

Ecophotography as Environmental Communication in Post-Mining Bangka Belitung: Visual Narratives of Ecological Issues

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology has transformed patterns of environmental communication and positioned photography as a strategic medium for fostering ecological awareness. In the context of tin mining in Bangka Belitung, the role of local photographers deserves scholarly attention because their work demonstrates that photography functions not merely as a visual product but also as a form of environmental advocacy. This study aims to identify the roles of local photographers in constructing ecophotographic narratives for post-mining nature conservation campaigns. It employs a descriptive qualitative method, supported by Strauss and Corbin's analytical approach and Stuart Hall's theory of representation, to examine how ecological meanings are constructed, negotiated, and communicated to audiences. The findings reveal four interrelated roles performed by local photographers. First, they act as designers of visual narratives by combining images of ecological wounds with hopes for environmental recovery through local symbols, such as kolong biru, post-mining old towns, birds, and former mining landscapes. Second, they serve as mediators between photographic subjects and wider audiences by using diverse Instagram content to expand the circulation of ecological messages. Third, they embody the values of visual honesty, empathy toward humans and nature, and persuasive criticism by aestheticizing environmental damage so that ecological concerns can be more easily understood by digital audiences. Fourth, they function as local storytellers who present "voices from within" through varied visual approaches, despite resistance from miners. Overall, these roles show that local photographers contribute significantly to shaping environmental awareness and encouraging public reflection on post-mining landscapes in Bangka Belitung.



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Introduction

The development of digital technology has reshaped the landscape of environmental communication, where visual representation particularly photography has become a strategic medium for fostering ecological awareness. Digital platforms have transformed the way the public understands environmental issues; visuals have emerged as a powerful "language" because they operate through emotion, memory, and heuristics Hall, (1997);



Rose (2016), Within the tradition of representation, images are not merely mirrors of reality; rather, they are practices of meaning-making shaped by social codes and conventions and, therefore, remain open to negotiation by audiences (Hall, 1997). Contemporary visual research further suggests that environmental photographs are effective in drawing public attention, although their impact depends greatly on framing, symbolism, and the social contexts surrounding them (Altinay et al., 2019; Chapman et al., 2016; Doyle, 2007; Hansen & Machin, 2013; Kaufmann & others, 2023; S. Wang et al., 2018).

However, in the context of tin mining in Bangka Belitung, a gap remains between visual documentation and public participation in environmental advocacy. Massive and unconventional mining activities have contributed to the degradation of coastal and terrestrial ecosystems (Ahmad, 2022; Haryadi et al., 2023, 2024; Holili et al., 2022; Reuters, 2024, 2025). This condition is also reflected in data from BPS-Statistics of Kepulauan Bangka Belitung Province, which recorded a 15% decline in the environmental quality index over the past five years (BPS Bangka Belitung, 2024).

At the same time, the emergence of documentary photography practices initiated by local communities has opened up new possibilities for environmental communication rooted in local wisdom (Addhella, 2018). Unfortunately, no systematic study has yet mapped the strategic role of photography in shaping ecological narratives within digital public spaces (Afif & Aisyianita, 2023; Cahayanta, 2021; Indrawan, 2024; Pirdaus et al., 2024). Therefore, this study is particularly important in responding to the challenges of the digital era, which demands stronger connections among visual narratives, the engagement of digital generations APJII (2024); Pezzullo & Cox (2021), and photography-based environmental policy advocacy.

Ecophotography is a genre of photography that communicates environmental concerns and contributes to the circulation of environmental discourse within the public sphere (McManus, 2014). Photography has long been used as an effective medium of visual communication for conveying social and environmental messages. Several studies have highlighted the important role of visual media in nature conservation campaigns. Photography, for instance, can serve as a space for expressing ecological grief by mediating human relationships with extinction and ecological loss Simpson et al. (2025), fostering participatory environmental awareness from an early age Jones (2022), and communicating ecological messages through strong aesthetic appeal (Schuster, 2013).

More specifically, in the context of mining, studies by Gilisua & Andrea (2024) and Firmansyah (2008), using a descriptive documentary photography approach, document the lives of artisanal miners on Bangka Island. These studies demonstrate how visual media can capture the tension between economic activity and ecological impact while also constructing a powerful narrative about post-mining life. In addition, Anggraheni (2008) and Hidayati (2019) employed photography to support the design of campaign posters for forest and coastal conservation, positioning photography as a form of community-based environmental communication.

However, to date, no study has explicitly examined how local photographers in Bangka Belitung contribute to constructing ecophotographic narratives as part of environmental conservation campaigns. Therefore, this research can be considered one of the first studies to position local photographers as key actors and to treat their portfolios as visual texts requiring in-depth analysis, particularly in relation to how their works contribute to

shaping public perceptions of environmental conservation. In addition, the novelty of this study lies in its research setting: Bangka Belitung, a post-mining region with significant ecological and social relevance that has received limited scholarly attention from the perspectives of visual art and narrative content.

This study employs Stuart Hall's theory of visual representation Hall (1997) combined with an observational approach to data analysis. This framework is used to understand the dynamics of visual message production and how the research subjects interpret the process of meaning construction. Four indicators derived from the theory of visual representation are used to examine the extent to which environmental messages are communicated through photography: visual ecological narratives, the positioning of subjects and audiences, the construction of ideology and values, and the local social context. Accordingly, the research problem is addressed systematically through the integration of visual analysis and in-depth interviews with key informants.

The research problem addressed in this study concerns how local photographers in Bangka Belitung represent post-mining ecological issues through the construction of visual narratives in ecophotographic works shared on social media, as viewed from the perspective of visual representation. In the digital era, environmental visualization through social media has become a key channel for ecological communication, particularly among Generations Z and X, who actively engage with environmental issues through images.

However, no in-depth study has examined how local photographers in Bangka Belitung visually represent post-mining ecological issues. This research is therefore important in responding to the need for a contextual, relevant, and effective environmental campaign model that aligns with the visual media consumption patterns of today's digital generations.

Method

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach informed by grounded theory Charmaz (2014); Corbin & Strauss (2015), with Stuart Hall's theory of visual representation serving as its main theoretical foundation. The study examines how local photographers in Bangka Belitung communicate post-mining environmental issues through visual works shared on Instagram.

The research was carried out in several stages. In the first stage, the research team formulated the research problem and conducted a literature review by identifying key issues related to the ecological and social context of Bangka Belitung as a post-mining region. The literature review was conducted comprehensively to develop a conceptual understanding of ecophotography, visual environmental campaigns, and the socio-ecological conditions of communities in post-mining areas. The reviewed literature included national and international journal articles, undergraduate theses, environmental organization reports, and local policy documents related to mining and environmental conservation. This stage resulted in a clearly defined research problem, a theoretical framework, and a methodological foundation that guided the overall implementation of the study.

In the second stage, the research team developed the research instruments for data collection, particularly an in-depth interview guide for photographers serving as key

informants. The interview guide was constructed based on the operational definitions of four analytical categories derived from Hall's theory of visual representation Hall (1997): visual ecological narratives, the positioning of subjects and audiences, the construction of ideology and values, and the local social context. The photo observation instrument was also designed using the same categories applied in the interview process. These categories were intended to guide the observation of visual elements representing environmental issues and to examine how these elements shape ideological and ecological narratives within the post-mining context.

In the third stage, the research team collected field data through several methods. The primary method was in-depth interviews with five local photographers selected as research informants. They were chosen through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in environmental visual campaigns and their presence on social media, particularly Instagram. The research informants were Zainal Abdi (@zainal_n_abdi), Resha Juhari (@reshajr), Yogi Orientama (@yogie.orientama), Dian Firmansyah (@dian_firmansyah), and Yudhi Sulthan (@yudi_sulthan). This stage produced interview transcripts.

Data collection was also conducted through visual observation of six photographs from each selected photographer. The photographs were selected based on the quality of their visual narratives, locational context, and relevance to post-mining issues. The categories used in the visual observation instrument were designed to capture how meaning is constructed in environmental photography produced by local photographers. These categories aimed to identify visual elements representing environmental issues and to examine how such elements form ideological and ecological narratives within the post-mining context. The observation was conducted through an in-depth examination of the selected photographs, followed by the completion of an observation table based on predetermined analytical categories.

In the fourth stage, the research team processed the data by classifying and digitizing interview and visual observation data. All interview data were transcribed and coded into a tabulated format for further analysis using data processing software. At this stage, triangulation was conducted by comparing visual data from the photographs with informants' statements and observation notes to ensure consistency in the meanings and symbols analyzed. Source triangulation was selected as the data validation method in this study to strengthen the credibility and validity of the research data. In the fifth stage, the research team interpreted the data through thematic analysis of the tabulated findings. This analysis was used to identify visual narratives, ecological values represented in the photographs, and patterns of environmental representation. The interpretation of the findings was then connected to the theoretical framework, previous studies, and the results of the visual observation of the selected photographs.

Findings

This study analyzes how local photographers in Bangka Belitung represent post-mining ecological issues through ecophotographic works published on social media, particularly Instagram. The analysis focuses on four main analytical categories: (1) visual ecological narratives, (2) the positioning of subjects and audiences, (3) the construction of ideology and values, and (4) the local social context. The data were processed using Strauss and Corbin's analytical approach through the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective

coding. This process generated categories, subcategories, and thematic relationships among the analytical categories. Stuart Hall's theory of representation was employed to examine how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and consumed within the local sociocultural context.

Visual Ecological Narratives

For the first analytical category, the analysis was based on information obtained from informants and organized into several subcategories, including visual narratives, environmental symbolism, and the depiction of damage and recovery. A series of questions was posed during interviews with five informants. The data were then analyzed through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding as an integrated process before being further discussed in the following section.

1. Visual Narrative

At the open coding stage, several key excerpts were identified.

- Resha stated, "Ingin memberikan pesan dari fotonya ke orang luar. Ini loh Bangka Belitung, kondisi hari ini... kerusakan lingkungan, pertambangan ilegal, dampak sosial dan ekonomi."
- Dian emphasized a monochromatic narrative: "*Pengen bercerita ke masyarakat luas... narasi itu proses penambangan timah... foto saya 100% hitam putih.*"
- Yogie positioned narrative as a form of everyday documentation: "*Lebih ke situ sih. Everyday dokumentari... kehidupan sehari-hari masyarakat Belinyu.*"
- Yudhi highlighted a dual message: "*Pesannya ya impian kita ingin gambarkan keluar, Bangka Belitung tuh gimana kondisinya... merekam Bangka Belitung... mudah-mudahan jadi solusi.*"
- Zaenal emphasized education: "*Tujuannya kan untuk edukasi, mengedukasi masyarakat awam yang gak ngerti... burung itu lebih asyik dinikmati di hutan.*"

The next stage was axial coding. The narratives constructed by the informants reveal several variations: Resha frames his work through ecological crisis; Dian focuses on the mining process through monochromatic imagery; Yogie documents everyday life; Yudhi develops a solution-oriented narrative; and Zaenal promotes ecological education through wildlife. Despite these different perspectives, all narratives share an educational orientation. At the selective coding stage, visual ecological narratives emerged as a space in which photographers position themselves as reminders, recorders, and educators. The core category identified here is "photography as a polyphonic narrative of ecological education."

2. Environmental Symbolism

At the open coding stage, several key excerpts were identified.

- Resha stated, "*Menggunakan banyak simbol, termasuk anak-anak, orang pelimbang, dan aktivitas penambangan.*"
- For Dian, symbolism is expressed through monochromatic imagery, which removes the distraction of color.
- Yogie consistently includes human figures as a visual scale, stating, "*Kurang nyaman kalau foto itu gak ada unsur manusia.*"
- Yudhi uses symbols such as water, rocks, and local culture as distinctive markers of Bangka Belitung.



- For Zaenal, the main symbols are birds and their behavior: *“Burung itu hidup di pohon tertentu... kalau digusur karena tambang, dia pindah.”*

At the axial coding stage, the emerging narrative shows that symbolism emphasizes the interconnectedness between humans and nature. Children, tin ore washers, birds, water, and rocks all function as visual signs. The continuity of these visual symbols strengthens the anchoring of ecological messages. At the selective coding stage, visual symbols were found to function as cultural codes linking ecological messages to social reality.

3. *Depiction of Damage and Recovery*

At the open coding stage, several key excerpts were identified.

- Resha foregrounds environmental damage: *“Menonjolkan kerusakan lingkungan... orang hanya tahu kolong biru indah, padahal dampaknya besar.”*
- Dian presents the massive mining process as a sign of environmental damage.
- Yogie tends to emphasize *“hal-hal sederhana”* rather than explicitly showing destruction.
- Yudhi presents an ambivalent view: *“Kolong biru itu kerusakan, tapi difoto dengan baik jadi daya tarik.”*
- Zaenal depicts the degradation of birds and their habitats: *“Before–after, burung berkurang karena pesisir tercemar.”*

At the axial coding stage, two main tendencies emerged: first, an emphasis on environmental damage, as reflected in the works and narratives of Resha, Dian, and Zaenal; and second, an attempt to balance damage with beauty or possible solutions, as reflected in Yudhi’s and Yogie’s approaches. At the selective coding stage, the depiction of environmental damage emerged as the dominant frame. However, some photographers adopt an aesthetic strategy in representing environmental damage so that ecological issues can be more readily received and understood by the public.

Positioning of Subjects and Audiences

For the second analytical category, the analysis was based on information obtained from informants and organized into several subcategories: subject and location choice, narrative intention, public response, digital sharing, and message comprehension. A series of questions was posed during interviews with five informants. The data were then analyzed through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding as an integrated process before being further discussed in the following section.

1. *Subject and Location Choice*

At the open coding stage, several narratives were identified.

- Resha emphasized the importance of research and a personal approach because the issue being photographed is sensitive.
- Dian explained that access was facilitated through familiarity with the local language and relationships with local authorities or area holders.
- Yogie selected subjects in a candid and spontaneous manner.
- Yudhi explored places that are distinctive to Bangka Belitung, shaped by his experience of being born and raised in the region.
- Zaenal focused on bird habitats that have been lost due to mining activities.

At the axial coding stage, the analysis shows that subject selection is influenced by local

identity, social networks, and representational goals. At the selective coding stage, the positioning of subjects emerged as the result of negotiation among social access, narrative intention, and aesthetic strategy.

2. *Narrative Intention*

At the open coding stage, several narratives were identified.

- Resha stated, “Untuk pembaca media... Bangkapos.”
- Dian directed his work toward audiences outside Bangka.
- Yogie positioned his photographs as both personal documentation and an archive for future generations.
- Yudhi intended his work for audiences beyond Bangka Belitung while also hoping that it could contribute to ecological solutions.
- Zaenal emphasized public education, particularly for the general public who may not fully understand ecological issues.

At the axial coding stage, the analysis shows that the photographers addressed different target audiences, ranging from local media readers and national publics to future generations and general communities. At the selective coding stage, narrative intention was found to shape layered audience segments, extending from the local to the global.

3. *Public Response, Digital Sharing, and Message Comprehension*

At the open coding stage, several key excerpts and narratives were identified.

- Resha noted that audiences mostly responded through likes and comments, while Generation Z audiences often reposted his works.
- Dian did not specifically discuss detailed forms of public response.
- Yogie viewed photographs as a future archive.
- Yudhi suggested that publication could encourage change: “*kolong biru akhirnya didandani.*”
- Zaenal did not explicitly describe public response but emphasized education as the main purpose of his work.

At the axial coding stage, the emerging narrative shows that public response is more affective, such as likes and reposts, than action-oriented. Nevertheless, these responses still contribute to the diffusion of ecological messages. At the selective coding stage, the audience was found to interpret the works through various decoding positions: dominant decoding, in which the educational message is accepted; negotiated decoding, in which audiences appreciate the aesthetics without necessarily taking action; and oppositional decoding, which may appear in the form of pressure from mining actors.

Construction of Ideology and Values

For the third analytical category, the construction of ideology and values is examined through three subcategories: environmental identity, value construction, and social norms, policy, and visual censorship. A series of questions was posed during interviews with five informants. The five sets of responses were then analyzed through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding as an integrated process before being further discussed in the following section.

1. Environmental Identity

For this subcategory, the open coding process produced several key excerpts and narratives.

- Resha emphasized his identity as a Bangka resident and his personal experience of witnessing changes in crocodile habitats.
- Dian explained that his local identity made it easier for him to gain access to miners.
- Yogie positioned the documentation of Belinyu as part of cultural identity.
- Yudhi stated, "*Ya lah, saya lahir di sini... bangga eksplor Bangka Belitung.*"
- Zaenal emphasized his identity as a wildlife photographer, guided by the principle of natural representation without editing.

At the axial coding stage, the emerging narrative shows that local identity strengthens the credibility of representation while also creating emotional proximity to the issue. At the selective coding stage, the analysis indicates that the photographers construct a dual ecological identity: as local residents and as agents of change.

2. Value Construction and Social Norms

For this subcategory, the open coding process produced several key excerpts and narratives.

- Resha stated, "*Foto harus punya nilai... butuh waktu lama untuk pulih.*"
- Dian used black-and-white photography to emphasize the mining process.
- Yogie emphasized personal values, including satisfaction and the function of photography as a visual archive.
- Yudhi connected aesthetic value with ecological solutions.
- Zaenal emphasized the value of naturalism, stating, "*senatural mungkin, minim editing.*"

At the axial coding stage, the emerging narrative shows that the values constructed through photography range from educational and aesthetic values to documentary and naturalistic ones. At the selective coding stage, the analysis indicates that value construction forms an ideological framework in which photographs are not merely images but ecological discourses.

3. Policy and Visual Censorship

For this subcategory, the open coding process produced several key excerpts and narratives.

- Resha described pressure from field supervisors and authorities, indicating the presence of informal censorship.
- Dian explained that access was easier because of his local networks.
- Yogie expressed disappointment with the effects of tin mining.
- Yudhi placed greater emphasis on solutions and did not specifically mention censorship.
- Zaenal acknowledged the existence of regulations, stating, "*ada aturannya... bukan ranah saya.*"

At the axial coding stage, the emerging narrative shows that photographers face a dilemma involving social norms, weak or flexible regulation, and pressure from mining actors. At the selective coding stage, the analysis suggests that ideological values emerge from the negotiation between the desire to represent ecological realities and the political-economic

constraints of the local context

Local Social Context

For the fourth analytical category, the local social context is examined through two subcategories: local/cultural positioning and creative constraints. A series of questions was posed during interviews with five informants. The responses from the five informants were then analyzed through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding as an integrated process before being further discussed in the following section.

1. Local/Cultural Positioning

For this subcategory, the open coding process produced several key excerpts and narratives.

- Resha stated, “Storytelling sebagai warga lokal.”
- Dian explained that the use of the local language made access easier.
- Yogie focused on portraying the everyday life of Belinyu.
- Yudhi emphasized that he was born in Bangka Belitung and felt proud to explore local places.
- Zaenal positioned birds as symbols of native habitats.

At the axial coding stage, the local context emerged as the main entry point that strengthens the legitimacy of representation. At the selective coding stage, the analysis shows that post-mining ecological photography represents local rootedness, a form of visual practice closely tied to identity, culture, and community solidarity.

2. Creative Constraints

For this subcategory, the open coding process produced several key excerpts and narratives.

- Resha faced resistance from authorities and mining actors.
- Dian experienced technical limitations through his choice of monochrome photography.
- Yogie encountered difficulties in explaining the effects of tin mining.
- Yudhi identified discomfort in photographing waste and environmental damage as one of his limitations.
- Zaenal limited his editing process in order to maintain naturalism.

At the axial coding stage, the analysis shows that creative constraints are not merely technical but also political and cultural. At the selective coding stage, the local social context was found to shape distinctive visual styles: cautious representation, naturalistic expression, and the aestheticization of environmental damage.

Discussion

Based on the findings presented above, the discussion of the first analytical category is as follows:

Visual Ecological Narratives

In the study of representation, Hall (1997) emphasizes that meaning is not inherently attached to objects; rather, it is produced through representational practices. The five photographers in this study demonstrate how visual narratives of post-mining ecology in

Bangka Belitung are produced through different strategies, yet share a common purpose: fostering ecological awareness. The analysis shows that local photographers in Bangka Belitung construct post-mining ecological issues through diverse visual strategies while revealing a similar pattern of meaning: a balance between messages of crisis and hope.

Resha Juhari explicitly portrays environmental damage through images of *kolong biru*, river degradation, and children living amid environmental decline. This strategy functions as a preferred reading Hall (1980) of ecological crisis, directing viewers to understand mining as a socio-ecological threat. This finding is in line with Doyle (2007), who argues that visual representations of ecological crisis tend to be effective in evoking public emotion, although they may also risk producing fatigue if not accompanied by a sense of possibility or solution.

In contrast, Yudhi Nopiandi combines environmental damage with aesthetic beauty. *Kolong biru*, which is essentially the result of environmental degradation, is photographed through visually appealing compositions so that it can be received by audiences as a tourism object. This strategy resonates with the concept of aestheticizing damage Lester & Cottle (2009), which refers to the practice of representing destruction through aesthetic forms so that it becomes more acceptable to the public. Such an approach creates a more negotiated form of decoding: audiences may enjoy the beauty of the image while, at the same time, being gently encouraged to reflect on the deeper causes of environmental damage.

Zaenal Abdi adopts a different strategy by using wildlife, particularly birds, to represent habitat degradation. This approach expands the scope of representation from mining landscapes to broader ecological impacts, especially the loss of living spaces for fauna. In this sense, the ecological narrative not only emphasizes visible environmental damage but also highlights its wider implications for biodiversity. This finding is consistent with Altinay et al. (2019), who emphasize the importance of visualization in environmental communication as a means of bridging scientific issues and the public's emotional experience.



Figure 1. A black-and-white photograph of a tin ore washer diving in a *camui* or mining pond.

Source: Instagram account @reshajr.

As shown in Figure 1, Dian Firmansyah employs black-and-white photography as his narrative style. Monochrome functions as a symbol of “seriousness” while reducing the distraction of color. This shows how visual codes Barthes (1977) are used to emphasize

the mining process rather than the aesthetics of the landscape. Meanwhile, Yogie Orientama places greater emphasis on everyday documentation, including the activities of the Belinyu community, human interactions with mining spaces, and ordinary daily practices that may appear banal but carry strong ecological meaning. This strategy aligns with the photovoice approach C. Wang & Burris (1997), in which photography is used to document everyday realities that are often overlooked by dominant narratives.

Thus, the visual ecological narratives produced by these photographers are polyphonic in nature. There are voices of crisis, as seen in the works of Resha, Dian, and Zaenal; aesthetic and solution-oriented voices, as reflected in Yudhi's and Yogie's approaches; and educational-naturalistic voices, particularly in Zaenal's work. This variation shows that the representation of post-mining ecology is not homogeneous but is instead produced through diverse strategies rooted in each photographer's identity, perspective, and purpose.

The observation of their photographs further reveals that the use of color, composition, and natural symbols is not merely aesthetic but also rhetorical. The saturated blue color of *kolong*, for instance, is not simply a visual effect; it becomes a symbol of ambiguity beautiful yet dangerous which supports the idea of aestheticizing damage (Lester & Cottle, 2009). The integration of interview findings and visual observation indicates that ecophotographic works in Bangka Belitung do not stop at documentation. Rather, they function as a medium of social articulation that communicates ecological impacts in an emotionally resonant way (Doyle, 2009).

Positioning of Subjects and Audiences: Negotiating Production and Consumption

Based on the findings above, the discussion of the second analytical category draws on Hall (1980) view that representation is a two-way communication process involving encoding by the message producer and decoding by the audience. In the context of this study, the selection of subjects and audiences becomes an important site of negotiation.

Resha emphasizes the need for field research before taking photographs. He has to negotiate with mining actors who often feel disturbed by the presence of a camera and, at times, even faces threats. A personal approach, such as presenting himself as a photojournalist, becomes a strategy for maintaining access to the field. This is in line with Rose (2016), who argues that visual production is always shaped by power relations in the field.

Dian has a different experience. His familiarity with the local language and social networks allows him to access mining locations more easily. This shows how local identity can function as social capital that influences the process of producing representation. Yogie, through a candid approach, places greater emphasis on spontaneity, while Yudhi chooses to explore landscapes that are distinctive to Bangka Belitung. Zaenal, on the other hand, focuses on bird habitats, indicating a strong ecological preference in his choice of subject.

In terms of audience positioning, the five photographers target different segments. Resha addresses readers of local media, particularly *Bangkapos*; Dian aims to reach audiences outside Bangka Belitung; Yogie positions his work as documentation for future generations; Yudhi addresses broader audiences with the hope of contributing to "ecological solutions"; and Zaenal seeks to educate the general public, particularly those with limited understanding of ecological issues.

These differences indicate that the audience is not a single, homogeneous entity but rather a layered and diverse one. Chapman shows that environmental visuals are often interpreted differently depending on the sociocultural background of the audience (Chapman et al., 2016). This is consistent with the findings of this study, in which Generation Z audiences tend to respond by reposting content, while local audiences more commonly respond through likes and comments

The dominant form of public response, which appears mostly as low-threshold engagement likes, comments, and reposts indicates the limitations of social media as a space for behavioral change. However, as Tifentale and Manovich note, photo-sharing practices on social media serve both documentary and affective functions: they build a collective visual archive while also strengthening symbolic solidarity (Tifentale & Manovich, 2018).

The observation of the photographs shows a pattern consistent with the interview findings. A low-angle perspective is used to emphasize the dominance of nature, as seen in Zaenal's work, while horizontal framing expands the social context of human life, as reflected in Yogi's photographs. Natural light is frequently chosen because it is associated with visual authenticity, suggesting an effort to avoid manipulating reality. This reinforces what Rose (2016) refers to as the "positionality of the image," namely how the photographer's position influences the formation of visual meaning.

These findings also show that social media audiences are not passive. They are involved in layered processes of decoding, ranging from aesthetic appreciation and empathy toward affected communities to debates over the morality of exploitation. This phenomenon is consistent with Altinay who argue that environmental images in the digital era encourage both emotional and rational participation within online public spaces (Altinay et al., 2019). Therefore, the positioning of subjects and audiences in ecophotography is not merely a technical matter but also an ideological dimension that determines how ecological messages are received, interpreted, or negotiated.



Figure 2. A photograph of a group of children bathing in mud at a former mining site (*camui*).

Source: Instagram account @yogie.orientama.

Construction of Ideology and Values: Identity, Ethics, and Censorship

Based on the three subcategories discussed above, it can be argued that, as Hall (1997) emphasizes, identity is constructed through cultural practices. The five photographers in

this study construct a dual ecological identity: as local residents and as agents of change. Resha affirms his identity as a resident of Pagarawan who has directly experienced changes in river habitats. Dian uses the local language as a way to interact with miners. Yogie documents the identity of Belinyu as a form of cultural heritage. Yudhi expresses pride in exploring Bangka Belitung because he was born there. Zaenal, meanwhile, asserts his identity as a wildlife photographer who adheres to the principle of naturalistic representation.

The values constructed by the photographers are also diverse. Resha emphasizes educational value and the urgency of environmental recovery. Dian uses monochrome as both an aesthetic and symbolic value. Yogie highlights personal and documentary values, particularly the role of photographs as a visual archive. Yudhi connects visual beauty with ecological solutions. Zaenal emphasizes the value of naturalism through minimal editing. These findings are consistent with [Barthes \(1977\)](#), who argues that photographs contain both denotation the reality being recorded and connotation the values and ideologies attached to that reality.

However, the construction of values cannot be separated from various constraints. Resha faces informal censorship, including threats from authorities, mining actors, and even the possibility of violence. Dian, although able to access mining sites more easily, still encounters limitations in representation. Yogie expresses frustration over the impacts of tin mining, which are difficult to explain fully. Yudhi chooses an aesthetic approach to avoid direct confrontation. Zaenal is aware of legal regulations but tends to take an apolitical position.

These conditions show that ecological representation in Bangka Belitung is a negotiated practice shaped by the influence of mining-related political and economic power. Environmental communication literature emphasizes that visual representation often functions as a counter-hegemonic practice ([Lester & Cottle, 2009](#)). However, in the context of Bangka Belitung, photographers more often adopt a form of “subtle education” rather than “direct confrontation” because of the risk of informal censorship and direct threats.

From the perspective of visual observation, these values are reflected in both the technical and symbolic aspects of the photographs. The use of monochrome tones in Dian’s work conveys a sense of honesty as well as nostalgia for a disappearing natural environment. Resha’s downward-facing angle suggests a form of respect for nature, while the presence of birds in barren spaces in Zaenal’s photographs reflects a sense of ecological hope. Taken together, these elements form a visual ideology that not only documents environmental damage but also articulates the ecological morality internalized by the photographers.

The selective coding stage produced a broader theme: “a pragmatic ethics of care.” This ethic does not seek to assign blame but rather to invite reflection. Values such as honesty, empathy, and ecological responsibility are articulated subtly so that they remain acceptable to local communities that still depend on mining. This shows that ideology in visual representation does not always take the form of resistance; it may also appear as an adaptive strategy within a socially sensitive space.

These findings reinforce [Hall \(1997\)](#) theory that representation is an arena in which social meaning is produced, negotiated, and circulated. Ideology does not appear as a rigid dogma but as the result of interaction between social context and symbolic practice. In addition, [Barthes’ \(1977\)](#) concept of mythologies helps explain how symbols such as *air kolong* or

birds become new ecological myths: local icons that carry implicit criticism of exploitation. In this context, Doyle's (2007) concept of "visual climate rhetoric" is useful for understanding how ecological awareness is built through visual rhetoric that appeals to emotion and empathy.



Figure 3. A photograph of a group of floating pontoons operating on a river for tin exploitation.

Source: Instagram account @dian_firmansyahh.

Value construction is also closely related to the ethics of visual production. Rose (2016) argues that the choice of visual style always carries ideological consequences: who speaks, for whom, and in what manner. In the photographs of Dian and Yogi, the value of social solidarity is reflected in the way they portray human faces with dignity rather than positioning them as passive victims. By contrast, in the works of Zaenal and Resha, spiritual and ecological values are more prominent through landscapes and wildlife, portraying a disrupted harmony between humans and nature.

The photographers' tendency not to manipulate colors and forms supports the value of "ethical transparency," as discussed by Altinay et al. (2019), who emphasize the importance of visual credibility in environmental communication. In the local context of Bangka Belitung, this strategy strengthens the social legitimacy of their works while also allowing photographers to remain accepted within the community. Thus, the ideology constructed through these visual practices is adaptive rather than openly oppositional, yet it continues to carry a strong ecological message.



Figure 4. A photograph of several houses that have collapsed or are nearly collapsing due to land subsidence caused by nearby tin mining activities.

Source: Instagram account @reshajr.

Local Social Context: Rootedness and Creative Constraints

The local social context serves as a key foundation for understanding the meaning of ecophotography in Bangka Belitung. Through Strauss and Corbin's analytical approach, this study found that photographers' relationships with the social and cultural spaces in which they live influence how they frame ecological realities. In the open coding stage, several themes emerged, such as "cultural closeness to nature," "post-mining socioeconomic pressure," and "resistance to visual exploitation." The axial coding stage then connected these themes to the condition of communities that remain dependent on tin mining, both economically and as part of their social identity.

The interview findings show that the photographers do not stand outside this social system. They are part of communities that directly experience environmental and economic change. Therefore, their photographs are not merely forms of artistic expression but also social documentation shaped by local ecological awareness. Dian and Yogi, for example, portray communities adapting to mining spaces. Their works show that damaged nature remains a living space, not simply a landscape of loss. In contrast, Resha and Zaenal adopt a more reflective approach by presenting silent and alienated natural spaces as metaphors for the fractured relationship between humans and their environment.

The visual observation reveals that local cultural symbols such as *perahu pelimbang*, traditional mining tools, and fishermen's rituals are presented not merely as visual ornaments but as forms of "local knowledge" that carry ecological values (Berkes, 2018). In several photographs by Yudhi and Zaenal, the calm blue water of *kolong* landscapes contrasts with traces of mining activity, creating a paradox between beauty and destruction. The bright blue tones and symmetrical compositions used by Yudhi create an atmosphere of apparent harmony, which, in Barthes' (1977) terms, can be understood as a "myth of natural purity" constructed to conceal the traces of exploitation.

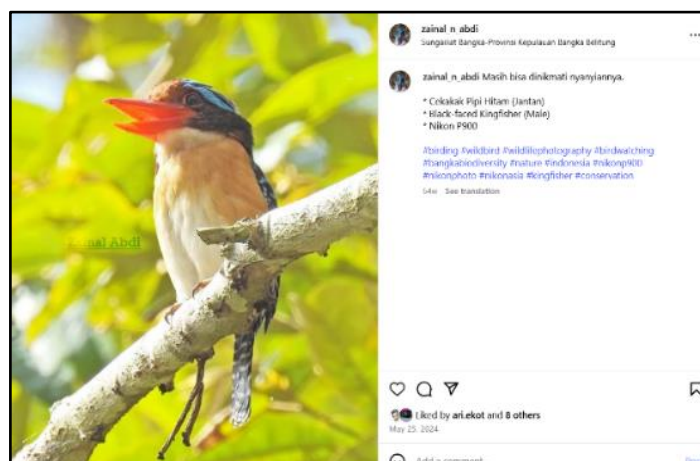


Figure 5. A photograph of a Black-capped Kingfisher perched on a forest branch in Bangka. Source: Instagram account @zainal_n_abdi.

The selective coding stage crystallized the core theme: "local rootedness as both an anchor of legitimacy and a creative boundary." Attachment to local culture provides photographers with moral legitimacy to speak about ecological issues. At the same time, however, it limits direct criticism of local economic actors. The photographers balance ecological responsibility with social responsibility: they criticize environmental damage

while still respecting the social relations that sustain their everyday lives.

These findings are consistent with Hall (1997) circuit of culture framework, which places representation within the interrelated processes of production, consumption, identity, and regulation. In the context of Bangka Belitung, visual production is shaped by informal regulations in the form of social and economic pressure; the photographers' identities as local residents influence how they represent reality; and the consumption of photographs on social media becomes a space of negotiation between local values and global ecological discourse.

The local social context also functions as an ideological field. Rose (2016) refers to this as a "geography of meaning," in which every representation is bound to place and its social history. Photographs taken in Sungailiat, Belinyu, and other mining areas reveal an "architecture of ecological wounds" that cannot be separated from the collective memory of local communities. Doyle (2007) emphasizes that representations of environmental crisis are always connected to local politics. In this case, Bangka Belitung photographers articulate ecological crisis through cultural symbols rather than scientific rhetoric.

In addition, the local social context introduces an ethnographic dimension into photographic practice. As Wang and Burris (1997) argue through the photovoice method, visuals produced by local residents have participatory power because they reflect the authentic experiences of the community. In this study, the visual observation shows that each photographic work speaks not only about nature but also about social life, spirituality, and post-mining identity. Thus, these works serve a dual function: as ecological archives and as sociocultural expressions.



Figure 6. A photograph of a group of traditional *pelimbang*, who represent the lowest working class within tin mining activities on Bangka Island.

Source: Instagram account @yudi_sulthan.

Conclusion

This study addresses its main research objective: identifying the role of local photographers in constructing ecophotographic narratives as part of nature conservation campaigns in Bangka Belitung. The findings reveal four interrelated roles. First, photographers act as designers of visual narratives that connect ecological wounds with



hopes for recovery through local symbols, such as *kolong biru*, *pelimbang*, birds, and post-mining landscapes. In this sense, photographs function as educational narratives, not merely as documentation. Second, photographers serve as mediators between subjects and audiences. The choice of angle, distance, and the presence or absence of human figures combined with Instagram curation through feeds, reels, captions, and hashtags helps balance the ethics of representation with the reach of ecological messages. Audience responses, such as likes, comments, and reposts, further strengthen the horizontal diffusion of the campaign.

Third, photographers bring values and ethics into their visual practices, including visual authenticity through minimal manipulation, empathy toward both human and non-human subjects, and persuasive criticism, including the aestheticization of damage, so that ecological messages can be received by communities that still depend on mining. Fourth, they act as narrators of the local context. Their identity as local residents gives legitimacy to their “voice from within,” while at the same time creating creative boundaries shaped by community norms and resistance from mining actors.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive mapping of the role of local photographers through the five dimensions of Hall’s Circuit of Culture, which helps explain how ecological meanings are formed and circulated on Instagram. In terms of production, photographic works are prepared through location research, portfolio curation, and risk management. In terms of representation, ecological issues are presented through visual icons reinforced by captions as anchors of meaning. In terms of consumption, audiences respond through likes, comments, and networks that expand the circulation of the message. In terms of identity, photographers position themselves as “citizen-educators” who connect local wisdom with visual expertise. In terms of regulation, their practices are shaped by community norms, platform policies, and local political-economic power. Within this framework, Instagram does not function merely as an upload channel but as a communication infrastructure: its algorithms, features, and rules also filter, shape, and accelerate the circulation of ecological meaning.

The implications for future research include: (1) conducting experimental studies on the effects of visual framing and caption styles on attitudes and behavioral intentions; (2) using social media analytics to assess reach and the quality of audience interpretation; (3) comparing ecophotographic practices across different mining regions; (4) developing ethical guidelines for community-based ecophotography; and (5) conducting longitudinal studies on the impact of visual narratives on local environmental discourse and policy.

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