

TRANSFORMING COFFEE TOURISM IN LABUAN BAJO THROUGH DIGITAL INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

This community service initiative aimed to elevate coffee tourism in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, by integrating digital innovation and technology into local coffee SMEs. Leveraging strategies such as digital cafes with QR-code-based storytelling, social media branding, and electronic payment systems, the program sought to enrich tourism experiences while bolstering SME competitiveness and sustainability. Employing a participatory action research approach, the program included stakeholder workshops, design of digital coffee touchpoints, and training for SME owners and tourism actors. Results demonstrated enhanced visitor engagement, improved SME digital capacity, and heightened regional branding of coffee as a tourism asset. This study underscores the potential of technology-driven community interventions in propelling sustainable tourism and local economic development.

Keywords: Coffee Tourism, Digital Innovation, Labuan Bajo, SMEs, Sustainable Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian tourism is currently geared towards supporting the development of priority destinations that can drive economic growth and empower local communities. One such destination is Labuan Bajo, which has been designated as one of five super-priority destinations and serves as the gateway to Komodo National Park. The rapid growth of the tourism sector in this region is not only marked by increased infrastructure investment, but also by the emergence of local products such as coffee as a cultural-based tourism asset (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2024). Labuan Bajo's local coffee products have even been featured in various international events, such as the G20 DEWG meeting, and promoted through innovative approaches such as the use of QR-code payments and digital cafe storytelling that strengthen the appeal of local cultural narratives (Rahmawati & Putra, 2025). However, many coffee SMEs and tourism operators in the region still face limitations in digital marketing capacity, lack of structured integration of innovation, and a lack of immersive and sustainable tourism experiences (Suryani, Nugraha, & Hakim, 2025).

A recent community service study in East Java (2025) shows that the “digital coffee shops” initiative, which combines digital payments and cultural narratives, can enhance the visitor experience while empowering local communities (Kurniawan & Prasetyo, 2025). This is in line with the Sustainable Gastronomy study, which emphasizes the potential of combining local products with cultural preservation efforts to build sustainable tourism appeal (Lopez, 2024).

Based on these conditions, the urgency of this community service program is to provide real solutions for coffee MSMEs in Labuan Bajo so that they can integrate digital innovation, cultural narratives, and modern marketing strategies. This program not only targets improving the digital marketing skills of MSME actors but also aims to strengthen local identity as a tourist attraction

through collaboration between technology and cultural wisdom. Thus, this community service is expected to:

1. Empower local coffee MSMEs to compete in the global market through digitalization.
2. Create immersive tourism experiences that strengthen tourists' emotional connection with local products.
3. Support sustainable tourism by integrating coffee products as part of sustainable gastronomy and regional cultural narratives.
4. Enhance the competitiveness of Labuan Bajo as a leading tourism destination that relies not only on nature, but also on the strength of local products and culture.

With this focus, this community service is expected to make a strategic contribution to the transformation of tourism in Labuan Bajo through the synergy of digital innovation, cultural preservation, and the strengthening of community-based creative economy (Muis, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Coffee Tourism and Cultural Identity

The concept of coffee tourism is growing as a new approach to integrating local products with culture-based tourism experiences. Coffee is not only seen as a consumer product, but also as a medium for storytelling that can strengthen the cultural identity of a region. Research in Mataram City shows that coffee shops can function as cultural bridges that connect tourists with local stories, although their development still faces challenges such as fragmented infrastructure and weak tourism integration (Hidayat & Cahyono, 2024). Another study emphasizes that coffee-based tourism plays an important role in enriching cultural narratives while boosting the local economy, especially when combined with digital innovation and storytelling-based promotion (Wijaya, 2025). Coffee tourism is not just about enjoying coffee, but an immersive experience that involves social interaction, cultural exchange, and strengthening the image of tourist destinations (Prabowo & Taufiq, 2025).

In the context of super-priority destinations such as Labuan Bajo, the potential of coffee tourism is highly relevant as it can diversify tourist attractions that were previously dominated by natural beauty and marine tourism. The application of digital strategies such as QR-code payment and narrative integration in thematic cafes opens up new opportunities for local MSMEs to enter the sustainable tourism ecosystem (Rahmawati & Putra, 2025). This is in line with the Sustainable Gastronomy framework, which emphasizes the importance of combining local products with cultural preservation to enhance authentic and sustainable tourism appeal (Lopez, 2024). Thus, recent literature shows that coffee tourism is not only a means of commercializing coffee products, but also a strategic platform for strengthening cultural identity, increasing tourist engagement, and encouraging community-based creative economic growth.

Digital Innovation in Tourism Experience

Digital innovation has brought about major changes in the way tourists interact with tourism products and services. The trend of digital cafés that integrate QR code technology has expanded the coffee drinking experience into an educational and interactive activity. Tourists not only enjoy the taste of coffee, but also obtain information about the origin of coffee beans, the production process, and the cultural stories that accompany them (Rahmawati & Putra, 2025). This approach is known as immersive tourism, which combines storytelling, provenance, and interactive learning into the tourist experience (Lopez, 2024). This model has proven effective in increasing tourist engagement, strengthening emotional ties to local products, and expanding marketing opportunities for tourism-based MSMEs (Santoso & Nugraha, 2025). Thus, digital

innovation in tourism is not only a modernization strategy but also an instrument for building sustainability, inclusivity, and competitiveness of tourist destinations.

Digital Technology and Sustainable Tourism

The framework of sustainable tourism emphasizes the importance of utilizing local products, preserving culture, and supporting digital technology to achieve economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Recent research highlights that the application of digital technology—such as online marketing, QR code integration, and tourism applications—can expand the market for local products while ensuring sustainable tourism practices (Ardika & Suyanto, 2025).

In addition, sustainable gastronomy in tourist areas has shown that technology can strengthen the synergy between cultural preservation, unique culinary attractions, and tourist satisfaction (Lopez, 2024). Thus, the integration of technology in sustainable tourism is not only a matter of modernization, but also a strategy to maintain local identity while increasing the global competitiveness of tourist destinations.

Digital Capacity Building among UMKM

Digital transformation programs—such as the “Go Digital” workshops in Labuan Bajo—demonstrate how institutional support can build SME digital literacy, facilitate branding, and promote competitiveness in tourism markets. Digital capacity building for MSMEs is increasingly positioned as a key prerequisite for tourism-based creative economic transformation. Structured training programs—ranging from “Go Digital” workshops and marketing clinics to one-on-one mentoring—have been proven to improve the digital literacy, content skills, and analytical understanding of business actors (Kurniawan & Prasetyo, 2025). In the context of tourist destinations, this capacity building has a direct impact on branding quality, communication consistency, and the ability of MSMEs to package local cultural narratives in attractive digital formats (Santoso & Nugraha, 2025).

Recent community service studies emphasize that a combination of training + mentoring + digital asset curation (logos, product photos, brand stories) results in more sustainable adoption than one-time training. This model encourages the formation of standard operating content (SOC), thematic content calendars, and the use of platform features (QR codes, digital catalogs, analytical insights) that improve reach, engagement, and conversion (Suryani, Nugraha, & Hakim, 2025). In super-priority areas such as Labuan Bajo, digital capacity is also linked to service experience readiness—for example, contactless payment integration, QR-based provenance menus, and micro-storytelling in digital cafes—which enhance the immersive tourism experience (Rahmawati & Putra, 2025). Service literature indicates that institutional support (local government, universities, BUMDes, creative communities) is the most consistent driver of adoption. Policy interventions such as training subsidies, marketplace onboarding facilitation, and the “UMKM Go Digital” program improve business confidence, expand market access, and strengthen cross-tourism business networks (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2024; Kominfo, 2024). Additionally, peer learning among business actors and MSME champion schemes in destinations have proven effective in spreading good practices and maintaining the sustainability of digital behavior change (Muis, 2025). In terms of results, strengthening the digital capacity of MSMEs is consistently associated with improvements in brand asset quality, regularity of content calendar-based marketing, and the use of simple metrics (CTR, ER, click-to-WhatsApp, store visit prompts) for decision making. When combined with a sustainable tourism framework, digital capacity interventions not only improve commercial performance but also strengthen the socio-cultural dimension through the curation of local identity narratives and community engagement (Lopez, 2024). Thus, digital capacity building serves as a bridge between technological innovation and destination sustainability—relevant for promoting the competitiveness of coffee MSMEs in the Labuan Bajo tourism ecosystem.

METHODOLOGY

Approach

Participatory action community service model engaged coffee SMEs, tourism stakeholders, and local authorities in co-designing and implementing digital interventions.

Phase Overview

1. Stakeholder Workshops
Held to map existing practices, challenges, and co-create digital solutions such as interactive coffee kiosks, mobile apps, or QR-code experiences.
2. Pilot Implementation
Deploy digital prototype cafes or interactive coffee touchpoints in tourist sites, equipped with storytelling QR codes and digital payment integration.
3. Training & Capacity Building
Conduct hands-on training covering digital storytelling, QR-code generation, and basic app maintenance for SMEs and local tourism staff.
4. Feedback & Iteration
Collect visitor feedback and stakeholder insights to refine digital experiences.

Evaluation Metrics

1. Visitor engagement and dwell time at digital touchpoints.
2. SME capabilities in managing digital tools independently.
3. Qualitative feedback from tourists regarding experience enhancement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Enhanced Immersive Experiences

Digital coffee touchpoints enriched tourist engagement—offering coffee with context, culture, and local narrative embedded, similar to the East Java digital café mode.

SME Digital Capacity Growth

SMEs showed increased comfort using QR tools and managing digital content, laying a foundation for future tourism innovation.

Branding and Regional Identity

Integrating coffee culture with digital storytelling strengthened Labuan Bajo's destination branding, aligning with sustainable gastronomic tourism principles.

Collaborative Ecosystem Development

Creating a tech-enabled coffee tourism initiative fostered collaboration between SMEs, tourism bodies, and local government, mirroring successful "Go Digital" efforts.

CONCLUSION

This community service initiative successfully transformed the coffee tourism experience in Labuan Bajo through digital innovation. By co-developing digital touchpoints and training local SMEs and tourism actors, the program boosted visitor engagement, digital capacity, and regional branding. To ensure sustainability, suggested next steps include forming a coalition of coffee SMEs with shared digital platforms, pursuing government-supported digital tourism grants, and expanding digital installations across broader tourist routes.

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