

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN SHAPING VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM: CASE STUDY IN COASTAL TOURISM DESTINATION OF LOMBOK, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Purpose – This study investigates the role of digital technology in enhancing visitor experiences and promoting community engagement in community-based tourism (CBT) within coastal destinations. It explores how digital platforms support destination visibility, strengthen visitor-local interactions, and enable inclusive participation in sustainable tourism management, while also identifying key challenges and future opportunities.

Methodology – A qualitative case study approach was employed, using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 18 purposively selected informants, including domestic and international tourists, local tourism actors, government officials, and community organization representatives. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns in technology use, tourist experiences, and community involvement.

Findings – The findings reveal that digital platforms significantly improve access to tourism information and enhance the quality of visitor services. Tools such as websites, booking applications, and social media facilitate trip planning and foster meaningful interactions between tourists and local communities. Furthermore, digital technology empowers local stakeholders to actively participate in tourism promotion and service delivery. However, challenges persist, including limited digital infrastructure, uneven internet access, and generational disparities in digital literacy. Despite these barriers, digital platforms also support the promotion of local products and cultural heritage, contributing to more inclusive and sustainable CBT practices.

Contribution – This study offers original contributions by contextualizing the role of digital technology in CBT development within coastal areas, particularly those facing infrastructural and socio-cultural constraints. It provides empirical evidence on how digitalization can empower local communities and enhance visitor engagement. The study also proposes practical recommendations for improving digital capacity and fostering community-driven tourism innovation. These insights serve as a foundation for future research and policy development aimed at leveraging technology for sustainable and inclusive tourism growth.

Keywords Digital Technology, Community-Based Tourism, Visitor Experience, Sustainable Tourism, Coastal Destinations

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the tourism sector has changed the way tourist destinations are managed and promoted. Digitalization through platforms such as social media, location-based applications, and destination websites allows local communities to interact directly with tourists and introduce their experiences and cultures to a global audience (Rasul and Hoque, 2020; Bhatt & Dani, 2024; Barykin et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2024; Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021). This digital transformation not only enhances the promotion of tourist destinations but also strengthens community involvement in destination management and creates more authentic and personalized tourist experiences (Happ, Horváth, and Kupi 2024); (Roque and Raposo 2016).

Despite the many opportunities offered by digital technology, major challenges still face remote or less developed areas, such as the coast of Lombok, Indonesia. Communities in coastal tourism areas of Lombok, despite having extraordinary tourism potential, are often constrained by limited digital infrastructure and low technological literacy (Giampiccoli and Saayman, 2018; Marsdenia, 2022; Socratous et al., 2025; Barykin et al., 2021). Therefore, the adoption of digital technology for community-based tourism management in coastal areas of Lombok requires adjustments to local conditions and a deep understanding of how technology can be used effectively to support sustainability and responsible management (Baggio et al., 2020; Socratous et al., 2025; El Archi et al., 2023; Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021).

Digital technology has the potential to provide a more efficient way for coastal communities in Lombok to market unique local potential and interact with tourists, while supporting sustainability in destination management. However, challenges related to community readiness and understanding in utilizing digital technology need to be addressed so as not to cause inequality or social exclusion due to excessive dependence on technology (Socratous et al., 2025; El Archi et al., 2023). Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing how digital technology can strengthen sustainable community-based tourism in Lombok. Based on these arguments, this study aims to: (1) Explore the role of digital technology in connecting Lombok's coastal communities with tourists and increasing their involvement in sustainable tourism management. (2) Identify the challenges faced by local Lombok communities in adopting and utilizing digital platforms to support community-based tourism management. (3) Assess the potential of digital technology in creating a better, more inclusive, and sustainable tourism experience for tourists in Lombok.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. The Role of Digital Technology in Community-Based Tourism

Digital technology plays an important role in connecting local communities with tourists and supporting community-based tourism. Platforms like social media, location-based apps, and destination websites allow communities to directly promote their tourism experiences. It also enables direct interaction, encouraging more transparent and sustainable tourism management. (Rasul and Hoque, 2020; Bhatt & Dani, 2024; Barykin et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2024; Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021). Research by (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021) Digital technology enhances authentic connections between tourists and local communities while promoting environmentally and socially responsible practices that contribute to sustainable tourism. (Happ et al., 2024; Barykin et al., 2021).

1.2. Challenges in Adopting Digital Technologies by Local Communities

Although digital technologies offer significant advantages, many local communities struggle with adoption due to inadequate infrastructure, limited digital skills, and a lack of awareness about their potential value. (El Archi et al. 2023) found that the digital divide is a major barrier to technology integration in community-based tourism management. In addition, social and cultural factors also influence technology adoption in several community-based tourism destinations (Kurniati & Suryanto, 2023; Marsdenia, 2022; Socratous et al., 2025). (Marsdenia, 2022) emphasize the importance of training and developing digital skills in local communities to reduce this gap. (Socratous et al., 2025) also show that community readiness in facing social and economic changes brought about by technology is a determining factor in the success of digital adoption.

1.3. Impact of Digital Technologies on Tourist Experience and Sustainability

By streamlining access to destination details and encouraging real-time engagement, digital tools enhance how tourists explore and connect with local offerings. They also support experience-sharing and feedback, helping build credibility and foster deeper visitor trust. (Barashok et al., 2021; Narayan et al., 2022; Happ et al., 2024). Research by (Happ et al., 2024) shows that digital-based applications can encourage tourists to participate in tourism activities that focus on nature and culture conservation, thereby encouraging more responsible tourism (Chamboko et al., 2021).

Digitalization contributes to the long-term viability of community-based tourism by expanding awareness of responsible travel practices and offering local communities tools to showcase eco-conscious tourism initiatives. (Veseli and Bytyqi, 2025). (Duong, 2023). Digital technology aids in the responsible management of natural resources and fosters greater environmental consciousness among visitors. It also strengthens cultural preservation initiatives and promotes economic empowerment within local communities (So and Li, 2020). (Socratous et al., 2025) argue that technology can accelerate the transition to more sustainable tourism by involving local communities in the management and monitoring of tourist destinations.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and understand the role of digital technology in the sustainable management of community-based tourism in Lombok's coastal areas. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to capture rich, contextual insights into the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of local communities regarding the adoption and application of digital tools in tourism development (El Archi et al., 2023; Marsdenia, 2022). A case study design was chosen to allow an in-depth empirical investigation of this contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are blurred (Yin, 2015). Focusing on coastal communities in Lombok, the case study facilitated the exploration of how digital technology is being utilized in the management of community-based tourism (Quang et al., 2023; Kurniati & Suryanto, 2023).

The study specifically examined the participation of local communities, the challenges they face, and the potential of digital platforms to enhance tourist experiences and foster inclusive tourism development in coastal areas (Socratous et al., 2025; Kindzule-Millere & Zeverte-Rivza, 2022). The research was conducted in locations selected based on two main criteria: (1) limited digital infrastructure and technological literacy, and (2) the active involvement of local communities in community-based tourism initiatives (Megawati & Otok, 2025 ; Marsdenia, 2022; Bhatt & Dani, 2024; Azira et al., 2024). The fieldwork took place between September 2024 and February 2025, encompassing several phases: research preparation, data collection, preliminary data analysis, completion of data interpretation, and the formulation of conclusions.

Multiple qualitative data collection techniques were employed, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), direct observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with local tourism actors community leaders, entrepreneurs, and visiting tourists to understand individual experiences with digital adoption in tourism management (Yudhiasta

and Mijiarto, 2023). FGDs were held with groups of local stakeholders, Business actor, tourism officer, and tourism associations, to facilitate collective reflection and capture diverse perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of digital technology in community-based tourism. Each FGD consisted of 6–8 participants and was moderated using a semi-structured guide based on themes drawn from the literature. Direct observations were carried out in tourism-related locations to observe how digital platforms were used in practice and how digital interactions occurred between tourists and the local population (Bhatt & Dani, 2024). Document analysis included the review of reports, policy briefs, and local tourism development documents related to technology adoption in the Lombok tourism sector (Rasul and Hoque, 2020).

Table 1: **Interview Questions**

Exploring the role of digital technologies in connecting Lombok's coastal communities with tourists and increasing their involvement in sustainable tourism management.	
Questions	
1.	How do you see the role of digital technology in connecting local communities with tourists in Lombok?
2.	In your opinion, to what extent has digital technology helped coastal communities in Lombok in increasing their involvement in tourism management?
3.	How can digital technology play a role in creating more authentic and personal tourism experiences for tourists in Lombok?
4.	In your opinion, can digital technology help increase community involvement in environmentally friendly and sustainable tourism practices in Lombok?
Identifying the challenges faced by local communities in Lombok in adopting and utilizing digital platforms to support community-based tourism management.	
1.	What are the main challenges you face in accessing and using digital technology to promote tourism in Lombok?
2.	How do local communities in Lombok respond to efforts to adopt digital technology in tourism management?
3.	In your opinion, are there any cultural or social aspects that influence the adoption of digital technology in coastal communities in Lombok?
4.	What do you think needs to be done to make digital technology more accessible to local communities, especially in more remote coastal areas?
Assessing the potential of digital technologies in creating better, inclusive and sustainable tourism experiences for tourists in Lombok.	
1.	What potential do you see for digital technology in creating more personal and sustainable tourism experiences in Lombok?
2.	How can digital technology help in increasing tourists' awareness of sustainability and cultural preservation in Lombok?
3.	How do you see the future of tourism in Lombok using digital technology?
4.	What are your hopes regarding the use of digital technology to create more environmentally friendly and sustainable tourism in Lombok in the future?

Source: Processed data, 2024

To ensure data credibility, the study applied data triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, FGDs, observations, and documents. Additionally, member checking was used by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to validate interpretations and ensure alignment with the actual community context.

Table 2: **Profile of Interviewed Sample**

Informant	Number of Interviewed
Homestay Owner	4
Guide	5
Business Actor	3
Tourism Officer	1
Association of the Indonesian Tours and Travel Agencies (ASITA) Lombok	1
Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (IHRA) Lombok	1
Visitor	3

Source: Processed data, 2024

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Morgan, 2022). The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Initial coding was conducted independently by two researchers to enhance reliability. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. Although qualitative analysis software such as NVivo was considered, manual coding was deemed sufficient given the manageable volume of data. The themes that emerged reflect key aspects of digital technology adoption, community

engagement, barriers to implementation, and perceived impacts on tourism sustainability (Quang et al., 2023 ; Marsdenia, 2022). Direct quotes from participants were included to illustrate and support the thematic findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Overview of Thematic Analysis Process

Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Three major themes emerged from the data: (1) Empowerment through Digital Connectivity, (2) Barriers to Digital Adoption, and (3) Sustainable and Personalized Experiences through Technology. Each theme includes relevant subthemes and is supported by rich quotes and scholarly discussion.

Table 3. Thematic Summary Table

Main Theme	Subthemes	Informant
1. Empowerment through Digital Connectivity	- Social media as a promotional tool - Strengthening community roles in tourism	IR1, IR2, IR3, IR4, IR7, IR12, IR13
2. Barriers to Digital Adoption	- Infrastructure and connectivity issues - Intergenerational digital divide - Cultural perceptions of technology	IR5, IR6, IR7, IR8, IR12, IR13
3. Sustainable and Personalized Experiences through Technology	- Personalization and immersive engagement - Awareness of sustainability - Inclusive community-based services	IR9, IR14, IR10, IR11, IR15, IR16, IR17, IR18

Source: Source: Processed data, 2024

3.2. Empowerment through Digital Connectivity

Participants emphasized the transformative role of digital technology, particularly social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, in promoting local tourism destinations.

"We saw a significant change after utilizing social media. More tourists came from outside Lombok and they often found us through the photos we uploaded on Instagram." IR1.

This finding aligns with (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) who assert that digital platforms foster two-way communication, enabling dynamic engagement between tourism operators and tourists. Social media enables broader promotion without geographical limits and enhances engagement through visual content (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Beyond promotion, digital tools empower local communities to take more active roles in tourism management.

"Technology helps us communicate directly with tourists, giving them more information about our local culture and the tourism experiences we offer." IR2.

Websites, apps, and location-based platforms allow for real-time communication and direct booking of community-led experiences, enhancing tourist engagement. The digital communication theory by Dickinson et al., (2017); Benedek and Szöllösi, (2023) highlights how digital platforms facilitate interactive communication, allowing local communities to share authentic experiences and enrich tourist engagement. Research by Kusumastuti et al, (2024) also demonstrate that digital integration strengthens community capacity in managing sustainable tourism.

3.3. Barriers to Digital Adoption

Infrastructure limitations remain a fundamental challenge. Respondents from remote coastal areas of Lombok noted the struggle with internet access.

"Unstable internet is a big problem, especially in areas further from the city centre. This really limits our ability to use technology to its full potential." IR5.

Hendrawan et al., (2024) discuss how poor infrastructure hampers digital marketing and destination management. This challenge persists despite the availability of digital tools (Maquera et al., 2022). Digital marketing positively impacts rural destination image and tourist interest (Rodrigues et al., 2023), while digitalization boosts tourism revenues when adapted to local cultural contexts (Ammirato et al., 2022). Respondents identified a digital literacy gap between age groups, with younger individuals adapting more easily to digital tools.

"The younger generation is getting used to using technology, but the older generation often feels alienated by these changes. We try to provide hands-on training to bridge this gap." (IR6)

Research by (Azira et al., 2024) confirm that generational gaps hinder digital adoption, and call for inclusive strategies to bridge them. Training for older generations is essential to help them adapt (Paunovic et al., 2023). In Lombok, cultural and social factors also influence digital adoption, as some coastal communities perceive technology as a threat to traditions. Digital marketing positively impacts rural destination image and tourist interest (Rodrigues et al., 2023), while digitalization boosts tourism revenues when adapted to local cultural contexts (Ammirato et al., 2022). However, adoption varies across age groups, with younger generations adapting more quickly than older ones, highlighting the need for inclusive digitalization strategies. Some communities view technology as a potential threat to tradition.

“We have to make sure that technology does not replace our culture, but rather strengthens it. For example, we use social media to share stories about our traditions.” (IR7)

Digital technologies like AR/VR and smart platforms can promote traditions without losing authenticity while enhancing tourist experiences and community involvement (Maquera et al., 2022). Digitalization also improves destination image, increases tourist visits, and boosts rural tourism revenues (Rodrigues et al., 2023; Ammirato et al., 2022).

3.4. Sustainable and Personalized Experiences through Technology

Digital platforms offer tourists customized experiences and deeper engagement with local culture.

“With an app that can recommend tours based on my interests, I feel more connected to the local culture and can enjoy more meaningful experiences.” (IR9)

“A digital platform that connects travellers with community-based service providers would be very helpful in finding more sustainable experiences.” (IR15)

Technologies such as Airbnb Experiences and GetYourGuide support this trend (Srinivasan et al., 2024). Technology enables tourists to select personalized experiences, deepening cultural interactions and enhancing authenticity. Technology fosters environmental awareness among tourists by sharing ecotourism information.

“We see potential for apps that can help travellers understand and reduce their negative impact on the environment.” (IR4).

“We often direct tourists to places that support nature and cultural conservation, and this can be done more effectively through the app.” (IR10)

This aligns with Socratous et al. (2025); Rodríguez et al., (2020), and Rausser et al. (2021) who advocate the role of digital tools in promoting sustainable behavior. Informants were optimistic about technology enabling more inclusive tourism, where local communities and tourists benefit mutually.

“I believe technology will enable us to offer a more inclusive experience and connect different segments of society in the tourism industry.” (IR11)

This corresponds with the views of Buhalis and Law (2008), and (Liberato et al. 2018) who suggest digital tools enhance destination marketing and empower local actors. This not only benefits for tourists, but also local managers and communities involved in the industry. The following are statement from the tourism officer, hotel association and travel agent association:

“Digital technology enables tourism destinations in Lombok to be better known globally.” (IR16)

“Digital technology has changed the way tourists plan and enjoy their trips.” (IR17)

“Digital technology plays a major role in improving service and operational efficiency.” (IR18)

Informants expect stakeholders to collaborate in promoting eco-friendly tourism through technology, aligning with (Richards, 2018) view that digital tools can connect tourism with sustainability values by managing environmental and cultural impacts while encouraging responsible tourist behaviour.

The thematic analysis shows that while digital technology empowers local communities and enriches tourist experiences, significant barriers particularly infrastructure and digital literacy—must be addressed. Social media, apps, and smart platforms play key roles in enhancing visibility, fostering engagement, and supporting sustainability. Stakeholders are encouraged to collaborate in building digital capacity and infrastructure, ensuring inclusive and resilient tourism ecosystems.

Based on the research results, digital technology plays an important role in connecting local communities with tourists through social media and location-based platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Google My Business. Homestay managers and tour guides in Lombok admit that social media increases the number of tourists from outside the area, in accordance with the theory of digital communication which states that social media can build two-way relationships between destination managers and tourists (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Roque and Raposo, 2016; So and Li, 2020; Khairani and Fachira, 2021).

In addition, digital technology allows destinations to be better known without geographical boundaries (Buhalis and Law, 2008; Bhatt & Dani, 2024) and provides authentic information directly from local communities that enriches the tourist experience (El Archi et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2024). In addition to social media, digital technology helps local communities manage tourism through location-based applications and websites, which allow tourists to find tourism activities managed by local communities, such as tour packages and cultural experiences. Interactive communication theory asserts that digital interaction

strengthens community involvement in tourism promotion and management (Dickinson et al., 2017; El Archi et al., 2024; Marsdenia, 2022). Kusumastuti et al., (2024) study showed that the integration of digital technology in tourist villages not only increases the attractiveness of destinations but also strengthens community capacity in sustainable tourism (Megawati & Otok, 2025; El Archi et al., 2024). Thus, digital technology is not only a promotional tool but also an important mechanism in managing destinations more effectively.

Furthermore, digital technology enhances the tourism experience through platforms such as Airbnb Experiences and GetYourGuide, allowing tourists to enjoy more immersive experiences, such as cooking courses or cultural tours with local guides. Several recommendations were proposed regarding government regulations, digital infrastructure development, and the implementation of digital technology (Parlov, Perkov, and Sičaja 2016). As stated by (Vlahović and Davidović 2024) highlight the growing global reliance on e-booking platforms and their potential to enhance the customer experience and optimise business operations. However, still do not fully understand the potential of smart technology in supporting the digital promotion of tourist destination. Studies show that virtual reality can enhance attendance and change tourists' perceptions of cultural destinations (Han et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2022). In addition, digital technology-based services help tourists explore cultural sites virtually before direct visits (Vaidhyanathan et al., 2021; (Sumaia Afren 2024); Kindzule-Millere & Zeverte-Rivza, 2022). Thus, technology is not only a marketing tool, but also enriches the tourist experience and supports sustainable tourism practices through environmental conservation applications and ecotourism information (Socratous et al., 2025; Rausser et al., 2021; Nicola-Gavrila, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the strategic role of digital technology in enhancing community-based tourism (CBT) along the coastal regions of Lombok. By employing a thematic analysis approach, the research provides empirical evidence that social media platforms and location-based applications significantly improve destination visibility and promote more authentic and meaningful tourist engagement. These technologies facilitate two-way communication between local communities and visitors, fostering a personalized tourism experience while promoting cultural appreciation. A key contribution of this research lies in demonstrating how digital tools not only serve as promotional channels but also act as instruments of empowerment for local communities. The findings reveal that digitalization strengthens the capacity of coastal residents to actively participate in tourism development, thus shifting their role from passive beneficiaries to proactive managers within a more inclusive tourism ecosystem.

However, the study also uncovers persistent barriers, including limited digital infrastructure and unequal internet access, particularly in remote areas. In addition, an intergenerational digital divide presents a significant challenge; while younger community members are generally adept at using digital platforms, older generations often require targeted training and support. This underscores the urgent need for community-based digital literacy programs that are sensitive to generational and cultural contexts. The original contribution of this study is its contextual insight into how digital technology intersects with local community dynamics in a coastal, resource-constrained setting. By centering the voices of various tourism stakeholders, this research advances understanding of how technology can be localized and leveraged to support more sustainable and participatory tourism practices. Nevertheless, the study has several limitations. Its focus on a single geographical area may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technology necessitates ongoing observation and adaptation, which falls beyond the scope of this research.

Future studies should explore comparative analyses across different coastal regions to examine how varying socio-cultural and infrastructural contexts shape digital tourism adoption. In addition, there is a need to investigate the development of sustainable digital business models that align with local community values. Further research could also examine the potential of emerging technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), in enriching tourist experiences while supporting cultural preservation. In conclusion, digital technology, when implemented inclusively and contextually, can function not only as a marketing tool but also as a transformative force that empowers local communities, enhances visitor experiences, and contributes to the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector.

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