toilets with a score of 376, and the availability of parking spaces with a score of 438 from the three indicators of the existence of a terminal with a score of 422. This results in a mean value of 4.17, meaning that tourists consider the tourism infrastructure, such as road conditions, clean water, parking spaces, and the terminal, to be good. However, the tourism infrastructure still requires further improvement to meet the needs of tourists who wish to visit.

4.1.3. Facilities aspect

The score obtained for tourism facilities based on the availability of a ferry crossing is 449 (4.58), which means that tourists consider the terminal to be located not far from the tourist site, making it easy for tourists to access the tourist site from the terminal. The score obtained for tourist facilities based on the availability of pharmacies and hospitals is 446 (4.55), which means that tourists consider that there are easily accessible pharmacies and hospitals at the tourist location. The score obtained for tourist facilities based on the availability of hotels, homestays, and inns is 444 (4.53), which means that tourists consider that hotels, homestays, and inns are readily available at tourist sites, making it easy for tourists who want to stay overnight.

The score obtained for tourist facilities based on the availability of restaurants is 449 (4.58), which means that tourists consider that the tourist location has easily accessible restaurants, making it easier for tourists to find food around the tourist

attraction. The score obtained for tourist facilities based on the availability of ATMs was 438 (4.47), which means that tourists consider that tourist sites already have easily accessible ATMs, making it easier for tourists to withdraw money from ATMs when they run out of cash. From the calculations using the Likert scale above, it is known that tourist facilities based on the availability of a prayer room or place of worship are rated most highly as strongly agree. There were 59 tourists who strongly agreed with a score of 295, 39 tourists who agreed (S) with a score of 156, and no tourists who disagreed or strongly disagreed. The score obtained for tourist facilities based on the availability of a prayer room or place of worship was 451 (4.60), which means that tourists consider that tourist sites already have prayer rooms or places of worship, especially for Muslims. The score obtained for tourism facilities based on the availability of public transportation was 394 (4.02), which means that tourists consider that there is not enough public transportation, making it difficult for tourists to access the tourist location. The score obtained for tourist facilities based on the availability of stalls for selling goods to earn a living and boost the economy is 452 (4.61), which means that tourists consider that there are many vendors selling various goods at the tourist location, making it easy for tourists to find food or snacks typical of the location. The score obtained for tourism facilities based on the availability of recreational areas to make tourists feel at home is 402 (4.10), which means that tourists consider that there are quite a number of interesting recreational areas that can be visited by tourists at the tourist location.

In the above aspects of tourist facilities, it is known that the availability of bridges has a score of 449, the availability of pharmacies and hospitals has a score of 446, the availability of hotels, homestays, and inns has a score of 444, the availability of restaurants with a score of 449, the availability of ATMs with a score of 438, the availability of prayer rooms or places of worship with a score of 451, the availability of public transportation with a score of 391, the availability of stalls selling goods to earn a living and boost the economy with a score of 452, and the availability of recreational facilities to make tourists feel at home with a score of 402.

4.1.4. Management capacity aspect

The score obtained for management or infrastructure is based on the smooth travel route system to tourist attractions, which makes it easier for tourists to visit, is 421 (4.30), which means that tourists consider the access roads to tourist attractions to be smooth, even though there are still damaged roads in some places, so the trip is

not completely smooth and easy to access. The score obtained for management or infrastructure based on the security and surveillance system that provides convenience in various sectors for tourists is 433 (4.42), which means that tourists consider that security at tourist sites is provided by the presence of officers there, but surveillance is not very intensive due to the large number of visitors. The score obtained for management or infrastructure based on the support from the Kuantan Singingi Regency Tourism and Culture Office is 456 (4.65), which means that tourists consider that the tourist attraction has received support from the Kuantan Singingi Regency Tourism and Culture Office, as evidenced by the government's presence at the event at the *Pacu Jalur* festival tourist attraction. The score obtained for management or infrastructure based on cooperation with the government and the community is 419 (4.28), which means that tourists consider the government to have a very important role in promoting tourism in Kuantan Singingi Regency and that this cooperation involves the local community in maintaining the tourist site and keeping it safe. The score obtained for management or infrastructure based on economic support is 446 (4.55), meaning that tourists consider the *Pacu Jalur* festival tourist attraction to have strong economic support for the local community if the attraction is visited by many tourists, and of course, the location is comfortable for visiting tourists. The score obtained for management or infrastructure based on social and cultural carrying capacity is 447 (4.56), meaning that tourists consider the *Pacu Jalur* festival tourist attraction to have a strong social and cultural carrying capacity that still reflects the distinctive culture of Kuantan Singingi Regency, without losing the local culture in the cultural performances held by the local government.

4.2. External environment (opportunities and threats)

4.2.1. Socio-cultural aspect

The score obtained for socio-cultural aspects based on the existence of tourist attractions that introduce the unique culture of Kuantan Singingi Regency is 454 (4.63), meaning that tourists consider that the existence of tourist attractions has introduced the unique culture of Kuantan Singingi Regency. The score obtained for socio-cultural aspects based on the existence of tourist attractions that have an impact on businesses managed by the surrounding community is 448 (4.57),

meaning that tourists consider that the existence of tourist attractions has an impact on businesses managed by the surrounding community.

In the socio-cultural aspect, it is known that the existence of tourist attractions introduces the unique culture of Kuantan Singingi Regency with a score of 454 and the existence of tourist attractions has an impact on businesses managed by the surrounding community with a score of 448 with a percentage of 92%.

4.2.2. Political or governmental aspect

The score obtained for the political or governmental aspect is based on the cooperation between government agencies and the surrounding community in developing tourist attractions, which is 437 (4.46), meaning that tourists consider that the cooperation between government agencies and the surrounding community in developing tourist attractions is evident in the promotion of tourism in Singingi Regency. The score obtained for the aspect of government attention to developing tourist attractions is 453 (4.62), meaning that tourists consider that the government's attention to developing tourist attractions is evident from the availability of public facilities in tourist areas, such as the construction of mosques and toilets for tourists.

4.2.3. Economic aspect

The score obtained for the economic aspect, based on the existence of tourist attractions that help the surrounding community to open business opportunities, is 453 (4.62), meaning that tourists consider that the existence of these tourist attractions helps the surrounding community to open business opportunities in facing the household economy of traders. The score obtained for the aspect of the existence of tourist attractions that increase the income of the surrounding community is 455 (4.64), meaning that tourists consider that the existence of these tourist attractions increases the income of the surrounding community.

In the economic condition aspects, it is known that the existence of tourist attractions helps the local community to open business opportunities with a score of 453 and that the existence of tourist attractions increases the income of the local community with a score of 455 with a mean of 4.63.

4.2.4. *Technological progress aspect*

The score obtained for the aspect of technological progress based on information about tourist attractions being easily accessible via the internet is 447 (4.56), meaning that tourists consider that information about tourist attractions can be easily accessed via the internet. The score obtained for the aspect of the availability of tourist attractions, which can be easily, quickly, and accurately obtained, is 447 (4.56), meaning that tourists consider that information about tourist attractions is easily, quickly, and accurately available.

5. Discussion

Developing the tourism sector can drive economic growth both for regions and nations (Mardhani et al., 2024b; Mardhani et al., 2021d; Maulana et al., 2025). Tourism not only creates employment opportunities but also contributes to economic diversification, infrastructure development, and the preservation of local culture and the environment (Ismandianto et al., 2023; Mardhani et al., 2025a; Safuridar et al., 2025). This is particularly important for regions where tourism constitutes a major part of the economy. Moreover, tourism has significant social and cultural impacts. Community support for tourism development plays a crucial role in ensuring its sustainability (Som et al., 2023). When local residents perceive tourism as beneficial, they are more likely to support initiatives that foster the growth of the tourism sector (Syahputra & Mardhani, 2024; Razy et al., 2025).

The *Pacu Jalur* festival has evolved into a ceremonial event that successfully attracts the attention of tourists (Firmanyah & Masunah, 2019). In addition, its existence has established it as one of the key tourism destinations that drives the local economy (Handayani, 2024). The success of tourism development projects, however, largely depends on the active participation of local communities, which in turn stimulates the growth of other economic sectors. Regions experiencing significant tourist inflows also tend to achieve stronger economic development, supported by increased innovation in tourism-related industries (Motsa et al., 2021). Therefore, developing new ideas and creative strategies to attract more visitors is essential, as this not only strengthens the tourism sector but also opens new opportunities for sustainable regional growth (Juliana et al., 2025; Sharma, 2020).

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study on the potential development of *Pacu Jalur* festival tourism through community empowerment and government collaboration in Kuantan Singingi Regency, it can be concluded that the internal environmental factors demonstrate a strong foundation for tourism development. The aspect of event attractiveness shows the highest potential, reflecting the significant appeal of the *Pacu Jalur* festival to visitors. In contrast, tourism infrastructure remains the weakest aspect, indicating the need for further improvement and investment to support the overall tourism experience.

Externally, socio-cultural conditions, government support, and technological progress play important roles in enhancing tourism potential. Among these, technological development emerges as the most dominant factor contributing to the advancement of *Pacu Jalur* festival tourism, while political and governmental support ensures the continuity and sustainability of tourism initiatives. Overall, the synergy between community participation, government involvement, and technological innovation is essential for strengthening the sustainable development of *Pacu Jalur* festival tourism in Kuantan Singingi Regency.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding this publication.

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