

Sustainable Marketing Strategies to Empower Stingless Bee Honey Agripreneurs for Competitive and Inclusive Agribusiness Growth

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Abstract

Background: Stingless bee honey presents a high-value niche within sustainable agrifood systems, yet small-scale agripreneurs face structural constraints in marketing, certification, and digital engagement that impede inclusive competitiveness. **Aim:** This study formulates sustainable marketing strategies to empower stingless bee honey agripreneurs in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, thereby enhancing market access, firm-level resilience, and socio-ecological sustainability. **Methods:** Employing a convergent mixed-methods design, primary data were collected between July and September 2025 through 27 semi-structured interviews, three focus group discussions (FGDs), direct observation, and structured questionnaires involving 65 agripreneurs, eight cooperative leaders, and six local government or institutional stakeholders. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure representation across enterprise scales and cooperative membership. Internal and external determinants were assessed using IFE and EFE matrices; results were integrated via IE and SWOT frameworks to derive strategy clusters. **Results:** The IFE (score = 2.86) and EFE (score = 2.93) positions indicate a "Growth and Build" strategic posture. Four strategy clusters emerged: SO (eco-branding, certification, tourism linkages, e-commerce expansion), WO (digital literacy, quality assurance, managerial capacity building, inclusive finance), ST (value-chain diversification, R&D partnerships, sustainability differentiation, cooperative logistics), and WT (community microfinance, joint marketing, insurance/risk-sharing, partnership models). Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings strengthens the validity of these strategic priorities. **Conclusion:** Integrating sustainability principles with digital marketing and cooperative governance offers a viable pathway for transforming stingless bee honey firms into resilient, inclusive agribusinesses. Policy and institutional support that bolsters access to certification, digital capacity, and cooperative finance are pivotal in translating ecological strengths into competitive market outcomes.

Keywords: agripreneurship; inclusive agribusiness; kelulut honey; sustainable marketing; SWOT

Introduction

Sustainability and competitiveness have become dual imperatives shaping the trajectory of global agribusiness in the twenty-first century. The global food system increasingly demands efficiency, transparency, and ethical responsibility in production and marketing, reflecting a broader shift toward sustainability-driven value creation (Verma & Diwan, 2025; Duangphakdee et al., 2024). As consumer awareness of environmental and social issues deepens, agribusiness enterprises are required to integrate ecological integrity into their market strategies (Advisors, 2022). Stingless bee honey, commonly known as kelulut honey, has emerged as a high-value niche commodity characterized by its nutritional richness, medicinal attributes, and ecological benefits (Wahab & Salahudin, 2024; Wijayanti, 2024). Its cultivation supports biodiversity conservation, pollination services, and sustainable livelihoods in tropical rural landscapes (Widiarta et al., 2025). Despite this ecological promise, the marketing

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performance of stingless bee honey remains underdeveloped, particularly among small-scale agripreneurs who face structural barriers in branding, innovation, and certification (Wijayanti, 2024). This disparity between ecological potential and commercial realization underscores the urgency of formulating sustainable marketing strategies that simultaneously strengthen competitiveness and uphold environmental ethics (Duangphakdee et al., 2024).

The empowerment of agripreneurs represents a pivotal mechanism for achieving inclusive and sustainable agribusiness growth (Widiarta et al., 2025). Agripreneurs contribute to rural resilience through innovation, income diversification, and environmentally responsible practices (Duangphakdee et al., 2024). Within the stingless bee honey sector, most enterprises are embedded in community-based production systems that rely on indigenous knowledge and localized natural resource management (Wahab & Salahudin, 2024). However, many producers still depend on conventional marketing approaches that inadequately convey the product's ecological narrative, thereby limiting differentiation and consumer engagement (Escribano et al., 2020). Weak brand positioning and limited consumer education further constrain their ability to access premium markets (Wijayanti, 2024). Consequently, sustainable marketing anchored in green innovation, ethical communication, and social inclusivity offers a transformative framework to translate ecological integrity into competitive advantage (Wahab & Salahudin, 2024).

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the marketing landscape for agri-based micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Advisors, 2022; Wijayanti, 2024). Digital platforms enable direct consumer engagement, transparency in supply chains, and traceable storytelling that enhance authenticity and trust in sustainable products (Widiarta et al., 2025). For stingless bee honey agripreneurs, these technologies open new avenues for market diversification and value addition. Nonetheless, low digital literacy, infrastructural limitations, and weak institutional support remain critical barriers (Brenya et al., 2023). Integrating digital and sustainable marketing approaches not only widens market access but also embeds ethical values and community empowerment within enterprise strategy (Duangphakdee et al., 2024). Thus, agripreneurial empowerment extends beyond economic gains, reflecting the capacity to internalize sustainability principles into innovation and marketing behavior (Wahab & Salahudin, 2024).

Existing research on stingless bee honey has mainly focused on biological, ecological, and production aspects, such as hive management, product quality, and biodiversity outcomes (Duangphakdee et al., 2024; Wahab & Salahudin, 2024), with limited attention to strategic marketing and entrepreneurship dimensions. Empirical studies examining how sustainable marketing can drive inclusive agribusiness competitiveness remain scarce, particularly in Indonesia and across Southeast Asia (Brenya et al., 2023; Verma & Diwan, 2025). Methodologically, prior works have relied primarily on descriptive or single-method approaches, lacking integrated analytical tools that connect internal organizational capacities with external market environments. Geographically, most stingless bee studies have been concentrated in Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, while systematic empirical research on East Kalimantan's kelulut industry remains virtually absent. This geographical and methodological void calls for a comprehensive analytical framework that situates sustainable marketing within the context of digital transformation, cooperative governance, and local socio-ecological systems.

This study offers a novel contribution by being the first to apply a convergent mixed-methods approach combining Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrices to the stingless bee honey sector in East Kalimantan. The integration of digital marketing, eco-branding, and cooperative-based strategies within the SWOT-IE framework represents an innovative analytical synthesis that links sustainability principles to actionable marketing strategy. By uniting quantitative performance assessment with qualitative stakeholder insights, this research advances both methodological rigor and practical applicability in sustainable agribusiness strategy development.

The significance of this study is threefold. First, it provides policymakers with evidence-based insights to design targeted interventions that enhance access to certification, cooperative financing, and digital infrastructure for rural MSMEs. Second, it offers strategic guidance for agripreneurs and cooperatives to strengthen eco-branding, diversify value chains, and expand market access through digital platforms. Third, it informs development agencies and academic institutions about replicable models of sustainable marketing empowerment applicable across tropical agrifood sectors. The anticipated outcomes improved market access, greater income stability, increased certification uptake, and strengthened cooperative networks, which directly contribute to measurable progress toward inclusive and sustainable agribusiness ecosystems in Ind

Methods

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to formulate sustainable marketing strategies for stingless bee honey agripreneurs in Samarinda City, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The combination of approaches enabled a comprehensive understanding of both numerical and contextual dimensions of agripreneurial performance. Primary data were collected between July and September 2025 across five major stingless bee production sites in Samarinda. The research involved 65 agripreneurs who completed structured questionnaires, 27 semi-structured interviews, and three focus group discussions (FGDs) with 8-10 participants each, representing agripreneurs, cooperative leaders, marketers, and local institutional stakeholders. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure representation across enterprise scales, cooperative membership, and market engagement levels. Participants were recruited through coordination with local cooperatives and the Department of Agriculture, in accordance with voluntary participation and ethical consent procedures. Secondary data were obtained from institutional reports, official statistics, and peer-reviewed publications relevant to sustainable agribusiness and entrepreneurship to strengthen triangulation and contextual interpretation.

The analytical framework was based on the Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrices to assess the key internal and external determinants shaping enterprise competitiveness and sustainability. The IFE matrix examined internal dimensions, including innovation capability, production efficiency, branding strength, and managerial competence. In contrast, the EFE matrix evaluated external dimensions, including digital transformation, consumer behavior, policy support, and market competition. Each factor was assessed using a Weighted Score Formula, which combines a weight value (indicating factor importance) and a rating value (indicating performance level). The total score for each matrix was obtained using the Composite Weighted Index Formula, which summarizes all factor contributions to

determine the overall enterprise position. Weighting and rating were established through expert judgment involving nine panelists comprising cooperative leaders, agribusiness academics, and government officers using a Delphi consensus approach to achieve consistency in evaluation. The final IFE and EFE scores were integrated using the Internal-External (IE) Matrix Formula, which positioned enterprises within strategic categories such as "Growth and Build" or "Hold and Maintain." The results were further synthesized through the SWOT Analytical Model to identify strategy clusters (SO, WO, ST, and WT) that align internal resources with external opportunities and constraints, forming the foundation for the sustainable marketing strategies proposed in this study.

Results and Discussion

Internal Factor Evaluation and External Factor Evaluation Analysis

The Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) analyses were employed to assess the strategic position and sustainability potential of stingless bee honey agripreneurs in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. Analyses provided an integrative understanding of how internal resources and external environments collectively influence the competitive performance and sustainability trajectory of micro and small-scale honey enterprises.

The IFE matrix revealed a total weighted score of 2.86, indicating that internal factors were moderately favourable yet still required strategic enhancement. The key strengths identified included innovation in eco-friendly hive management (0.38), use of biodegradable and recyclable packaging (0.32), participatory management through local cooperatives (0.34), and strong community-based knowledge networks (0.30). These elements reflect a growing orientation toward environmental stewardship and social inclusivity, aligning with the principles of sustainable agripreneurship (Hersleth et al., 2022). Several weaknesses persisted, including limited digital marketing literacy (0.33), inconsistent product quality (0.36), low capital accessibility (0.30), and weak branding coherence (0.27). These internal limitations constrain scalability and reduce competitiveness against more technologically advanced food enterprises.

Table 1. Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) Matrix of stingless bee honey agripreneurs

Internal Factors	Weight	Rating	Weighted Score
Strengths			
Innovation in eco-friendly hive management	0.10	3.8	0.38
Sustainable and biodegradable packaging practices	0.08	4.0	0.32
Cooperative-based management and collaboration	0.09	3.8	0.34
Strong community-based knowledge and social capital	0.08	3.7	0.30
Weaknesses			
Limited digital marketing proficiency	0.09	3.7	0.33
Inconsistent product quality and lack of certification	0.09	4.0	0.36
Limited access to financial capital and technology	0.08	3.7	0.30
Weak branding and packaging differentiation	0.07	3.9	0.27
Total	1.00		2.86

Source: Primary data analysis (2025)

The results of the IFE analysis suggest that the stingless bee honey agripreneurs possess a solid internal foundation, particularly in terms of ecological innovation and collective management. Capacity-building programs in digital literacy, branding, and quality management remain essential to enhance long-term competitiveness. The integration of technological capability and institutional collaboration is critical for

transforming smallholder agribusinesses into competitive and sustainable ventures in Indonesia's evolving digital economy (Kristyanto & Jamil, 2023).

Table 2. External Factor Evaluation (EFE) Matrix of stingless bee honey agripreneurs

External Factors	Weight	Rating	Weighted Score
Opportunities			
Growing consumer demand for functional and organic foods	0.10	4.0	0.40
Expansion of digital and e-commerce marketing platforms	0.09	4.0	0.36
Local government support for sustainable agribusiness	0.08	3.8	0.30
Training and empowerment programs for rural entrepreneurs	0.07	4.0	0.28
Threats			
Price fluctuations and market instability	0.08	4.0	0.32
Limited certification and labeling mechanisms	0.08	3.9	0.31
Competition from commercial honey producers	0.08	3.8	0.30
Restricted access to export markets and logistics support	0.07	4.0	0.28
Total	1.00		2.93

Source: Primary data analysis (2025)

The EFE analysis, on the other hand, yielded a total weighted score of 2.93, indicating that the external environment presents significant development opportunities, albeit accompanied by specific structural threats. Opportunities were dominated by rising consumer preference for functional and organic products (0.40), growing adoption of digital marketing platforms (0.36), supportive local government programs for sustainable agribusiness (0.30), and access to training and capacity-building initiatives (0.28). These trends underscore the strategic potential for stingless bee honey products to position themselves as niche commodities within Indonesia's sustainable food market.

Notable threats were identified, including price volatility in raw materials and honey products (0.32), inadequate certification and labelling frameworks (0.31), rising competition from commercial honey products (0.30), and limited access to export-standard facilities (0.28). Gadanakis (2024) observed that such external constraints are typical among micro-agripreneurs in emerging economies, where infrastructural and institutional asymmetries can limit participation in premium value chains.

The combination of moderate internal strength and favourable external opportunities positions the stingless bee honey agripreneurs in a strategic growth condition. To achieve sustainable competitiveness, stakeholders must institutionalize collective marketing efforts, invest in brand development, and integrate sustainability narratives into value communication. These align with the recommendations of Dyer et al. (2021), who advocate for strategic adaptability and market-driven innovation as essential mechanisms for empowering rural enterprises.

Internal-External (IE) Matrix

The integration of IFE and EFE analyses positioned stingless bee honey agribusinesses in Cell V of the Internal-External (IE) matrix, representing a "Growth and Build" strategy category. This position signifies that the enterprises possess adequate internal strength and face a moderately favourable external environment, allowing them to pursue proactive development and expansion strategies. The total weighted score for IFE (2.86) and EFE (2.93) indicates that the stingless bee honey enterprises in

Samarinda, East Kalimantan, are in a stable position to enhance their market performance through innovation and collaboration.

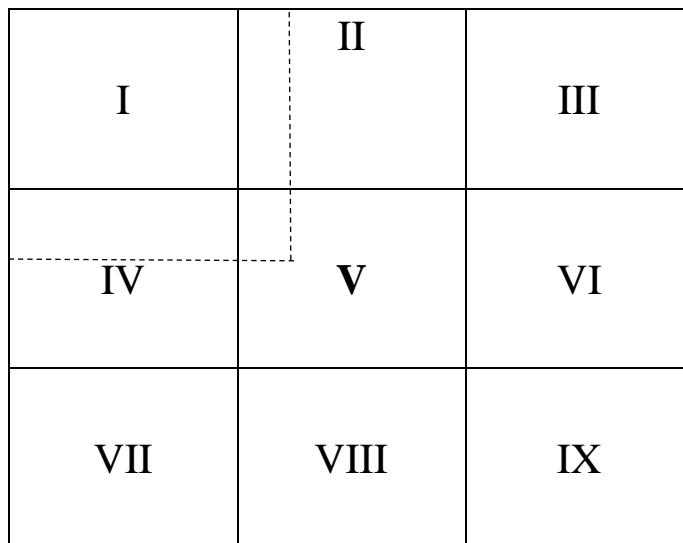


Figure 1. Strategic position of stingless bee honey enterprises

Source: Primary data analysis (2025)

According to the strategic framework proposed by Dyer et al. (2021), the “Growth and Build” zone recommends strategies such as market penetration, product development, and strategic partnerships. Sustainable marketing efforts should prioritize eco-branding, digital transformation, and capacity building for local agripreneurs. Partnerships with academic institutions, local cooperatives, and government agencies can enhance product standardization, access to certification, and digital literacy. These measures collectively contribute to strengthening brand visibility and competitiveness in both domestic and international markets.

Gadanakis (2024) emphasizes that the synergy between digital marketing and sustainability communication plays a pivotal role in building consumer trust and expanding inclusive market networks. The strategic orientation derived from the IE matrix highlights the need for integrating technological adaptation, environmental ethics, and institutional collaboration to achieve resilient and inclusive growth among stingless bee honey enterprises.

SWOT-Based Strategic Formulation

The synthesis of the Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) analyses, conducted through the SWOT framework, resulted in four clusters of sustainability-oriented strategies designed to strengthen the competitiveness of stingless bee honey agribusiness in Samarinda.

The SO (Strength-Opportunity) strategies leverage internal capabilities to capitalize on external opportunities. These include developing eco-branding initiatives, digital storytelling, and certification-based differentiation to build consumer trust and expand market penetration. Such strategies align with the growing demand for traceable, sustainable, and ethically sourced food products in Southeast Asia (Mascarello et al., 2024; Judijanto et al., 2025). Through the integration of digital marketing and environmental certification, producers can create emotional connections and authenticity narratives that enhance perceived value and loyalty among eco-conscious consumers (Judijanto et al., 2025; Qamara et al., 2025).

Table 3. SWOT matrix and strategic alternatives for stingless bee honey agripreneurs

Internal / External Factors	Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Growing demand for sustainable products b. Digital platform expansion c. Government support for green entrepreneurship d. Collaboration with tourism sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Market competition and price volatility b. Limited access to financing c. Certification and regulatory barriers d. Supply chain disruptions
Strengths (S)	SO Strategies	ST Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Eco-friendly hive management b. Sustainable packaging innovation c. Cooperative-based production system d. Strong local brand potential 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop eco-branding and digital storytelling campaigns to strengthen sustainability image. 2. Pursue certification-based differentiation (organic, halal, fair trade). 3. Build strategic alliances with tourism and wellness industries. 4. Expand e-commerce market access through integrated digital platforms. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish diversified value chains and local-regional market integration. 2. Develop partnerships with research institutions for continuous innovation. 3. Utilize sustainability as a differentiation tool against competitors. 4. Strengthen risk management through cooperative-based logistics systems.
Weaknesses (W)	WO Strategies	WT Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Limited marketing and branding literacy b. Inconsistent product quality c. Weak financial and managerial capacity d. Low digital skills 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement digital marketing and branding training for agripreneurs. 2. Strengthen cooperative quality assurance mechanisms. 3. Enhance managerial skills through university-industry collaborations. 4. Promote inclusive financing and mentoring programs for small-scale producers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop community-based microfinance and collective savings groups. 2. Initiate joint marketing and shared logistics systems to reduce costs. 3. Implement cooperative insurance and risk-sharing schemes. 4. Build community partnerships for sustainable supply and market stability.

Source: Primary data analysis (2025)

The WO (Weakness-Opportunity) strategies emphasize capacity-building through improved managerial and marketing literacy, cooperative-led training, and the establishment of collective quality control systems. By strengthening human capital and governance, stingless bee cooperatives can better capitalize on opportunities arising from the transition to a green economy and sustainable food markets (Savastano et al., 2022). These measures address skill gaps and institutional weaknesses that often hinder the performance of smallholder agribusinesses, ensuring that innovation and sustainability are integrated across production and marketing chains. Such initiatives are consistent with empirical findings showing that cooperative-based governance enhances product consistency, innovation adoption, and inclusive value chain participation (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2022).

The ST (Strength-Threat) strategies focus on leveraging core strengths such as product authenticity, natural resource availability, and local branding to mitigate external threats like price volatility and competitive market pressure. Market diversification through collaborations with tourism-based retail sectors and sustainable local enterprises enables producers to reduce dependence on a single distribution

channel, increasing resilience to external shocks (Kubal-Czerwińska et al., 2022). The development of resilient value chains, underpinned by transparent governance and adaptive marketing strategies, is crucial for sustaining profitability and competitiveness in the face of environmental and economic uncertainties (Dong, 2021). This aligns with the broader global movement toward circular bioeconomy-based agribusinesses that integrate environmental stewardship with entrepreneurship (Donner de Vries, 2023).

The WT (Weakness-Threat) strategies address overlapping internal and external constraints by promoting risk-sharing mechanisms, collective financing schemes, and community-based partnerships. Establishing microfinance linkages and revolving fund programs can improve liquidity while minimizing individual exposure to market risks (Brinda et al., 2024). Community-driven cooperatives, supported by government-backed sustainability initiatives, can facilitate collective resilience against systemic threats, including climate variability and fluctuating raw material prices (Widiarta et al., 2025). Through participatory governance, local stakeholders can ensure equitable distribution of benefits, fostering long-term sustainability and social inclusion within rural economies (Sambodo et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study formulates sustainability-oriented strategic alternatives to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of stingless bee honey agripreneurs in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. By integrating IFE-EFE and SWOT analyses within a mixed-methods framework, it demonstrates how ecological innovation, digital transformation, and cooperative governance can be aligned to drive inclusive and environmentally responsible agribusiness growth. The findings provide a clear scientific basis for strengthening eco-branding, certification, digital literacy, and cooperative financing as core levers for market expansion and sustainability. Based on the results, three actionable priorities are recommended: establishing a pilot eco-certification and halal labeling program within one production cluster; implementing a six-month digital literacy and marketing training program for at least 60 agripreneurs; and developing a cooperative-based revolving microfinance and joint marketing scheme to improve liquidity and market stability. The success of these initiatives can be evaluated through measurable indicators such as increased cooperative sales, market price premiums for certified honey, and improved export readiness.

This study emphasizes the policy relevance of integrating sustainability, certification, and digital empowerment into local agribusiness development agendas, offering a practical roadmap for government and development agencies to advance a resilient, inclusive, and ecologically sustainable stingless bee industry in East Kalimantan.

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