

Service Excellent Based Quality Management Strategy at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta: A Qualitative Case Study

Syaiful Ade Septemuryantoro^{1*}

¹ Universitas Dian Nuswantoro Semarang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: syaiful.ade@dsn.dinus.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Submitted:

22 March 2024

Revised:

11 April 2024

Accepted:

28 May 2024

Keywords

Boutique hotel,
Hospitality management,
Quality management
Service excellence,

ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry is increasingly characterized by intense competition, rising customer expectations, and the growing influence of digital transparency. In this context, quality management has evolved into a strategic imperative for sustaining competitiveness.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of service excellence-based quality management strategies at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta and examine their impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, involving purposively selected informants from managerial and operational levels. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. These data were analyzed using a thematic approach.

The findings reveal that the quality management strategy is built upon three integrated pillars: process standardization through structured Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the strengthening of service culture through continuous training, and the utilization of digital feedback as a quality control mechanism. Among the dimensions of service quality, reliability, and empathy are identified as the most influential factors in shaping guest experience. High levels of customer satisfaction are reflected in positive digital reviews and increased repeat guest rates.

This study contributes to the literature by providing an in-depth understanding on how service excellence is operationalized within a boutique hotel context through the integration of formal systems and personalized service culture. The findings also highlight the importance of aligning standardized procedures with emotional service delivery to enhance long-term customer loyalty.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry has experienced a shift in its competitive structure over the past decade. Competition is no longer solely based on price and physical facilities. Hotels compete on the quality of the guest experience. Changes in consumer behavior, the digitization of reviews, and rising traveler expectations are driving hotel management to strengthen quality management systems in a more systematic and measurable manner. In this context, quality management is no longer administrative; it has become a core organizational strategy. Conceptually, quality management has evolved from an inspection approach to a systemic, customer-oriented

approach. Total Quality Management emphasizes customer focus, employee engagement, and continuous improvement. This principle is relevant in the service industry, including hotels, because the products offered are intangible and heavily influenced by human interaction. (Goetsch & Davis, 2016) In hotel service, quality is not only judged by the end result, but also by the interaction process between staff and guests.

Changes in the external environment reinforce the urgency of quality management. Digitalization accelerates the transparency of hotel reputations. Online review platforms like online travel agents and social media rapidly shape public perception. Studies show that digital reviews significantly influence room booking decisions. (Xiang et al., 2017) This means that a single negative experience can spread widely and directly impact occupancy. This situation requires hotels to develop responsive and adaptive quality management systems. Furthermore, today's travelers aren't just looking for a place to stay; they're looking for an experience. The experience economy concept explains that consumers value personal, emotional, and authentic experiences. (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) Hotels that create unique experiences have a stronger competitive advantage. However, experiences don't happen spontaneously. They require structured and consistent service design.

In the context of Yogyakarta as a cultural and creative tourism destination, hotel competition is intensifying. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (*Badan Pusat Statistik*) shows an increase in the number of star-rated and non star rated hotels in recent years. This growth narrows facility-based differentiation. Hotels need to rely on service quality as a differentiating factor. Especially for hotels with boutique and creative concepts, consistent quality is key to sustainability. ARTOTEL Yogyakarta is one such boutique hotel that embraces art and creativity as its core identity. This concept creates a distinct positioning compared to conventional hotels. Interior design, collaborations with artists, and an artistic atmosphere are key attractions. However, differentiation based on creative concepts carries managerial consequences. Guest expectations for service quality are increasing. Guests value not only room comfort but also the quality of interactions, speed of response, and personalization of service.

To address these challenges, hotels need to integrate quality management with service excellence. Service excellence emphasizes providing service that exceeds customer expectations. The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry identifies five dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. (Parasuraman et al., 1988) This model is widely used in hospitality research to measure the gap between guest expectations and perceptions. Previous research has shown that service quality has a significant impact on hotel guest satisfaction and loyalty. (Liat et al., 2014) Satisfaction acts as a mediator between service quality and revisit intention. The higher the perceived quality, the more likely guests are to return and recommend the hotel to others. In a highly competitive environment, loyalty becomes a strategic asset because the cost of retaining guests is lower than acquiring new ones.

However, the implementation of quality management in boutique hotels differs from that in large chain hotels. Boutique hotels often rely on flexibility and creativity. However, flexibility without a system can compromise service consistency. Therefore, a quality management approach is needed that is not only based on procedures but also on organizational culture. A strong service culture can maintain standards despite staff turnover or high occupancy pressures. Service management literature emphasizes the importance of internal service quality as a foundation for external quality. (Heskett et al., 1994) When employees feel supported, trained, and appreciated, they tend to provide better service to guests. This is particularly relevant for high-engagement hotels like ARTOTEL Yogyakarta. Service excellence cannot be achieved without active employee involvement.

Furthermore, post-pandemic dynamics have heightened demands for cleanliness and safety standards. Travelers have become more sensitive to hygiene. Service quality now encompasses

health protocols, transparency of cleanliness, and a sense of security during their stay. Recent studies have shown that perceived safety significantly influences hotel selection decisions (Shin & Kang, 2020). Thus, quality management must expand its scope from interpersonal service aspects to risk management and security aspects. Research on quality management in Indonesian hotels is still dominated by quantitative approaches based on SERVQUAL. However, in-depth studies that integrate managerial strategies, organizational culture, and empirical analysis in boutique hotels are still limited. Therefore, this study is important to provide a comprehensive understanding of how service excellence-based quality management strategies are implemented in practice and how they impact guest satisfaction and loyalty.

The main problem studied is how quality management strategies are systematically implemented to produce consistent service excellence. This study also assesses their impact on guest satisfaction and loyalty. The objectives of this study are to identify the implemented quality management strategies, analyze the implementation of service excellence at each service point, and measure their impact on guest satisfaction and loyalty. Practically, this research is relevant for hotel managers who want to strengthen competitiveness through service quality. Academically, this research enriches the literature on the integration of quality management and service excellence in the context of creative hotels in cultural tourism destinations. The focus on ARTOTEL Yogyakarta provides a specific and current contextual contribution. Considering the intensity of competition, increasing guest expectations, and digital reputation pressures, a service excellence-based quality management strategy is no longer an option. It has become a strategic necessity. Hotels that are able to systematically manage quality, involve employees, and respond quickly to feedback will have a stronger competitive position in the long term.

Although previous studies have widely examined service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry, most studies rely on quantitative approaches such as SERVQUAL. There is still limited research that explores how quality management strategies are implemented in practice, particularly in boutique hotels with creative concepts. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of service excellence-based quality management strategies at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the service excellence-based quality management strategy at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta. The research was conducted for three months at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta. The research targets the quality management system and service practices, with research subjects including managers, department heads, supervisors, and operational staff selected purposively. The research procedure includes a preliminary study, field data collection, analysis, and verification of findings. The main instrument is the researcher himself with a semi-structured interview guide and observation sheet. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed thematically through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identifying Implemented Quality Management Strategies

ARTOTEL Yogyakarta's quality management strategy is built through an integrative approach that combines formal systems, organizational culture, and adaptation to digital

dynamics. (Yosep & Septemuryantoro, 2023) In service industries such as hospitality, quality is inextricably linked to human interaction and customer perception. Therefore, quality management must be designed as a comprehensive system that connects work procedures, employee behavior, and guest experience. Conceptually, modern quality management emphasizes customer orientation, employee involvement, and continuous improvement as the main foundations. (Goetsch & Davis, 2016) These principles serve as the basic framework for designing the hotel's quality strategy. In the Indonesian context, the quality management approach to the hotel industry also emphasizes the importance of aligning operational standards with local service culture. (Tjiptono, 2019) explains that service quality in a service context is determined not only by technical standards, but also by the cultural values and character of the interactions established by the organization. Hotels with creative concepts like ARTOTEL Yogyakarta face a dual challenge. On the one hand, hotels must maintain procedural consistency. On the other hand, hotels must maintain flexibility to stay true to their artistic identity, which is their primary attraction.

Field findings indicate that the hotel's quality strategy rests on three main, integrated pillars: process standardization, strengthening a service culture through training, and utilizing digital feedback as a quality control mechanism. These three pillars do not stand alone, but form a single, adaptive quality system that responds to operational dynamics and guest expectations. Process standardization is a key foundation because service quality in the hospitality industry relies heavily on consistency. Without a clear system, quality is easily influenced by individual factors, workload, and situational conditions. Therefore, management designed and implemented Standard Operating Procedures across all departments as a binding and measurable framework.

The implemented SOPs cover all key service points, from reservation procedures and check-in and check-out, to handling guest complaints, room cleanliness standards, restaurant service, and staff communication and guest interactions. At the reservation stage, SOPs ensure accurate pricing information, room availability, and booking confirmation. At the arrival stage, SOPs regulate the check-in process to ensure efficiency, friendliness, and minimize administrative errors. In room operations, SOPs regulate cleanliness standards, housekeeping turnaround times, and facility checks before rooms are handed over to guests. In restaurant services, SOPs establish serving standards, service times, and complaint handling procedures. Even in communication, guidelines are in place regarding language, body language, and how to greet guests to maintain a consistent experience.

SOPs function not only as technical guidelines but also as quality control tools. Written standards enable management to evaluate performance based on clear indicators. Deviations can be promptly identified and corrected. From a Total Quality Management perspective, quality does not arise by chance, but rather results from a systematically designed and consistently implemented system. (Oakland, 2014) asserts that uncontrolled variation in processes will degrade service quality and create uncertainty for customers. Therefore, controlling variation through standardization is a strategic step in maintaining quality stability.

However, standardization at this hotel is not rigidly enforced. Management still allows for a certain amount of flexibility to ensure interactions remain personal and non-mechanical. This approach is crucial because the hospitality industry demands a balance between structure and the human touch. Thus, process standardization serves as a foundational framework that maintains consistency, while a culture of service and responsiveness to digital feedback enrich the dynamic implementation of quality. The integration of these three pillars forms a quality management system that is not only controlled but also adaptive to changing guest needs and the competitive environment (Septemuryantoro, 2025). At ARTOTEL Yogyakarta, SOPs are not positioned as merely administrative documents. Management conducts regular outreach to ensure that every staff member understands the purpose behind each procedure. This approach

is crucial because service quality in the service industry depends heavily on individual awareness of standards. According to (Nasution, 2015) Service quality management must prioritize understanding service value, not just procedural compliance. Standardization also serves to maintain a consistent guest experience amid fluctuating occupancy. During peak seasons, operational pressures increase. Without a clear system, quality can easily decline. SOPs help mitigate the risk of inconsistency. However, hotels still allow for a certain amount of improvisation to ensure interactions remain personal and relaxed. This balance between structure and flexibility is a hallmark of a hotel quality strategy.

Strengthening Service Culture through Training is the second pillar, namely strengthening service culture through service excellence training. Training is conducted periodically and covers interpersonal communication, complaint handling, service personalization, and an understanding of art-based hotel concepts. Employees are taught not only how to serve, but also why that service is important to the guest experience. This approach aligns with the service profit chain concept, which states that external service quality is influenced by the internal quality of the organization. (Heskett et al., 1994) If employees feel valued and well-trained, they are better able to provide superior service. In the Indonesian context, (Lupiyoadi, 2018) emphasizes that the quality of hotel services is largely determined by the competence and attitude of employees because the main product of a hotel is experience.

The training also aims to build collective awareness of the hotel's identity. As an arts-based hotel, every staff member needs to understand the creative narrative they want to convey to guests. This is crucial for service interactions to align with the brand concept. If staff don't understand the hotel's identity, the guest experience will be fragmented. In addition to formal training, the hotel implements informal coaching through daily supervision. Supervisors provide direct feedback on service interactions. This process fosters continuous learning. (Argote, 2013) explains that organizational learning occurs when individual experiences are transformed into collective knowledge. In practice, morning briefings become a forum for reflection and improvement.

The third pillar is utilizing online reviews as a quality control tool. Each guest comment is systematically analyzed. Management monitors ratings, review content, and complaint patterns. Reviews are responded to promptly and professionally. This strategy demonstrates that quality management extends beyond internal processes to digital reputation management. (Xiang et al., 2017) found that online reviews have a significant influence on hotel booking decisions. In the Indonesian context, research by (Pratiwi & Rohman, 2021) This indicates that digital ratings have a positive effect on domestic tourists' revisit intentions. This means that online reputation is an integral part of a quality strategy.

At ARTOTEL Yogyakarta, every digital complaint is classified based on the type of issue. If a complaint recurs, management immediately conducts an evaluation. This approach reflects a continuous improvement cycle. In quality management literature, the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle is a fundamental mechanism for systematic quality improvement. (Goetsch & Davis, 2016). In addition to the three main pillars, the hotel implements daily briefings as a forum for coordination and reflection. Briefings serve to convey operational information, evaluate the previous day's service, and remind people of quality standards. This practice strengthens both vertical and horizontal communication. According to (Argote, 2013) Organizations that learn from experience are more adaptable to environmental changes. Daily briefings enable rapid learning. If a guest complains, staff can immediately address it and prevent repeat errors.

In the context of Indonesian work culture, face-to-face communication plays an important role in building team solidarity. (Sutrisno, 2019) Therefore, briefings are not only technical forums, but also spaces to build motivation and collective spirit. Overall, ARTOTEL Yogyakarta's quality management strategy is integrative. It combines formal systems, ongoing training, internal communications, and digital reputation management. This strategy aims not

only to maintain service standards but also to build a consistent experience that aligns with the hotel's identity, which is based on art and creativity.

This approach is relevant to the concept of strategic quality management which places quality as part of the organization's strategy, not just an operational function. (Oakland, 2014) In practice, quality management serves as a tool for maintaining hotel differentiation amidst Yogyakarta's intense competition. From an academic perspective, these findings suggest that boutique hotels require an adaptive approach to quality. Standards must be clear, but interactions must remain flexible. Systems must be robust, but a culture of service must be vibrant. This integration allows hotels to maintain a consistent experience while retaining their unique character.

Analyzing the Implementation of Service Excellence at Each Service Point

The implementation of service excellence at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta needs to be understood as a comprehensive process that follows the guest journey from pre-arrival to post-departure. In the hotel industry, experiences don't occur in a single moment, but rather are formed through the accumulation of small, interconnected interactions. Therefore, analyzing service excellence implementation requires a systematic approach to each touchpoint using the SERVQUAL framework, which encompasses tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. (Parasuraman et al., 1988) These five dimensions do not stand alone, but rather work simultaneously to form a comprehensive perception of quality.

In the pre-arrival phase, the interaction begins when guests search for information and make a reservation. At this stage, reliability is the primary foundation. The accuracy of information regarding prices, room types, amenities, promotions, and cancellation policies significantly determines the perception of a hotel's professionalism. When the reservation system provides fast confirmation and clear details, guests feel confident that the hotel has a well-organized system. Reliability at this stage also concerns the synchronization between the online platform and the hotel's internal systems. Mismatched room availability or incorrect rates can trigger distrust even before guests arrive. In the context of intangible services, initial trust is crucial because customers cannot physically evaluate the product before consumption. (Zeithaml et al., 2018) Responsiveness at this stage is evident in the speed with which staff respond to inquiries via email, instant message, or phone. A quick response time signals that the hotel values potential guests and is ready to assist with their specific needs. A smooth initial interaction creates positive expectations for the next stage.

When guests arrive at a hotel, the experience shifts from digital interactions to physical and interpersonal ones. During the arrival phase, tangible and responsive dimensions play a dominant role. Tangibles include architectural design, lobby layout, lighting, floor and reception desk cleanliness, room aroma, and the neatness of staff uniforms. As an art-based hotel, ARTOTEL Yogyakarta relies on visual elements to establish differentiation. The artworks displayed are not merely decorations, but part of the narrative of the experience. These tangible elements form a strong initial impression. Research in service marketing shows that physical evidence serves as a proxy for quality for intangible services. (Zeithaml et al., 2018). If the physical environment is clean and aesthetically pleasing, guests tend to assume that the hotel's internal processes are also well-managed.

Responsiveness at the arrival stage is reflected in the speed of the check-in process and the staff's ability to accommodate special requests, such as early check-in or specific room requests. An efficient process reduces wait times and increases comfort. Furthermore, assurance begins to emerge through the clear and confident communication of staff. When a receptionist explains hotel amenities, restaurant hours, or security procedures calmly and professionally, guests feel safe and confident in the organization's competence. This first impression is crucial because the halo effect can influence perceptions in subsequent stages of the experience.

Entering the stay phase, interactions become more intense and repetitive. At this stage, empathy and assurance become the most crucial dimensions. Empathy manifests itself in personal attention, the ability to recognize individual needs, and a willingness to listen attentively to complaints. Staff who remember repeat guests' preferences, such as their choice of pillow type or a particular beverage, create a personalized experience. This dimension is especially important in boutique hotels, which prioritize unique and intimate experiences. Research (Liat et al., 2014) Research shows that empathy significantly influences satisfaction and loyalty by building an emotional connection between customers and service providers. Assurance during the stay is evident in the staff's ability to handle issues quickly and competently. If a room experiences technical issues or a complaint about cleanliness, a professional response and clear solutions will restore guest trust. In such situations, trust can be maintained even after a mistake occurs, as long as the process is handled appropriately. Reliability remains the foundation through consistent room cleanliness, timely housekeeping, and accurate provision of additional amenities. Responsiveness is tested when additional requests come in simultaneously, especially during high occupancy rates. Coordination between departments is a crucial factor in ensuring quality does not decline.

In hotel restaurants, the implementation of service excellence demonstrates the integration of reliability, responsiveness, and tangibles. Accuracy of orders, consistency of taste, and serving time demonstrate reliability. When food is served as ordered and within a reasonable timeframe, the perception of quality increases. Responsiveness is evident when staff quickly respond to additional requests or changes to orders. Tangibles are present through table cleanliness, the aesthetics of food presentation, and the ambiance of the room. Empathy emerges when staff provide menu recommendations based on guest preferences or consider specific dietary needs. Interactions in restaurants have a significant impact because they involve a powerful sensory experience.

The checkout stage concludes the experience. Reliability and responsiveness are once again the primary focus. The payment process must be accurate and transparent. Administrative errors at this final stage can undermine the overall positive experience. Responsiveness is reflected in the speed of transaction completion and the staff's readiness to assist with the guest's final needs. Empathy is manifested in personal thanks and attention to the guest's final impressions. The peak-end rule concept explains that consumers tend to remember the peak and final moments of an experience more strongly than other moments. (Kahneman, 2011) Therefore, quality at this stage has strategic value in shaping the intention to provide a positive review or return stay. An integrative analysis shows that the five dimensions of SERVQUAL are interrelated. Tangibles build a visual impression and strengthen a professional image. Reliability maintains process consistency and builds trust. Responsiveness ensures needs are met quickly. Assurance creates a sense of security and confidence in staff competence. Empathy forms a deep emotional bond. Among the five dimensions, empathy has the strongest influence on guests' emotional experiences, especially in the context of boutique hotels that emphasize interpersonal closeness.

However, implementing service excellence is not without challenges. High occupancy rates can increase work pressure and slow down response times. Employee turnover can also impact the consistency of empathy and assurance. Therefore, ongoing training and internal communication systems are crucial. Daily briefings and regular evaluations help maintain collective awareness of quality standards. The use of digital feedback also supports the continuous improvement process. Overall, the implementation of service excellence at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta demonstrates a consistent, systemic approach. Every service point is designed to support the overall guest experience. Quality is measured not only by the absence of complaints but by the hotel's ability to create meaningful and personalized experiences. The integration of formal systems and a personalized service culture allows the hotel to maintain

quality standards while maintaining its creative character. In a highly competitive environment, consistent implementation at every stage of the guest journey is key to building satisfaction, loyalty, and a long-term reputation.

Measuring the Impact on Guest Satisfaction and Loyalty

Guest satisfaction is the most concrete indicator in assessing the success of the quality management strategy at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta because satisfaction represents the end result of the entire process of planning, controlling, and evaluating quality carried out by management. In the service industry, products are intangible, cannot be stored, and cannot be tested before consumption, so quality can only be assessed after guests experience the service directly. Therefore, satisfaction is not just a momentary perception, but a reflection of the effectiveness of the quality management system as a whole. (Tjiptono, 2019) explains that in service marketing, satisfaction is the primary outcome of the interaction between customer expectations and actual service performance. If a quality system is consistently designed and implemented with discipline, the guest experience will be relatively stable and result in repeated positive evaluations.

Based on internal surveys and digital review analysis, guest satisfaction is high. The majority of guests gave positive reviews of the staff's friendliness, room cleanliness, bed comfort, breakfast quality, and the hotel's unique artistic concept, which differs from conventional hotels. The hospitality aspect emerged as a dominant factor in guest comments, both in closed surveys and open online reviews. This indicates that the human interaction dimension plays a greater role than mere physical elements. (Lupiyoadi, 2018) emphasizes that in the hospitality industry, employee-customer interaction is at the heart of value creation, as hotel services rely heavily on the quality of communication and service delivery. While art-based hotel concepts are visually appealing, the emotional experience created through friendly, attentive, and personalized service is a stronger differentiator.

Theoretically, satisfaction can be explained through the theory of expectation disconfirmation. (Oliver, 2014) states that satisfaction arises when perceived performance exceeds initial consumer expectations. If performance falls below expectations, negative disconfirmation occurs, resulting in dissatisfaction. If performance meets or exceeds expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs, resulting in satisfaction or even delight. In the context of ARTOTEL Yogyakarta, guest expectations are relatively high due to the hotel's positioning as a creative and premium hotel. Guests come with expectations for quality design, comfort, and distinctive personalized service. Successfully achieving high levels of satisfaction demonstrates that the implementation of service excellence is able to meet or even exceed these expectations. (Nasution, 2015) explains that service quality management must be able to manage customer expectations through realistic communication and consistent performance, so that the gap between expectations and performance can be minimized.

Further analysis showed that the reliability and empathy dimensions had the strongest correlation with satisfaction. Reliability reflects the consistency of service from the reservation stage to check-out. Guests are satisfied when the reservation process runs smoothly, the room is available as requested, the facilities are functioning properly, and additional requests are handled without error. This consistency builds a sense of security and reduces uncertainty. In services, uncertainty is a major source of consumer anxiety because customers cannot control the service production process. (Zeithaml et al., 2018) When hotels demonstrate consistent and predictable performance, satisfaction levels increase significantly. Empathy, on the other hand, provides a deeper emotional connection. Personalized service, such as remembering a repeat guest's preferences, offering birthday greetings, or responding to complaints with an empathetic approach, creates a more personal and meaningful experience. (Tjiptono & Chandra, 2016)

emphasizes that the empathy dimension in service strengthens the perception of value because customers feel valued as individuals, not just as objects of transactions.

In addition to the survey, digital review analysis reinforced these findings. Keywords such as friendly staff, helpful team, clean room, cozy bed, and artistic atmosphere appeared repeatedly across various online booking platforms. The predominance of positive sentiment indicates that guest experiences were not only personally satisfying but also powerful enough to be shared publicly. In the digital age, online reviews have become a social proxy for individual satisfaction. According to research by (Pratiwi & Rohman, 2021) Positive reviews significantly influence potential guests' decisions when choosing a hotel, so satisfaction impacts not only the guest in question but also other potential customers. When guests voluntarily leave positive reviews, it reflects a high level of satisfaction and a memorable experience.

Consistent satisfaction is the foundation for loyalty. Loyalty in the hotel context is measured through repeat guest intentions and willingness to recommend the hotel to others. Internal data shows an increase in the percentage of repeat guests over the past year, as well as high scores on questions related to willingness to recommend. These indicators demonstrate that satisfaction doesn't stop at a short-term evaluation but develops into a long-term commitment. (Kotler & Keller, 2016) Relationship marketing theory explains that loyalty forms when customers perceive consistent value and a lasting relationship with a service provider. Loyalty results not only from functional satisfaction but also from emotional closeness and trust.

In this hotel context, personalized service plays a crucial role in building these relationships. When staff recognize repeat guests and greet them by name, or when room preferences are prepared without prompting, it creates a sense of closeness that competitors find difficult to replicate. (Lupiyoadi, 2018) stated that in the hospitality business, warm interpersonal relationships increase psychological switching costs, namely emotional barriers that make customers reluctant to switch to competitors. Loyalty formed through personal relationships tends to be more resistant to price fluctuations or competitor promotions. Loyalty also has two main dimensions: behavior and attitude. The behavioral dimension is reflected in the frequency of repeat visits and the length of the relationship with the hotel. The attitudinal dimension is reflected in commitment, brand preference, and willingness to provide recommendations. In the case of ARTOTEL Yogyakarta, many guests return not only because of the location or price, but because of the overall experience they had previously. This shows that the loyalty formed is affective, not merely rational. (Tjiptono, 2019) emphasizes that affective loyalty is more stable because it is driven by positive feelings and emotional attachment.

However, loyalty isn't a permanent condition. The hotel industry is highly competitive, with numerous accommodation options offering similar prices and amenities. If service quality declines or becomes inconsistent, guests can easily switch. Therefore, quality management must be viewed as a dynamic and ongoing process. Regular evaluation of service standards, regular training, and analysis of digital reviews are essential to maintain consistency. (Nasution, 2015) emphasizes that continuous improvement is a key principle in integrated quality management because customer needs and expectations are constantly evolving. Changing preferences across traveler generations also influence loyalty patterns. Younger travelers tend to seek new and unique experiences and are more active in sharing them through social media. Their loyalty is more flexible and not always based on habits. Therefore, hotels need to continuously innovate without compromising quality standards. Innovation can take the form of new art collaboration programs, creative events, or trend-relevant thematic experiences. However, innovation must remain within a consistent quality framework to avoid sacrificing reliability and assurance.

Satisfaction and loyalty also directly impact a hotel's financial performance. Loyal guests have lower acquisition costs than new guests because they don't require intensive promotion. They are also more likely to make additional purchases, such as food, beverages, or other

additional services. Furthermore, word-of-mouth recommendations serve as credible free advertising. (Kotler & Keller, 2016) Studies show that loyal customers contribute to long-term profitability through repeat purchases and advocacy. In the hotel context, a stable loyal customer base helps maintain occupancy rates and more stable cash flow. From a managerial perspective, these findings confirm that investments in quality management yield tangible results. Standardizing processes ensures reliability. Service excellence training strengthens empathy and assurance. Managing digital reviews maintains reputation and extends the social impact of satisfaction. All three work together to create a consistently positive experience. This consistency is key to building long-term loyalty.

The analysis also shows that emotional experiences have a greater influence on loyalty than physical amenities. While a hotel's artistic concept provides the initial attraction and visual differentiation, staff friendliness, personal attention, and warm interactions are the deciding factors in repeat visits. This reinforces the view that the hospitality industry is fundamentally a people business. Human interaction is central to value creation and the formation of long-term relationships. Overall, the impact of a service excellence-based quality management strategy on guest satisfaction and loyalty has been proven significant. Consistent service quality creates a strong and meaningful positive experience. This experience builds trust, strengthens emotional connections, and fosters long-term commitment. However, this success must be maintained through continuous evaluation, targeted innovation, and adaptation to changing market preferences. Without strategic renewal and a commitment to quality, loyalty can weaken. By maintaining the integration of a strong quality system and a warm service culture, hotels can maintain their competitive position in an increasingly dynamic industry that demands consistently high quality.

Conclusion

Based on the research results presented in this article, it can be concluded that the service excellence-based quality management strategy at ARTOTEL Yogyakarta has been proven to be systematic and integrative. The quality strategy rests on three main pillars: process standardization through structured SOPs, strengthening service culture through ongoing training, and utilizing digital feedback as a quality control and evaluation mechanism. These three pillars form an adaptive quality system capable of maintaining service consistency amidst the dynamics of hotel operations. The implementation of service excellence at every service point, from reservation to check-out, demonstrates that the dimensions of reliability and empathy play a dominant role in shaping the guest experience. Consistency of service builds a sense of security and trust, while personalization and warmth of interactions strengthen emotional attachment. The impact is reflected in high levels of guest satisfaction and increased loyalty in the form of repeat visits and positive recommendations. Overall, consistent service quality and an orientation toward emotional experiences are key factors in maintaining the competitiveness of boutique hotels amidst increasingly fierce and digitalized industry competition.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the integration of SOP standardization, service culture, and digital feedback plays a crucial role in maintaining service excellence in boutique hotels. The findings contribute to the literature by providing an empirical understanding of how quality management strategies are implemented in practice. From a managerial perspective, hotel managers should focus not only on a procedural standardization, but also on strengthening service culture and actively managing digital feedback. However, this study is limited to a single case study. Therefore, future research is encouraged to explore comparative studies across different types of hotels or tourism destinations.

REFERENCES

- Argote, L. (2013). *Organizational Learning: Creating, Retaining and Transferring Knowledge*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5251-5>
- Goetsch, L. D., & Davis, S. B. (2016). *Quality Management for Organizational Excellence Introduction to Total Quality*.
- Heskett, J. L., Jones, T. O., Loveman, G. W., Sasser, W. E., & Schlesinger, L. A. (1994). Putting the Service Profit Chain to Work. *Harvard Business Review*, 72(2), 164–174.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing Management* (15th ed.). Pearson.
- Liat, C. B., Mansori, S., & Huei, C. T. (2014). The Associations Between Service Quality, Corporate Image, Customer Satisfaction, and Loyalty. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 23(3), 314–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2013.796867>
- Lupiyoadi, R. (2018). *Manajemen Pemasaran Jasa* (3rd ed.). Salemba Empat.
- Nasution, M. N. (2015). *Manajemen Mutu Terpadu (Total Quality Management)* (3rd ed.). Ghalia Indonesia.
- Oakland, J. S. (2014). *Total Quality Management and Operational Excellence* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315815637>
- Oliver, R. L. (2014). *Satisfaction: A Behavioral Perspective on the Consumer* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315700896>
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 64(1), 12–40.
- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (2011). *The Experience Economy*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Pratiwi, N., & Rohman, F. (2021). Pengaruh Online Review terhadap Keputusan Menginap Wisatawan Domestik. *Jurnal Manajemen Perhotelan Indonesia*, 5(2), 87–98.
- Septemuryantoro, S. A. (2025). The Implementation of Total Quality Management Principles through Employee Involvement at Syariah Hotel Solo. *Media Wisata*, 23(2).
- Shin, H., & Kang, J. (2020). Reducing Perceived Health Risk to Attract Hotel Customers in the COVID-19 Pandemic Era. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 91, 102664. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102664>
- Sutrisno, E. (2019). *Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia*. Kencana.
- Tjiptono, F. (2019). *Strategi Pemasaran Jasa*. Andi.
- Tjiptono, F., & Chandra, G. (2016). *Service, Quality & Satisfaction* (4th ed.). Andi.
- Xiang, Z., Du, Q., Ma, Y., & Fan, W. (2017). A Comparative Analysis of Major Online Review Platforms. *Tourism Management*, 58, 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.10.001>
- Yosep, H., & Septemuryantoro, S. A. (2023). UPAYA KOMUNIKASI UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KUALITAS PELAYANAN DI FRONT OFFICE DEPARTMENT ALL STAY HOTEL SEMARANG. 8, 186–195.
- Zeithaml, V. A., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. D. (2018). *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus Across the Firm* (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Modeling Tourists' Intention to Visit Safer Destinations: An Extended Theory of Planned Behavior Approach

Anggraeni Woro Hapsari^{1*} Worry Mambusy Manoby^{2*}

¹ Universitas Bina Nusantara

² Research Center for Domestic Government, BRIN, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: anggraeni.hapsari@binus.edu; worr001@brin.go.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Submitted:
22 March 2024

Revised:
11 April 2024

Accepted:
28 May 2024

Keywords
TPB, health protocols,
safer destination.

ABSTRACT

Background: Recent developments in tourism behavior highlight the growing importance of safety considerations in destination choice. Travelers increasingly evaluate destinations not only based on attractiveness but also on perceived risk and their ability to manage uncertain conditions. In this context, understanding the determinants of travel intention becomes essential.

Objectives: This study aims to examine tourists' intention to visit safer destinations by extending the Theory of Planned Behavior with perceived knowledge of health protocols as an additional predictor.

Method: A quantitative approach was employed using survey data collected from 200 Indonesian respondents who intended to travel domestically. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess both measurement and structural models.

Result: The findings show that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control significantly influence travel intention, with attitude emerging as the strongest predictor. Perceived knowledge does not directly affect intention but significantly influences attitude and subjective norm, indicating its indirect role in shaping decision-making.

Conclusion: The study demonstrates that travel intention in safety-sensitive contexts is driven by evaluative, control-related, and knowledge-based factors. Extending the TPB framework with knowledge provides a more comprehensive understanding of tourist behavior, offering practical insights for promoting safer destinations.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in tourism behavior highlight the increasing importance of safety considerations in shaping destination choice. Travel decisions are no longer driven solely by traditional motivations such as leisure, novelty, or escape, but are increasingly influenced by how individuals evaluate potential risks and their ability to manage uncertain conditions. This shift reflects a broader transformation in consumer behavior, where perceptions of safety, control, and access to reliable information play a central role in decision-making processes (Zenker & Kock, 2020; Kock et al., 2020; Neuburger & Egger, 2021). As tourism environments become more complex and uncertainty becomes more salient, understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying travel intention has become a critical issue in tourism research.

In this context, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) remains one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks for explaining behavioral intention. According to Ajzen (1991), intention is determined by three key constructs: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude reflects an individual's overall evaluation of a behavior, subjective norm captures perceived social pressure, and perceived behavioral control represents the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. The TPB has been extensively validated across various domains, including tourism, where it consistently demonstrates strong predictive power in explaining travel intention and destination choice (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Hsu & Huang, 2012; Han et al., 2020).

Among the TPB constructs, attitude is often identified as the most influential predictor of behavioral intention. In tourism contexts, individuals form intentions based on their evaluation of expected outcomes, including perceived benefits, risks, and overall experience (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Han et al., 2020). When destinations are perceived as safe and manageable, individuals are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward visiting them. This evaluative process becomes particularly important in environments characterized by uncertainty, where individuals must balance desire for travel with concerns about safety. Empirical evidence consistently shows that positive attitudes significantly increase the likelihood of travel intention, suggesting that attitude functions as a central mechanism through which individuals translate perception into action. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Attitude positively influences tourists' intention to visit safer destinations.

In addition to attitude, subjective norm represents the influence of social expectations on behavioral intention. Travel decisions are often embedded within social contexts, where individuals consider the opinions, behaviors, and expectations of significant others, such as family members, peers, and social groups (Lam & Hsu, 2006). Although subjective norm has been found to influence intention, its effect is often less dominant compared to attitude (Han et al., 2020). In safety-related contexts, social influence may operate through shared perceptions of responsibility and collective awareness of acceptable behavior. Normative expectations may encourage individuals to adopt behaviors that are perceived as socially responsible, including choosing safer destinations. This perspective is supported by the focus theory of normative conduct, which suggests that individuals' behavior is shaped by perceived social norms (Cialdini et al., 1990). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Subjective norm positively influences tourists' intention to visit safer destinations.

Perceived behavioral control represents another important determinant of intention, reflecting individuals' perception of their ability to perform a behavior. In tourism contexts, this includes access to financial resources, transportation, information, and the ability to comply with travel-related requirements. Previous research indicates that perceived behavioral control becomes particularly salient in situations involving uncertainty, constraints, or perceived risk (Ajzen, 1991; Yuzhanin & Fisher, 2016). When individuals perceive that they have sufficient control over these factors, they are more likely to form travel intentions. Conversely, perceived barriers may reduce intention even when attitudes are favorable. This highlights the importance of perceived feasibility in shaping behavior. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Perceived behavioral control positively influences tourists' intention to visit safer destinations.

While the TPB provides a robust theoretical foundation, recent studies suggest that additional variables are needed to capture context-specific dynamics in tourism behavior (Han et al., 2020; Bae & Chang, 2021). One such variable is perceived knowledge, which refers to individuals' understanding of relevant information that informs their decision-making. In safety-sensitive tourism environments, knowledge plays a critical role in reducing uncertainty and shaping perception. Individuals rely on information to interpret risks, evaluate alternatives,

and assess whether a particular action is feasible and acceptable (Neuburger & Egger, 2021; Kock et al., 2020).

Previous research suggests that knowledge does not always directly influence behavior but instead shapes underlying cognitive and evaluative processes (Bae & Chang, 2021). Individuals who possess greater knowledge are more likely to develop positive attitudes, as knowledge enhances their confidence in managing potential risks. In tourism, knowledge of safety protocols can influence how travelers perceive destinations and evaluate their level of safety (Wen et al., 2020; Ivanova et al., 2021). This suggests that knowledge functions as a cognitive resource that supports the formation of favorable attitudes.

In addition to influencing attitude, knowledge may also shape subjective norm. When information about safety practices is widely disseminated and understood, individuals may perceive that engaging in safe travel behavior is socially expected or endorsed. This reflects the role of communication in shaping shared understanding and collective perception (Cialdini et al., 1990). As a result, knowledge contributes not only to individual evaluation but also to the perception of social expectations. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Perceived knowledge positively influences attitude toward visiting safer destinations.

H5: Perceived knowledge positively influences subjective norm toward visiting safer destinations.

Despite its importance, the role of knowledge remains underexplored in tourism studies applying the TPB framework. Most existing research focuses on risk perception, trust, or perceived safety, while the cognitive role of knowledge as a precursor to evaluation and social perception receives limited attention (Neuburger & Egger, 2021). This gap suggests the need to integrate knowledge into the TPB model to provide a more comprehensive understanding of travel intention.

This study addresses this gap by extending the TPB framework to include perceived knowledge of health protocols. By examining the relationships among attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and perceived knowledge, the study aims to provide a more nuanced explanation of tourists' intention to visit safer destinations. The focus on domestic tourism also offers insights into how travelers in emerging market contexts respond to safety considerations.

The study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it reinforces the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior in explaining travel behavior in safety-sensitive contexts. Second, it extends the model by highlighting the indirect role of knowledge in shaping attitude and subjective norm. Third, it provides empirical evidence that can inform tourism stakeholders in designing communication strategies that enhance positive perceptions, reduce uncertainty, and encourage travel intention. By integrating theoretical and practical perspectives, this study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding travel behavior in contemporary tourism environments.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the determinants of tourists' intention to visit safer destinations. The research model was developed based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), extended by incorporating perceived knowledge of health protocols as an additional construct. A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted, allowing data to be collected from respondents at a single point in time, which is appropriate for testing causal relationships in behavioral research (Hair et al., 2019).

Data were collected from 200 Indonesian respondents who had intentions to engage in domestic travel. A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure that participants were relevant to the research context, particularly individuals who were familiar with tourism activities and aware of safety-related considerations. Online distribution of the questionnaire was used to facilitate broader reach and efficient data collection. The sample size meets the recommended minimum requirements for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is suitable for exploratory and predictive research with relatively small to medium sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019).

The measurement instrument was developed based on established scales from previous studies and adapted to fit the tourism context. All constructs were measured using multiple items to ensure reliability and validity. Attitude was operationalized as the degree to which respondents evaluated visiting safer destinations as favorable or beneficial. Subjective norm captured perceived social influence from significant others, while perceived behavioral control reflected respondents' perceived ability to perform travel-related behavior. Perceived knowledge referred to respondents' understanding of health protocols and safety measures in tourism settings. Travel intention was measured as the likelihood of visiting safer destinations in the near future. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, which is commonly used in behavioral research to capture respondents' perceptions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the support of SmartPLS. PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for complex models and its ability to handle non-normal data distributions (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis followed a two-step approach, beginning with the evaluation of the measurement model and followed by the assessment of the structural model. The measurement model was assessed in terms of indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity, using criteria such as outer loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was also evaluated to ensure that each construct was distinct.

The structural model was then assessed by examining path coefficients, significance levels, and the coefficient of determination (R^2). A bootstrapping procedure with resampling was applied to test the significance of the hypothesized relationships (Hair et al., 2019). This approach allows for robust estimation of standard errors and provides statistical support for evaluating the proposed model. Through this analytical procedure, the study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the relationships among attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, perceived knowledge, and travel intention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate both the measurement model and the structural relationships among constructs. The assessment of the measurement model indicates that all indicators meet the required thresholds for reliability and validity. Indicator loadings exceed the recommended value of 0.70, demonstrating adequate indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Composite reliability values range from 0.89 to 0.92, indicating strong internal consistency across constructs. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeds 0.50, confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1. Measurement Model Evaluation

Construct	Items	Loadings Range	CR	AVE
Attitude	4	0.72–0.89	0.91	0.72
Subjective Norm	3	0.75–0.87	0.89	0.68
Perceived Behavioral Control	4	0.71–0.88	0.90	0.69
Perceived Knowledge	4	0.73–0.86	0.90	0.70
Travel Intention	3	0.78–0.91	0.92	0.79

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, indicating that each variable is empirically distinct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This confirms that the constructs capture different conceptual dimensions within the model.

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to examine the hypothesized relationships. The results indicate that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control significantly influence travel intention. Attitude shows the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), followed by perceived behavioral control ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and subjective norm ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$). Perceived knowledge significantly influences attitude ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$) and subjective norm ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$), but does not have a direct effect on travel intention. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for travel intention is 0.68, indicating that the model explains a substantial proportion of variance.

Table 2. Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Attitude \rightarrow Travel Intention	0.41	6.12	<0.001	Supported
H2	Subjective Norm \rightarrow Travel Intention	0.22	2.45	0.015	Supported
H3	PBC \rightarrow Travel Intention	0.29	3.87	<0.01	Supported
H4	Knowledge \rightarrow Attitude	0.47	7.03	<0.001	Supported
H5	Knowledge \rightarrow Subjective Norm	0.35	4.26	<0.01	Supported

The findings provide strong support for the Theory of Planned Behavior in explaining travel intention in safety-sensitive contexts. The dominance of attitude suggests that individuals rely heavily on evaluative judgments when forming behavioral intentions. This is consistent with previous tourism studies that identify attitude as the most influential predictor of intention, particularly when individuals must assess both benefits and potential risks associated with travel (Han et al., 2020; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Verma & Chandra, 2018). The results indicate that safer destinations are more likely to be selected when they are perceived positively in terms of safety, comfort, and overall travel experience.

The significant role of perceived behavioral control further emphasizes the importance of perceived capability in shaping intention. This finding aligns with earlier research suggesting that individuals are more likely to engage in travel behavior when they perceive it as feasible and manageable (Yuzhanin & Fisher, 2016; Meng & Cui, 2020). In contexts where travel involves additional considerations related to safety and procedures, perceived control becomes a critical factor. Individuals who feel confident in their ability to manage travel requirements are more likely to translate their evaluations into intention. This highlights the interaction between evaluation and feasibility in decision-making processes.

Subjective norm, although significant, shows a relatively weaker influence compared to attitude and perceived behavioral control. This pattern is consistent with prior studies in tourism, where social influence tends to play a secondary role (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020). In safety-related contexts, decision-making appears to be more

individually driven, with travelers relying more on personal judgment than on external pressure. However, the significance of subjective norm indicates that social influence still contributes to shaping perceptions of acceptable and responsible behavior, particularly when safety practices are widely communicated (Cialdini et al., 1990).

A key contribution of this study lies in the role of perceived knowledge. The results indicate that knowledge does not directly influence travel intention but significantly affects attitude and subjective norm. This finding supports the argument that knowledge functions as a cognitive antecedent rather than a direct determinant of behavior (Bae & Chang, 2021; Ru et al., 2021). Individuals who possess greater knowledge are better able to interpret safety-related information, which enhances their confidence and leads to more favorable evaluations.

The relationship between knowledge and attitude suggests that information plays a crucial role in reducing uncertainty. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that access to reliable information enhances individuals' ability to evaluate risks and make informed decisions (Neuburger & Egger, 2021; Wen et al., 2020). In tourism contexts, knowledge of safety measures contributes to the perception that travel is manageable and less risky, thereby strengthening positive attitudes.

In addition, the influence of knowledge on subjective norm highlights the role of information in shaping social perception. When individuals are aware of widely accepted safety practices, they are more likely to perceive that responsible travel behavior is socially endorsed (Guerin & Toland, 2020; Wan et al., 2017). This suggests that knowledge contributes to the formation of shared norms, reinforcing the idea that behavior is influenced not only by individual cognition but also by social context.

The absence of a direct relationship between knowledge and intention reflects the distinction between awareness and action. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that knowledge alone is insufficient to drive behavior unless it is translated into evaluative and normative frameworks (Ajzen, 1991; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2020). In other words, information must first influence how individuals perceive and evaluate a situation before it can affect their intention to act.

The relatively high explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.68$) indicates that the extended TPB framework provides a robust explanation of travel intention. This is consistent with prior research demonstrating the effectiveness of TPB in predicting tourism behavior (Han et al., 2020; Hsu & Huang, 2012). The inclusion of perceived knowledge enhances the model by capturing an additional dimension that is particularly relevant in contemporary tourism environments.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that tourism stakeholders should focus on strategies that enhance positive attitudes and perceived behavioral control while also improving public understanding of safety measures. Providing clear, consistent, and accessible information can help reduce uncertainty and strengthen travelers' confidence (Zenker & Kock, 2020; Kock et al., 2020). At the same time, simplifying procedures and ensuring ease of access can increase perceived control, thereby encouraging travel intention.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that travel intention in safety-sensitive contexts is shaped by a combination of evaluative, control-related, and knowledge-based factors. Attitude emerges as the most influential determinant, supported by perceived behavioral control and subjective norm. Perceived knowledge plays an indirect but significant role by shaping how individuals interpret safety and form perceptions. The integration of these factors provides a more comprehensive understanding of tourism behavior and highlights the importance of combining theoretical and practical perspectives in addressing contemporary challenges in tourism.

CONCLUSION

This study examines tourists' intention to visit safer destinations by extending the Theory of Planned Behavior with perceived knowledge of health protocols. The findings indicate that intention is primarily shaped by evaluative and control-related factors. Attitude emerges as the most influential determinant, suggesting that individuals rely heavily on their overall evaluation when deciding whether to travel. Perceived behavioral control also plays a significant role, indicating that perceived capability and feasibility are essential in translating intention into action. Subjective norm contributes to a lesser extent, reflecting the supporting role of social influence in shaping behavior.

In addition, the study highlights the indirect role of perceived knowledge. While knowledge does not directly influence intention, it significantly affects both attitude and subjective norm. This suggests that knowledge functions as a cognitive foundation that shapes how individuals interpret safety and evaluate travel-related decisions. The integration of knowledge into the TPB framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of how intention is formed in contexts where safety considerations are prominent.

From a theoretical perspective, the study reinforces the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior in explaining travel behavior while demonstrating the value of extending the model with context-specific variables. The findings contribute to the literature by showing that knowledge plays an indirect but meaningful role in shaping behavioral intention. This highlights the importance of considering both evaluative and cognitive dimensions in behavioral models, particularly in environments characterized by uncertainty and risk.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer several implications for tourism stakeholders. Efforts to promote safer destinations should prioritize strategies that enhance positive attitudes and strengthen perceived behavioral control. This can be achieved by communicating safety measures in a clear and accessible manner, reducing perceived barriers, and ensuring that travel procedures are manageable. Providing accurate and consistent information is also essential, as knowledge influences how individuals interpret safety and form perceptions. Rather than focusing solely on information dissemination, communication strategies should aim to build trust and confidence among potential travelers.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture changes in behavior over time. Travel intention may evolve as individuals gain more experience or as external conditions change. Future research could adopt longitudinal approaches to better understand these dynamics. Second, the study focuses on domestic tourists within a specific context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the sample to include international tourists or different cultural settings would provide a broader perspective. Third, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias. Future studies could incorporate behavioral data or mixed methods to enhance validity.

In addition, while the model explains a substantial portion of variance in travel intention, other factors may also influence decision-making. Variables such as trust, perceived risk, or emotional responses may further enrich the model and provide deeper insights. Future research is encouraged to explore these variables and examine their interaction with the constructs included in this study.

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding tourists' intention to visit safer destinations by integrating evaluative, control-related, and knowledge-based factors. The findings offer both theoretical and practical insights, contributing to the development of more adaptive and responsive approaches in tourism research and practice.

REFERENCES

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Bae, S. Y., & Chang, P. J. (2021). The effect of coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) risk perception on behavioral intention towards “untact” tourism. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(7), 1017–1035. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1798895>
- Chen, C. F., & Tsai, D. (2007). How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioral intentions? *Tourism Management*, 28(4), 1115–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2006.07.007>
- Cialdini, R. B., Kallgren, C. A., & Reno, R. R. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 24, 201–234. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60330-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60330-5)
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39–50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3151312>
- Guerin, R. J., & Toland, M. D. (2020). Behavioral influences on safety decision-making. *Journal of Safety Research*, 74, 101–109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsr.2020.06.003>
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2019). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Han, H., Al-Ansi, A., Chua, B. L., Tariq, B., Radic, A., & Park, S. H. (2020). Application of the theory of planned behavior to safer destination choices. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(18), 6485. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186485>
- Hsu, C. H. C., & Huang, S. (2012). An extension of the theory of planned behavior model. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 36(3), 390–417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348010390817>
- Ivanova, M., Ivanov, I., & Ivanov, S. (2021). Travel behaviour after the pandemic: The role of perceived risk. *Tourism Economics*, 27(7), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548166211009134>
- Kock, F., Nørfelt, A., Josiassen, A., Assaf, A. G., & Tsionas, M. (2020). Understanding the COVID-19 tourist psyche. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 85, 103053. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.103053>
- Lam, T., & Hsu, C. H. C. (2006). Predicting behavioral intention of choosing a travel destination. *Tourism Management*, 27(4), 589–599. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2005.02.003>
- Meng, B., & Cui, M. (2020). The role of co-creation experience in tourist behavior. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 34, 100631. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100631>
- Neuburger, L., & Egger, R. (2021). Travel risk perception and travel behavior. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 19, 100561. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100561>

- Ru, X., Qin, H., & Wang, S. (2021). Young people's behavior intentions toward environmental protection. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 164, 105206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.105206>
- Sánchez-Cañizares, S. M., Cabeza-Ramírez, L. J., Muñoz-Fernández, G., & Fuentes-García, F. J. (2020). Impact of perceived risk on travel intention. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(7), 970–984. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1798895>
- Ulker-Demirel, E., & Ciftci, G. (2020). The role of perceived risk in tourism behavior. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 36, 100758. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100758>
- Verma, V. K., & Chandra, B. (2018). Sustainability and tourists' behavioral intention. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 172, 1151–1161. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.10.047>
- Wan, C., Shen, G. Q., & Yu, A. (2017). The role of perceived knowledge in pro-environmental behavior. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 52, 25–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2017.04.002>
- Wen, J., Kozak, M., Yang, S., & Liu, F. (2020). COVID-19: Potential effects on tourism industry. *Tourism Management*, 81, 104164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104164>
- Yuzhanin, S., & Fisher, D. (2016). The efficacy of the theory of planned behavior. *Tourism Review*, 71(2), 135–147. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-11-2015-0055>
- Zenker, S., & Kock, F. (2020). The coronavirus pandemic and tourism research agenda. *Tourism Management*, 81, 104164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104164>



Spatial and Capital Contestation in Pindul Cave Tourism: Management Rights, Price Competition, and Local Politics

Nurul Hashilah¹, Yusuf Hermawan², Dyah Kemala Firdausi^{3*}

¹ Universitas Gadjah Mada

² Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika

³ Universitas Horizon Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: nurulhashilah@mail.ugm.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Submitted:

22 March 2024

Revised:

11 April 2024

Accepted:

28 May 2024

Keywords: governance, tourism sustainability, cruise tourism.

ABSTRACT

Background: Natural resource tourism often faces management conflicts due to competing interests, as seen in Pindul Cave tourism involving land rights, pricing, and government policies.

Objectives: This article aims to analyze the dynamics of conflict in the management of Pindul Cave tourism, particularly focusing on rights claims, competition practices, and governance policies.

Method The study uses a qualitative approach, with descriptive and analytical discussion framed by tourism governance and the political economy of tourism.

Result Conflicts in Pindul Cave tourism stem from overlapping authorities, unequal power relations, and market-driven practices rather than purely technical issues. Price competition and weak supervision worsen social tensions and risk environmental and reputational damage. Although Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2013 introduced BUMDes as a centralized management body, its implementation faces challenges due to local resistance and fiscal-oriented governance.

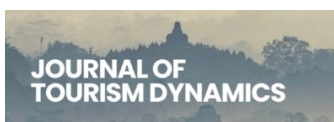
Conclusion: Resolving tourism conflicts requires improvements in participatory, transparent, and equitable governance. Such reforms are essential to ensure that tourism policies support social, economic, and environmental sustainability in tourist destinations..

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



INTRODUCTION

The dynamic development of a tourist destination is accompanied by conflicts and problems. Decision-making by policy makers is inseparable from various conflicts that can hinder the development of tourism in a region (Denkler, 2011). Social conflicts that occur, when viewed from the perspective of power relations, can be divided into three types. Conflicts can take the form of public protests against public policies established by the government, social conflicts between the community and business or private groups, and social conflicts between businesspeople and the government (Icomos, 2009; Lewis, et al.,



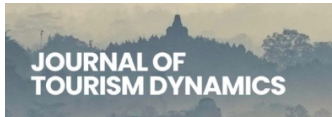
2003; in Eddyono, 2021:87,172). An example of an issue related to the struggle for power occurred in Pindul Cave, Gunung Kidul, Special Region of Yogyakarta. This power struggle became a non-physical social conflict that was highlighted by various media outlets and academics.

The Pindul Cave natural tourist attraction is located in Gelaran 1, Bejiharjo Village, Karangmojo District, Gunungkidul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region. The site's primary tourism potential lies in its ancient karst architecture, which visitors explore via subterranean river tubing, a practice popularly known as "cave tubing" (Borobudur Authority Agency, 2019). However, the site has been plagued by protracted issues since 2013, including land disputes, contestation over management fees, inter-community conflicts, service quality deficits, and environmental degradation (Widiastuti & Makhasi, 2019).

The roots of this conflict began with the emergence of community claims over the right to manage tourist attractions between local communities, the government, and the Tourism Awareness Group/Pokdarwis (Afala, 2017). The Pindul Cave tourist attraction became widely known, increasing tourist visits and quickly generating economic benefits for the community, but also causing ongoing conflict (Farid, et al., 2022). The problem persisted despite mediation efforts. The community of Bejiharjo Village, which has also experienced socio-cultural shifts, previously relied on agriculture as their main source of income but is now required to adapt to the world of tourism, is considered unprepared to manage and handle such issues (Ismail and Sariffuddin, 2016).

Beyond socio-economic, non-physical conflicts, Pindul Cave faces critical issues regarding environmental degradation and a lack of integrated tourism development planning. Ideally, the site should be developed as a special interest tourism destination that strictly adheres to carrying capacity limits. In reality, however, poor management has led to unchecked mass tourism. This problem has resulted in environmental degradation, which should be addressed through the implementation of appropriate regulations. This requires decisive, concrete, and measurable action, implemented consistently, to address environmental degradation (Damanik, 2017:60). The convergence of the community's limited capacity for sustainable management and weak oversight by the local government has exacerbated these problems. Specifically, the interplay of environmental neglect, inter-group conflict, and the struggle for power among stakeholders has triggered intense political and economic contestation within the site's management.

In response, the Gunungkidul Regency Government, as the holder of regional tourism management rights, has attempted to address these issues through regulatory intervention. The government enacted Gunungkidul Regency Regulation Number 5 of 2013 concerning Tourism Management to provide a legal framework for planning, marketing, and defining the rights and obligations of involved actors. Furthermore, the Regent issued Decree No. 316/KPTS/2013, appointing the Gunungkidul Regency Culture and Tourism Office as the official manager of Pindul Cave. These measures were intended to establish legal certainty and implement effective governance as a conflict management strategy (Farid et al., 2022).



Based on the overall problems that have arisen in the management of the Pindul Cave tourist attraction, this study focuses on non-physical conflicts in the political and economic spheres. Issues related to contestation in the pursuit of interests by each actor in the management of the Pindul Cave tourist attraction are examined from the perspective of policies made by the village government and the Gunungkidul regency government. This study aims to examine the issues of power struggles and political interests that have an impact on the community's economy and the extent to which the Gunungkidul Regency Government has made efforts to formulate policies to overcome these various issues. This study is expected to serve as input and consideration in reviewing tourism policies so that it can help overcome the political and economic conflicts of interest that occur.

METHODS

This study was conducted using qualitative descriptive methods. Data in the form of a general description of the Pindul Cave tourist attraction, news and articles related to the conflict, and policy documents in the form of Gunungkidul Regency Regulations on Tourism were collected through literature study. The data was then analyzed through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The author conducted the data reduction stage by sorting the data obtained from various literature on the conflicts that occurred at Pindul Cave and then analyzing the data using theories related to tourism political economy and policies published by the Gunungkidul Regency Government. The analyzed data was then presented descriptively in the form of a narrative so that conclusions could be drawn based on each conflict that occurred.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contestation over Management Rights and Land Claims

The problem that occurred at Pindul Cave began in 2013. A conflict arose between three tour operators, namely Dewa Bejo, Wira Wisata, and Panca Wisata, and a local landowner over the management of the Pindul Cave tourist attraction. The dispute involved Atiek Damayanti, the landowner, as evidenced by her official land certificate, and the Taruna Wisata group, which was involved in the debate. The main conflict involved the Taruna Wisata group's request to transport building materials and demolish the sarang seriti (a type of tree) at the top of the Pindul Cave land. This resulted in the closure of the entrance to Pindul Cave by the local community (Kompas.com, 2013).

From a regulatory perspective, the utilisation of natural resources, particularly underground rivers, requires formal authorisation from the Geological Agency, as stipulated in Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution, Law No. 7 of 2004, and Government Regulation No. 38 of 2011. These legal frameworks place the authority for resource utilisation under the jurisdiction of the Gunungkidul Regency Government. Subsequently, the Regent delegated this authority to the local Tourism Office in accordance with prevailing statutory provisions (Sudjarwono, cited in Farid et al., 2022).



Despite continuous mediation efforts conducted by the Tourism Office, the dispute persisted for nearly a decade, from 2013 to 2021. A further mediation attempt in 2021 involved the Regent of Gunungkidul, Sunaryanta, and a member of the Gunungkidul Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), Kuntariningsih (Kabarhandayani.com, 2021). The conflict was eventually resolved through a negotiated land sale agreement between the landowner and the tourism management actors (Suharjono, 2021).

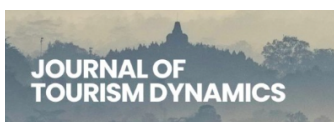
These developments demonstrate that prolonged conflicts and negative publicity can substantially damage the image of a tourism destination, potentially disrupting visitor flows and local economic activities. As argued by Damanik (2017), tourists' perceptions of safety and comfort are critical determinants of destination image and competitiveness. In response to these challenges, the Gunungkidul Regency Government adopted a political and regulatory approach by issuing Gunungkidul Regency Regulation No. 5 of 2013, which specifically addresses disputes over management rights and land claims at the Pindul Cave tourist site. This regulation reflects an institutional effort to mediate tensions between private property rights and state authority over natural resource governance, thereby promoting more sustainable and coordinated tourism management.

Price Competition as a Form of Rivalry among Tour Operators

Price competition has become a significant source of tension between community-based tourism groups (Pokdarwis) and private tour operators, particularly with regard to the pricing of tour packages. This phenomenon reflects irregular pricing practices that deviate from collectively agreed standards and have contributed to disputes among tourism stakeholders. Kurniawan (2019) explains that there are irresponsible tour operators who dare to sell cave tubing tour packages at prices lower than the agreed price between operators. The agreed rate is IDR 40,000, excluding the retribution fee charged to each tourist. However, unscrupulous tour operators cheat by selling the package for IDR 15,000, causing commotion among tour operators.

The Head of Bejiharjo Village responded to allegations of these pricing practices by rejecting claims of misconduct. According to Yanto in Kurniawan (2019), if there is a low selling price for Pindul Cave tour packages, it is intended to attract more tourists so that the community's economy becomes more prosperous. However, contrary to this statement, Yanto, as the village head, also did not approve of the sale of tour packages at low prices because too many tourists could damage the environment and disrupt market prices among tour operators. To maintain order and fairness, the Maju Mandiri Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes), which has been delegated authority by the regional government to manage the Pindul Cave tourism area, retains the right to terminate the operational contracts of operators found to violate agreed pricing policies.

From the demand side, tourists have also expressed dissatisfaction with inconsistent pricing practices. Itsnaini (2022) notes that visitors frequently encounter intermediaries or unauthorized ticket sellers offering Pindul Cave tour packages at prices higher than the official rates established by Pokdarwis and authorized operators. Moreover, limited access to reliable information regarding official service providers has created confusion among tourists, particularly due to the proliferation of unofficial online sources.



In response, Aldian (as cited in Itsnaini, 2022), Head of the Gunungkidul Regency Tourism and Culture Office, advised tourists to verify the legitimacy of operators, including by consulting official communication channels and social media accounts.

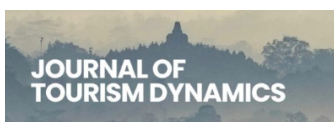
In facing these challenges, the Gunungkidul Regency Government introduced several regulatory measures aimed at mitigating price conflicts and improving governance in the tourism sector. These measures include Gunungkidul Regency Regulation No. 5 of 2013 concerning Tourism Implementation, Gunungkidul Regency Regulation No. 56 of 2014 amending Regency Regulation No. 3 of 2014 concerning technical guidelines for tourism management, and the establishment of the Maju Mandiri Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) Maju Mandiri in 2017, which officially collaborates with the Regency Tourism and Culture Office. Collectively, these initiatives reflect the local government's efforts to strengthen institutional oversight and implement a more centralized and coordinated tourism management system.

Tourism Policy as a Government Response in Gunungkidul Regency

The challenges associated with regional autonomy are reflected in the fragmented management of tourism destinations, where attractions are often administered independently by multiple actors without adequate coordination. This situation can generate overlapping authority, institutional inefficiencies, and competing interests among stakeholders. Damanik (2017) notes that discrepancies frequently arise between the central and regional governments regarding the distribution of authority and responsibility. Regional governments commonly face constraints related to infrastructure capacity and financial resources. In contrast, the central government tends to assume a coordinating role to ensure the overall functioning of tourism activities at both national and international levels.

Given this redistribution of responsibilities and the varying levels of institutional preparedness, local governments are expected to adopt a more proactive role in managing tourism destinations and addressing emerging issues. These responsibilities are intended to support national tourism development objectives, as stipulated in the Minister of Culture and Tourism Regulation No. PM 37 of 2007. In response to the range of governance challenges identified at Pindul Cave, the Gunungkidul Regency Government issued Gunungkidul Regency Regulation No. 5 of 2013 on Tourism Management as a legal framework to regulate and strengthen regional tourism development.

Article 8 of the Regional Regulation stipulates that marketing activities must be carried out collaboratively, in an integrated and sustainable manner, involving all stakeholders in organizing responsible tourism activities to build the image of the region as a competitive tourist destination. In response to this, all actors involved in the management of the Pindul Cave tourist attraction, including the community, investors, government, and tourism operators, need to work together effectively. Of course, marketing activities need to consider environmental carrying capacity in order to minimize the impact of environmental degradation and social conflict as an effort to create a good and competitive destination image. Marketing management needs to be carried out honestly and fairly, including in disseminating information related to tour package prices. This is



intended to prevent unhealthy competition between tour operators, which often lowers the selling price of Pindul Cave tour packages.

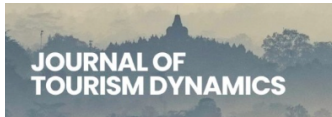
In addition, both village and regional governments play a critical role in supervising the collection and distribution of tourism levies in accordance with visitor numbers. Daily revenues from levies should be systematically recorded and monitored to ensure accountability and to facilitate accurate evaluation of Regional Original Revenue (Pendapatan Asli Daerah, PAD). Transparent practices in the collection, documentation, and reporting of levies are necessary to build trust among communities, tourism operators, and government institutions. This need for improved oversight is underscored by the Gunungkidul Regency Government's PAD target of IDR 27 billion in 2022, of which only IDR 14.42 billion had been realized by mid-August (Kemenparekraf.go.id, 2022). Consequently, enhanced monitoring and stricter enforcement of regulations, particularly those related to the financial management of Pokdarwis and tour operators, are necessary to improve revenue performance and strengthen governance transparency in the tourism sector.

Article 14 concerning the development of tourist attractions explains that village governments and communities must obtain authorisation from the regional government, in this case the Gunungkidul Regency Government. In accordance with Article 19, tourism management businesses run by village governments in the form of village-owned enterprises (BUMDes) and by individuals or business entities must register with the Gunungkidul Regency Government so that all tourism activities can be properly monitored. These enforcement efforts are carried out to prevent fraudulent practices in the payment of levies and the sale of tourism packages.

Issues related to rights and obligations are further addressed in Article 44, which grants priority rights to residents of the Pindul Cave area and surrounding communities. These rights include preferential access to employment opportunities, participation in consignment or sales partnerships through commission- or revenue-sharing arrangements, and involvement in management activities. Article 46 also outlines the rights of tourism entrepreneurs, including equal opportunities for business development, the right to establish and join tourism associations, and access to legal protection and government support in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Alongside these rights, stakeholders are required to fulfil a set of obligations as specified in Articles 48 and 50. These provisions broadly aim to promote social order, environmental conservation, and the implementation of responsible and sustainable tourism practices to maintain the destination's image and long-term viability. The Gunungkidul Regency Government likewise bears institutional responsibilities. As stated in Article 47, the government is tasked with fostering a conducive tourism climate through supervision, regulation, and control, as well as providing clear information and legal certainty to all stakeholders.

Taken together, the provisions contained in Gunungkidul Regency Regulation No. 5 of 2013 demonstrate the local government's effort to exercise its functions as both policymaker and regulator in addressing governance challenges within the tourism sector. The regulation provides a legal framework that can serve as a reference for resolving



emerging disputes. Nevertheless, further examination is warranted regarding the objectivity and inclusiveness of the policy formulation process, particularly the extent to which diverse stakeholders, such as local communities, tourism operators, government agencies, and academic experts, were involved in the deliberations leading to the regulation's adoption.

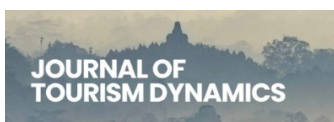
Subsequent efforts to refine conflict resolution mechanisms were introduced through Gunungkidul Regent Regulation No. 56 of 2014, which amended Regent Regulation No. 3 of 2014 on the technical implementation of tourism management. This amendment sought to reduce management disputes by recommending a simplified governance structure in which a single destination would be managed by one Pokdarwis, or each village would be represented by one Pokdarwis. Although the community formally agreed to this arrangement, its implementation proved challenging. In practice, multiple Pokdarwis members, many of whom also operate as tour service providers, continued to participate in the management of Pindul Cave, the area's primary revenue-generating attraction (Farid et al., 2022). This overlap in roles contributed to ongoing competition over economic benefits, thereby undermining principles of equity and coordinated governance.

The conflict surrounding the management of the Pindul Cave tourist attraction has also attracted the attention of the Bejiharjo Village Government, which sought to establish the Maju Mandiri Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes) in 2017 and officially collaborated with the Gunungkidul Regency Tourism and Culture Office. The Bejiharjo Village Government aims to manage tourist attractions in its area through a one-stop system in order to minimize various conflicts. This effort was formalized through the signing of a cooperation agreement between the two parties. The policy related to centralized management by BUMDes Maju Mandiri resulted in a retribution fee of IDR 5,000 per person being charged to tourists. However, this policy has elicited responses from the community, including tourism groups and tourism operators, who feel burdened by the retribution fee, believing it could reduce the income of tourism operators and that the government has an interest in achieving its Local Revenue (PAD) targets (Farid, et al., 2022; Afala, 2017; Kurniawan, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The conflict over the management of the Pindul Cave tourist attraction shows that local tourism does not develop in a neutral space but rather in an arena of competing interests over land, resources, and economic profits. Since 2013, overlapping private property rights, state authority over the use of natural resources, and the economic interests of the community and tourism operators have triggered prolonged conflict. Unhealthy price competition among operators, the practice of selling tour packages below agreement prices, and the presence of brokers indicate weak governance and oversight. This also confirms that market logic left unregulated has the potential to undermine economic justice, the environment, and the image of tourist destinations.

In response, the Gunungkidul Regency Government has developed a policy framework through Local Regulation No. 5 of 2013 and its derivative regulations, including the establishment of BUMDes as a centralized management effort. The establishment of



BUMDes Maju Mandiri as a one-stop centralized management effort represents the institutional strategy of the village and regional governments to reduce conflict and improve the accountability of destination management. However, this policy has also sparked new controversy regarding retribution burdens and perceptions of regional fiscal dominance, particularly in the context of achieving Regional Original Income (PAD) targets. This confirms that tourism policy is never neutral, but is always caught between economic interests, political legitimacy, and social and environmental sustainability. Therefore, resolving the conflict at Pindul Cave requires strengthening participatory, transparent tourism governance that applies the principle of fairness. This is intended so that policies not only reduce conflict but also ensure the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of the destination.

REFERENCES

- Afala, L.O.M. (2017). Menalar Dinamika Konflik Wisata Gua Pindul. *Journal of Governance* Vol. 2 No. 1.
- Badan Otorita Borobudur. (2019). Gua Pindul. Retrieved from <https://bob.kemenparekraf.go.id/goa-pindul/>
- Damanik, J. (2017). *Pariwisata Indonesia: Antara Peluang dan Tantangan*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar
- Denkler, Ann. (2011). The Colored Folks From The Most Interesting Spectacle in The South: Conceptualizing Race, Labor, and Travel in PostBellum America. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 3(2), 170-186.
- Eddyono, Fauziyah. (2021). *Pengelolaan Destinasi Pariwisata*. Ponorogo: Uwais Inspirasi Indonesia.
- Farid, A., et al. (2022). Strategi Governance Melalui Community Based Tourism Sebagai Upaya Penyelesaian Konflik Wisata di Gua Pindul. *Jurnal Politik dan Pemerintahan POLITICOS*, 2(2) 114-131. <https://doi.org/10.22225/politicos.2.2.2022.114-131>
- Ismail, Dasril. & Sariffuddin. (2016). Pengaruh Kegiatan Pariwisata Gua Pindul Terhadap Perubahan Mata Pencapaian di Desa Bejiharjo, Kabupaten Gunungkidul. Skripsi, Universitas Diponegoro.
- Itsaini, F.M. (2022). Hindari Praktik Calo di Gua Pindul, Pemandu Wisata Sarankan Hal Ini. Retrieved from <https://travel.kompas.com/read/2022/08/21/090900627/hindari-praktik-calo-di-Gua-pindul-pemandu-wisata-sarankan-hal-ini?page=all>
- Kabarhandayani.com. (2021). Konflik Gua Pindul yang Berkepanjangan Kembali Dirembug. Retrieved from <https://kabarhandayani.com/konflik-Gua-pindul-yang-berkepanjangan-kembali-dirembug/>
- Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif RI. (2022). 2 Juta Lebih Wisatawan Berkunjung ke Gunungkidul, Retribusinya Capai Rp. 14,42 Miliar. Retrieved from <https://pedulicovid19.kemenparekraf.go.id/2-juta-lebih-wisatawan-berkunjung-ke-gunungkidul-retribusinya-capai-rp1442-miliar/>
- Kompas.com. (2013). Sengketa Pengelolaan Gua Pindul Belum Berakhir. Retrieved from <https://travel.kompas.com/read/2013/02/26/1212023/~Travel~News>



- Kurniawan, David. (2019). Banting Harga Jasa Susur Gua Marak di Pindul. Retrieved from <https://jogjapolitan.harianjogja.com/read/2019/03/07/513/976489/banting-harga-jasa-susur-Gua-marak-di-pindul>
- B. Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Pemerintah Kabupaten Gunungkidul. (2013). *Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Gunungkidul Nomor 5 Tahun 2013 tentang Penyelenggaraan Kepariwisataaan*.
- Pemerintah Republik Indonesia. (1945). *Undang – Undang Dasar Republik Indonesia 1945, Pasal 33*.
- Pemerintah Republik Indonesia. (2004). *Undang – Undang No.7 Tahun 2004*
- Pemerintah Republik Indonesia. (2011). *Peraturan Pemerintah No. 38 Tahun 2011*
- Suharjono. (2021). *Ini Keinginan Pemilik Lahan Pindul untuk Akhiri Konflik*. Retrieved from <https://yogya.inews.id/berita/ini-keinginan-pemilik-lahan-pindul-untuk-akhiri-konflik>
- Widiastuti, R. & Makhasi, G.Y.M. (2019). *Wacana dan Relasi Kuasa dalam Pengelolaan Destinasi Wisata Desa (Studi Kasus BUMDes Maju Mandiri Dan Operator Gua Pindul)*. *Jurnal Gama Societa*, Vol 3, No. 2



Social Dynamics and Community Resilience in a Tourism Dependent Heritage Area Slarong Cave Yogyakarta

Alya Nagita Slabina¹, Imetya Syifa Azarina², Dinda Novalia³, Erlangga Hikmah Budhyatma^{4*}

¹ Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

² Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

³ Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

⁴ Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

*Corresponding Author: alyanagita.2025@student.uny.ac.id

²imetya0fisip.2025@student.uny.ac.id ³dindanovalia.2025@student.uny.ac.id

⁴erlanggahikmahbudhyatma@uny.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Submitted:

22 March 2024

Revised:

11 April 2024

Accepted:

28 May 2024

Keywords: governance, tourism sustainability, cruise tourism.

ABSTRACT

Background: Tourism destinations function not only as economic spaces but also as social systems where community livelihoods and interactions shape sustainability, particularly in small-scale heritage tourism and post-pandemic contexts.

Objectives: This study examines the social dynamics of a tourism-dependent community in the Slarong Cave area, focusing on social interaction, livelihood strategies, and community resilience.

Method A qualitative case study was conducted using observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Informants were purposively selected, and data were analyzed through an interactive model with triangulation.

Result: Findings show strong social capital through cooperation and mutual support, which supports economic resilience. However, high dependence on tourism creates vulnerability, while weak integration of cultural products and limited infrastructure constrain economic opportunities and visitor engagement.

Conclusion: The sustainability of small-scale heritage tourism is socially embedded, relying on community interaction and adaptive practices. Strengthening community-based economic integration and improving infrastructure are key to enhancing resilience and tourism performance.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



INTRODUCTION



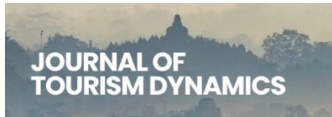
Tourism destinations are not only economic spaces but also social arenas where interactions, livelihoods, and cultural meanings are continuously negotiated. In the context of small-scale heritage tourism, the sustainability of a destination is closely linked to the social dynamics of the communities that depend on it. Previous studies have emphasized the role of tourism in generating regional income and promoting heritage conservation (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990), yet there remains limited attention to how local social relations and community-based practices shape the resilience of tourism-dependent areas, particularly in post-crisis situations.

Slarong Cave, located in Guwosari, Pajangan District, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region, represents a tourism destination that integrates historical significance with a relatively preserved karst landscape. Its association with the historical struggle of Prince Diponegoro and its proximity to the urban center of Yogyakarta position it as a potential site for both educational and recreational tourism. However, beyond its physical and historical attributes, Slarong Cave functions as a socio-economic space where local communities engage in tourism-related activities, including small-scale trade and craft production. These activities form the basis of local livelihoods, making the community highly dependent on the continuity of tourist flows.

From a social perspective, tourism areas often generate patterns of interaction that reflect forms of social capital, including cooperation, trust, and information exchange among local actors (Putnam, 2000). Such social capital plays a crucial role in sustaining economic activities, especially in contexts where formal institutional support is limited. In addition, the concept of community resilience highlights the ability of local communities to adapt to external shocks, such as economic downturns or disruptions in tourism flows (Adger, 2000; Biggs et al., 2012). In tourism-dependent communities, resilience is often manifested through informal cooperation, diversification of income sources, and collective adaptation strategies.

Despite its potential, Slarong Cave faces multiple challenges related to environmental conservation, infrastructure limitations, and fluctuating tourist visitation. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges by significantly reducing visitor numbers and weakening local economic activities (Utami & Kafabih, 2021; Sugihamretha, 2020). While existing tourism studies have examined destination recovery and sustainable management (UNWTO, 2021), there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of how local communities socially and economically respond to such disruptions within small-scale heritage tourism contexts.

Furthermore, community-based tourism (CBT) literature emphasizes that local participation and the integration of cultural products into tourism experiences are essential for achieving sustainable outcomes (Suansri, 2013). However, in many cases, local economic activities—such as traditional crafts—remain weakly connected to the overall tourism system, resulting in limited value creation and increased vulnerability to external market fluctuations. This gap suggests the need to examine tourism not only as a development strategy but also as a social system embedded in everyday community practices.



Therefore, this study aims to analyze the social dynamics of a tourism-dependent community in the Slarong Cave area by focusing on patterns of interaction, livelihood strategies, and community adaptation in the face of changing tourism conditions. By positioning tourism as a socio-economic context rather than merely a development object, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how local social structures influence the sustainability of small-scale heritage tourism destinations.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the social dynamics of a tourism-dependent community in the Slarong Cave area. A qualitative case study is appropriate for examining complex social interactions, meanings, and adaptive strategies within a specific real-life context (Yin, 2018). This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how local communities construct and sustain their livelihoods within a tourism environment, particularly under conditions of uncertainty and change.

The research was conducted in the Slarong Cave tourist area, located in Guwosari, Pajangan District, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Region. This site was selected purposively due to its dual characteristics as a heritage tourism destination and a community-based economic space, where local residents actively engage in tourism-related activities such as trading and craft production. The area also represents a context of post-pandemic recovery, making it relevant for analyzing community adaptation and resilience.

Research participants consisted of destination managers, local traders, small business owners, and community members who are directly involved in or affected by tourism activities. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their knowledge, experience, and level of engagement in the tourism system (Patton, 2015). This sampling strategy ensures that the data reflects diverse perspectives within the local socio-economic structure.

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to capture the physical condition of the tourism area, patterns of visitor movement, and everyday interactions among local actors. In-depth interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to tourism dependence, economic activities, and social relationships. Documentation, including field notes, photographs, and relevant records, was used to support data triangulation and provide contextual evidence.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied triangulation techniques, including method triangulation, source triangulation, and theoretical triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Method triangulation involved comparing data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation. Source triangulation was conducted by cross-checking information among different informant groups, such as managers, traders, and community members. Theoretical triangulation was applied by interpreting the data through multiple conceptual lenses, particularly social capital, community resilience, and community-based tourism, to ensure analytical depth and consistency.

Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). During the data

reduction stage, relevant information related to social interaction, livelihood strategies, and community adaptation was identified and coded. The data were then organized into thematic categories, such as cooperation patterns, economic vulnerability, and collective resilience. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn by linking empirical findings with theoretical frameworks to interpret how social dynamics shape the sustainability of the tourism-dependent community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism Decline and Livelihood Vulnerability

Tourist visitation patterns at Slarong Cave have experienced a significant decline since the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in reduced economic circulation within the local community. This condition reflects the vulnerability of tourism-dependent livelihoods, particularly in small-scale destinations that rely heavily on seasonal and weekend visits (UNWTO, 2021). The decline not only affects destination performance but also directly impacts local traders and small business actors whose income depends on visitor presence. From a social-dynamics perspective, this situation illustrates how tourism functions as a structural economic driver, where disruptions in visitor flows translate into immediate livelihood instability. In line with the concept of community resilience, such shocks require adaptive responses from local actors to sustain their economic activities (Adger, 2000; Biggs et al., 2012). However, limited diversification of attractions and weak integration of local products into tourism experiences contribute to a slower recovery process.



Figure 1 Atmosphere in the Slarong Cave area

Social Capital and Cooperative Economic Practices

One of the most significant findings of this study lies in the strong pattern of social interaction among local traders. The relationships observed are characterized by cooperation, mutual assistance, and information sharing, reflecting the presence of bonding social capital within the community (Putnam, 2000). These interactions include sharing production resources, exchanging market information, and providing emotional support, particularly among elderly traders who rely on tourism as their primary source of income.

Rather than competing, traders tend to adopt collective strategies, such as coordinating production during peak seasons and distributing orders among members. These practices function as an informal economic safety net, enabling the community to cope with fluctuating demand and limited access to formal support systems. This finding supports previous studies suggesting that strong social capital enhances the adaptive capacity of communities facing economic uncertainty.

Table 1. Social Interactions Among Traders

Category of Social Interaction	Form of Interaction	Activity Examples	Implications for Economic Resilience
Informal Cooperation	Helping each other in certain production processes	Borrowing labor or tools to fulfill large orders	Speeds up order completion and reduces delays
Production Information Exchange	Sharing techniques or simple patterns	Senior craftsmen give guidance on patterns or materials	Improves product quality and consistency
Market Information Exchange	Sharing information about collectors, prices, or orders	Informing about stock needs or price changes	Stabilizes income in a fluctuating market
Daily Social Support	Emotional relationships as a small community	Visiting each other and working while chatting	Reduces economic pressure and strengthens social cohesion
Relations with Collectors	Collective distribution collaboration	Sending production results through the same collector	Reduces distribution costs and facilitates marketing
Seasonal Order Distribution	Arrangement of labor and time	Helping each other during wedding seasons	Increases production capacity without additional workers

Furthermore, this cooperative structure demonstrates that the sustainability of tourism-dependent areas is not solely determined by physical attractions or infrastructure, but also by the strength of local social systems. In this context, tourism sustainability is socially embedded, relying on everyday practices of collaboration and trust.

Craft Production as Cultural Labor and Economic Vulnerability

The production of wooden fan crafts represents both a cultural expression and a livelihood strategy for the local community. However, its contribution to the tourism sector remains limited due to weak integration into the overall tourism experience. Most sales are generated through external demand, such as wedding souvenirs, rather than direct tourist consumption

Figure 2 Local Fan Craft Products



From the perspective of **community-based tourism (CBT)**, this condition indicates a disconnect between local cultural production and destination value creation (Suansri, 2013). Ideally, cultural products should be embedded within tourism experiences through activities such as workshops, demonstrations, or storytelling. The absence of such integration reduces the economic value of local crafts and increases dependence on unstable external markets.

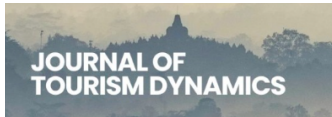
Moreover, this situation highlights the concept of **cultural labor**, where traditional skills are maintained by the community but are not fully recognized within the tourism economy. As a result, local producers remain economically vulnerable despite possessing culturally valuable resources. This finding suggests that strengthening the link between cultural production and tourism experience is essential for enhancing both economic resilience and cultural sustainability.

Infrastructure Limitations and Their Social Implications

The physical condition of tourism facilities in the Slarong Cave area shows uneven maintenance, particularly in family-oriented spaces such as playgrounds. Deteriorating infrastructure not only reduces visitor comfort but also affects the socio-economic dynamics of the community by limiting visitor engagement and length of stay.

Figure 3 Condition of Playground at Tourist Attraction Location





From a social perspective, inadequate infrastructure can be understood as a structural constraint that shapes local livelihood opportunities. Poor facility conditions may discourage repeat visits, thereby reducing income stability for traders and weakening the overall tourism ecosystem. This finding aligns with studies indicating that infrastructure quality significantly influences visitor satisfaction and economic outcomes (Widodo, 2019). Thus, infrastructure issues should not be viewed merely as technical problems, but as factors that directly affect community welfare and participation in tourism. Improving facility quality, therefore, becomes part of strengthening the social sustainability of the destination.

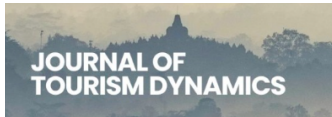
Environmental Features, Risk Perception, and Community Adaptation

Natural elements, such as the waterfall in the Slarong Cave area, play an important role in shaping the tourism experience. However, limited safety measures, slippery access paths, and the absence of interpretive signage contribute to increased risk perception among visitors. From the perspective of ecotourism and environmental management, safe access and environmental interpretation are crucial for enhancing visitor experience and ensuring sustainability (Sunkar & Santoso, 2018). At the same time, these limitations also influence community income, as reduced visitor comfort can lead to shorter stays and lower spending. Without proper management, tourism pressure on natural resources may result in environmental degradation, such as soil erosion and water quality disturbances (Farrant, 2017). In this context, community adaptation is not only economic but also ecological, requiring awareness and participation in maintaining environmental balance. This finding reinforces the idea that tourism sustainability depends on the interaction between environmental conditions, visitor experience, and community practices, rather than on physical attractions alone.

Without a clear management framework, tourism pressure has the potential to cause path erosion, soil compaction, and water quality disturbances—risks common to karst-based waterfall tourism (Farrant, 2017). Strengthening the path structure, implementing capacity-based visitation limits, and providing official viewing points can reduce direct pressure on wetlands and improve the visitor experience. Thus, the waterfall serves not only as a recreational attraction but also as an educational tool to introduce the ecological value of the Slarong area to tourists.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Slarong Cave is not merely a heritage tourism destination, but also a social and economic space in which local communities negotiate livelihood, cooperation, and cultural continuity. The findings reveal that the sustainability of the destination is closely linked to the social dynamics of the community, particularly the presence of strong social capital manifested through cooperation, information exchange, and mutual support among local traders. These informal social structures function as adaptive mechanisms that enable the community to cope with fluctuating tourist visitation and economic uncertainty.



The study also highlights that tourism decline, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, has exposed the vulnerability of tourism-dependent livelihoods. Limited integration of local cultural products, such as wooden fan crafts, into the tourism experience further weakens the economic resilience of the community. In addition, inadequate infrastructure and safety limitations not only affect visitor satisfaction but also have broader implications for local income stability and community participation in tourism activities.

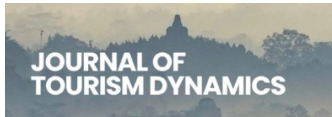
From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the understanding of tourism as a socially embedded system, where sustainability is shaped not only by physical attractions and management strategies but also by everyday social relations and collective adaptation practices. By integrating perspectives of social capital, community resilience, and community-based tourism, this study offers a more nuanced view of how small-scale heritage destinations operate in contexts of uncertainty.

Practically, the findings suggest that tourism development strategies should move beyond infrastructure improvement and promotion, and instead emphasize the strengthening of community-based economic integration, such as incorporating local crafts into tourism experiences through workshops, demonstrations, and storytelling. In addition, improving basic infrastructure and safety measures is essential to enhance visitor comfort while supporting local economic activities.

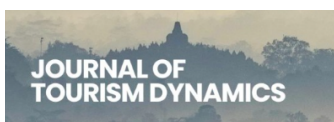
This study is limited by its qualitative scope and focus on a single case, which may not fully represent broader tourism dynamics in other regions. Future research is recommended to adopt mixed-method approaches, expand comparative case studies, and explore the role of digital tourism strategies in strengthening the connection between local communities and tourism markets. Further investigation into the long-term evolution of community resilience in tourism-dependent areas would also provide valuable insights.

REFERENCES

- Adger, W. N. (2000). Social and ecological resilience: Are they related? *Progress in Human Geography*, 24(3), 347–364.
<https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200701540465>
- Ashworth, G. J., & Tunbridge, J. E. (1990). *The tourist-historic city*. Belhaven Press.
- Biggs, R., Schlüter, M., & Schoon, M. L. (2015). *Principles for building resilience: Sustaining ecosystem services in social-ecological systems*. Cambridge University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.



- Suansri, P. (2013). *Community-based tourism handbook*. Responsible Ecological Social Tours (REST).
- Sugihamretha, I. D. G. (2020). Respon kebijakan: Mitigasi dampak pandemi COVID-19 pada sektor pariwisata. *Jurnal Perencanaan Pembangunan: The Indonesian Journal of Development Planning*, 4(2), 191–206. <https://doi.org/10.36574/jpp.v4i2.113>
- United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2021). *2021: A year in review*. UNWTO.
- Utami, B. S. A., & Kafabih, A. (2021). Sektor pariwisata Indonesia di tengah pandemi COVID-19. *Jurnal Dinamika Ekonomi Pembangunan*, 4(1), 383–389. <https://doi.org/10.33005/jdep.v4i1.198>
- Widodo, R. (2019). Pengaruh kualitas fasilitas terhadap kepuasan dan loyalitas wisatawan pada destinasi wisata keluarga. *Jurnal Pariwisata Indonesia*, 13(2), 101–115.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE.



Strategies for Developing Thematic Tourism Villages Based on Agrarian Culture and Local Wisdom (Case Study of Pule Village, Madiun Regency)

Ria Aswin Saputri^{1*}, Alma Verdiana², Fitriana³

¹Gadjah Mada University

²Gadjah Mada University

³Gadjah Mada University

*Corresponding author: riaaswinsaputri@mail.ugm.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Submitted:

22 March 2024

Revised:

11 April 2024

Accepted:

28 May 2024

Keywords:

strategy, thematic tourism, tourism village, cultural festival

ABSTRACT

Background: The development of thematic tourism villages based on agrarian culture and local wisdom holds strategic potential for strengthening destination identity and boosting the local economy. However, the sustainability of such programs is often hindered by reliance on specific events, as well as insufficient product innovation and governance.

Objectives: This study examines strategies for developing thematic tourism villages based on agrarian culture and local wisdom in Pule Village, Sawahan Subdistrict, Madiun Regency.

Method: A qualitative descriptive approach was used, involving in-depth interviews and observations. Informants included the village head, the tourism awareness group, and community groups.

Results: The findings indicate that: 1) The Rendengan Cultural Festival serves as the primary driver of tourism activities in the village; 2) Numerous constraints have led to a decline in tourism activities; 3) A thematic tourism village development strategy is needed to ensure tourism activities remain vibrant and sustainable.

Conclusion: The strategies formulated include establishing a thematic tourism village based on the agricultural calendar, developing cultural and local tradition-based educational tourism, and strengthening an experiential tourism approach that directly involves tourists in village life. This study contributes practical insights toward the development of a thematic tourism village rooted in agrarian culture and local wisdom.

This is an open access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.





INTRODUCTION

Tourism villages and their development process have emerged as a strategic choice in sustainable tourism development and efforts to preserve cultural heritage, particularly in developing countries rich in natural resources, culture, and strong agrarian traditions. Rural tourism is a key means of transforming ecological advantages into economic benefits (Li et al., 2025:1). Beyond serving as an alternative destination, tourism villages function as instruments for empowering local communities through the participatory utilization of the village's endogenous potential (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015:1133). In this context, community-based tourism prioritizes a balance between environmental conservation, economic growth, and the socio-cultural sustainability of local communities (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018:759).

As competition among destinations intensifies, strategies for developing tourism villages have become an unavoidable necessity. One unique and applicable approach is the development of thematic tourism villages—a destination differentiation strategy that highlights specific themes rooted in local identity to create distinctive and meaningful tourism experiences (Richards, 2018:12). The thematic approach is considered capable of strengthening a destination's image, enhancing tourism appeal, and extending tourists' length of stay through experiences rooted in local stories, activities, and values (Binkhorst & den Dekker, 2009:311). Several regions have implemented Thematic Village Programs in an effort to address village issues, such as in the cities of Semarang, Malang, and Bogor, and in Bandung Regency (Akbar & Alfian, 2018:37; Kristiana & Kusumoarto, 2019:1146; Marsdenia & Pranita, 2019:51; Sutanudjaja et al., 2018:24; Tamara & Rahdriawan, 2018:40). Thematic villages in Poland are associated with a single community activity conducted on a larger scale, where the theme becomes the village's specialization. Poland has been developing thematic villages from 2010 to 2012 as part of its rural development strategy (Głuszak, 2012:10). In a context of increasing choice and competition among destinations, it has become crucial for destinations to devise innovative strategies to create product and experience differentiation that delivers value and leaves a lasting impression on tourists (Neuhofer & Landkin, 2012:36).

In rural communities, agrarian values and local wisdom form the primary foundation of social, economic, and cultural life. Traditional agricultural systems, patterns of human-nature relationships, and local practices passed down across generations embody sustainability values relevant to the principles of sustainable tourism (Judijanto, 2025:45). Nevertheless, many tourism villages still face challenges in managing their agrarian potential and local wisdom innovatively. Tourism development is often fragmented, focused solely on physical attractions, and fails to effectively package local values as the main theme integrated into the tourism experience (UNWTO, 2018:65). This situation risks homogenizing destinations and undermining the uniqueness of tourism villages amid the tide of mass tourism (Yanan et al., 2024:1).

Based on these conditions and previous research identifying supporting and inhibiting factors for thematic villages (Putri, 2025:52), research on the transformation of urban village spaces into thematic village tourism destinations (Sukowati, 2022:27), and research



on a thematic village development model in Mulyaharja Village, Bogor (Parantika et al., 2020:1), it is important to conduct a study on the potential and strategies for unique rural tourism that differs from other regions. Meanwhile, studies on implementation-oriented strategies for developing thematic villages, particularly in Pule Village, remain limited and need to be conducted.

This study provides a qualitative overview of the origins of Pule Village as a tourism village, along with the Rendengan Cultural Festival. The current existence of Pule Village relies solely on festival activities; therefore, it is necessary to analyze the factors hindering tourism activities outside the festival's implementation. Furthermore, attention is needed regarding the development of thematic tourism villages based on agrarian values and local wisdom as a strategy to strengthen the destination's competitiveness while maintaining the social, cultural, and economic sustainability of the village community. This approach is expected to bridge the gap between the tourism market's growing demand for authentic experiences and efforts to preserve local values, which serve as the identity and primary strength of the tourism village.

METHODS

The scope of this study is located in Pule Village, Sawahan Subdistrict, Madiun Regency. The research employs a descriptive research design using a qualitative approach conducted from January 12, 2026 to January 30, 2026. This approach focuses on collecting natural and descriptive data. According to Lambert & Lambert (2012), descriptive qualitative research is used when researchers wish to gain a contextual understanding of a social phenomenon as it is, with participants serving as the primary source of information.

Table 1. Research Instruments and Indicators

Data Collection Techniques	Instruments	Key Indicators
Interview	Interview Guidelines	History of the Tourism Village, Role of Festivals, Tourism Activities, Obstacles, Development Strategies
Observation	Observation Sheet	Condition of tourism facilities and tourist activities
Documentation	Documentation and Archives	Visitor data, festival activities, supporting archives

The study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with a number of key informants representing various stakeholders in Pule Village. The selection of informants in this study employed *purposive sampling*, which involves intentionally selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Informants were selected because they possess knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the management and tourism activities in Pule Village. Additionally, *snowball sampling* was used to identify additional informants based on

recommendations from previous informants. Some of the informants selected through these two methods include the Village Head, who serves as both a key informant and the initiator of the tourism village concept, as well as the Secretary of the Pule Village Tourism Development Group (Pokdarwis), members of the MSME merchant community, Andong Wisata cart drivers, parking attendants, the manager of the Flamboyant Library, the manager of the Tirta Ceria Swimming Pool, the caretaker of the BUMDes minimarket, community members serving as the head of the village gamelan team, and several tourists visiting—both from cycling communities and individual visitors—at the Pule “Park”.

In addition to primary data, secondary data also comes from various relevant reference sources such as research journals, articles, theses, legislation, and other literature study data related to the research topic. Data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman analysis technique as described in Sugiyono (2013), which includes: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Thus, this method contributes to the development of theory and empirical understanding of social reality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Origins of the Formation of Ceria Pule Tourism Village and the Existence of the Rendengan Festival

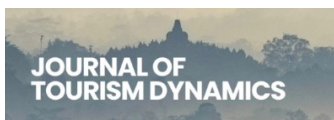
Pule Village is one of the villages administratively located in Sawahan Subdistrict, Madiun Regency, East Java Province. This village is part of the administrative area of Madiun Regency, most of which is characterized by an agrarian rural landscape and is situated in the foothills of the Wilis Mountains. Generally, the land in Pule Village is used productively, with the majority consisting of rice fields covering an area of 76.8 hectares. This indicates that the land in Pule Village is available and ready for cultivation. The majority of Pule Village residents work as farmers. Pule Village is an agricultural area that relies on irrigation via a groundwater pumping system and rainwater. This is because, in recent years, water flow from underground sources has become insufficient due to the construction of a toll road that crosses the village.



Figure 1. Rice Fields of Pule Village



Figure 2. Pule Park



Since taking office as Village Head in 2008, Anton Setyoko has observed that Pule Village is often labeled as a backward rural area with limited access due to its relatively remote location from urban centers. A turning point occurred in 2015 with the allocation of Village Funds, which were subsequently utilized to reclaim the village-owned rice and repurpose them into a public space—a recreational area equipped with a *jogging track*. The area was subsequently developed into Taman Pule, featuring various facilities supporting the community's social and economic activities, such as activity centers, a children's playground, public open spaces, a library, a café, a *food court*, and a pavilion serving as a hub for communal activities.

The development of the area continued with the construction of the Tirta Ceria Swimming Pool, utilizing remaining funds and the village head's technical expertise in construction. The presence of this facility received a positive response from the community and attracted tourists from surrounding villages, thereby increasing Pule Village's exposure as a local recreational destination. As visitor numbers increased, Pule Village began to be positioned and promoted as "Kampung Wisata Ceria" (Cheerful Tourism Village). The village concept was deemed relevant to Pule Village's circumstances, as it had previously been categorized as a village with a low standard of living.

This rapid development caught the attention of the local government, leading to Pule Village's inclusion in Madiun Regency's tourism event calendar in 2019. This designation spurred the organization of the Rendengan Cultural Festival, rooted in the labuhan ritual tradition—an agrarian cultural practice passed down through generations and serving as an annual event for Pule Village residents at the start of the rainy season. The labuhan ritual represents the farmers' expression of gratitude for the gift of rain, as well as a collective prayer that the rainy season will bring blessings and spare them from natural disasters that could potentially cause crop failure.

The name "Rendengan Cultural Festival" is inspired by the local term "rendengan," which etymologically derives from the word "rendeng" (rainy season) with the suffix "-an," which in Javanese cultural context refers to collective activities related to seasonal cycles. Thus, "Rendengan" is understood as a shared cultural practice undertaken by the community to welcome the rainy season. The festival was first held in late 2019 and was included in the official event calendar of Madiun Regency. Although it received high enthusiasm from the community, the initial festival was still limited in scope due to insufficient preparation, so the event lasted only one day and featured local traditional arts.

Plans to develop the festival on a more comprehensive scale were delayed due to the implementation of social restrictions during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, tourism activities in Pule Village did not come to a complete halt, as Pule Park continued to function as a recreational facility for residents. In the same year, Pule Village received an award as a Village for Cultural Advancement. By early 2021, the Covid-19 outbreak was gradually brought under control, reopening the possibility of holding the Rendengan Festival. Mr. Anton then collaborated with artists from Yogyakarta, including Om Black and Om Dobleh, in organizing the event. Through Anton Setyoko's vision, the festival was successfully developed into a traditional dance performance designed as the distinctive

identity of the Rendengan Festival. By involving local dance and gamelan artists, the Rendengan Dance was ultimately created as a representation of the local culture.

After the choreography and musical composition of the Rendengan Dance were finalized, the next phase focused on designing performance costumes and training dancers, particularly the village's youth. To ensure artistic quality, the training process was guided by professional instructors from one of Madiun's leading dance studios, Studio Java U2. The regular weekly practice sessions eventually gave rise to a village dance training center known as the Bintang Pule Dance Studio. Conceptually, the Rendengan Dance is rich in symbolic values that represent the worldview of the agrarian community of Pule Village. The use of a water jug placed on the dancer's head symbolizes respect for water as the primary source of life and the sustainability of agriculture. Meanwhile, the white costumes worn by the dancers reflect the values of purity and sincerity as the spiritual foundation of the local community's cultural practices. With the creation of the Rendengan Dance, the main entertainment icon of a festival is now complete, offering potential as a cultural tourism attraction to draw many visitors



Figure 3. Rendengan Dance

After undergoing more systematic preparation throughout 2020, the Rendengan Cultural Festival was held again at the end of 2021 with more significant achievements compared to its previous iteration in 2019. In 2021, the festival lasted four days and three nights, running from Thursday through Sunday. The series of activities began on Thursday evening after Maghrib with the opening ritual procession of the “-labuhan” tradition—the collection of water from five springs scattered across the five cardinal directions of Pule Village. The water was placed in jars and carried in a procession to the Baitul Mutaqin Mosque. During the procession, the community observes the “topo bisu” tradition—walking in silence without speaking. In this ritual water-collection practice, the people of Pule Village believe that the water is not “taken,” but rather “requested” from sacred springs as a form of respect for the guardians of nature and the sources of life. The series of events then continued with a session on the History of Pule Village presented by the Village Head. One theory suggests that the name Pule originates from the presence of the Pule Tree, which once grew abundantly in the village area but is no longer found there today.

The second day of the Rendengan Festival began with a Quran recitation ceremony at the Baitul Mutaqin Mosque. Water stored in a clay jar is then blessed on Friday to be used in the ritual's climactic procession on Sunday. In the afternoon, the community participates in various traditional agricultural-themed competitions, such as a clay jar race, a duck-catching contest, a geretan race, and a water fight. The series of activities on Saturday featured entertainment with local artists and performers, as well as cultural performances from nearby village art groups, such as Reog Ponorogo, jaranan, and comedic mask dance. In the evening, the event concluded with a workshop on event decoration facilitated by the Event Organizer as part of an effort to enhance the capacity of the village community.



Figure 4. The Kendi Feast Ritual

The fourth day marked the climax of the Rendengan Cultural Festival. The main activities took place from 7:00 AM to 9:30 AM, beginning with a procession of water jugs that had been blessed at the mosque on Friday, heading to the designated gathering point. During this procession, the community members () wore black attire and carried the kendi. The kendi were then arranged in the center of the ritual site, while the community gathered around them to perform a communal prayer known in local tradition as the Kenduri Kendi, as an expression of gratitude and a plea for safety in welcoming the arrival of the rainy season. Additionally, the residents of Pule Village bring various types of food from home, including main dishes and snacks, which are then blessed and shared among the villagers as a symbol of solidarity and social unity.

The Kenduri Kendi ritual, as the climax of the Rendengan Festival, concludes with a performance of the Rendengan Dance by female dancers from Pule Village who have undergone continuous training at the village dance studio. Informants interpret the overcast weather without rain as a special phenomenon that creates a solemn and comfortable atmosphere for the community participating in the procession. Afterward, the blessed water from the kendi is distributed to the villagers to be mixed into their household water as a symbol of blessings and hopes for goodness in daily life.

The series of rituals then continued with traditional art performances such as the Dongkrek and the children's Jaranan dance, which served as the grand finale of the four-day festival. Beyond serving as a space for cultural expression, the Rendengan Festival also functions as a vehicle for local economic empowerment through the involvement of SMEs,



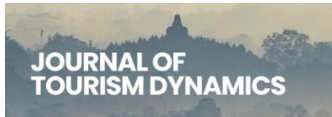
food vendors, and community members managing simple entertainment attractions like the odong-odong rickshaws. The success of the Rendengan Festival reflects the social transformation of Pule Village from a village previously perceived as underdeveloped into one capable of hosting large-scale cultural events. This was further reinforced by the presence of East Java Governor Khofifah Indar Parawansa, who witnessed the series of events firsthand. For the village government, the festival is not merely viewed as a tourism activity but also as a means to strengthen the value of mutual cooperation and efforts to preserve the labuhan ritual as a local cultural identity.

Since then, the Rendengan Festival has been established as an annual event typically held at the start of the rainy season. However, tourism activity remains seasonal, as visitor numbers tend to rise only during the festival and on weekends. This situation highlights the need to develop thematic tourism packages centered on education and experiential learning to ensure more sustainable visits, strengthen tourist-community interactions, and boost economic benefits for residents without relying solely on the agricultural sector. A thematic tourism approach emphasizing learning and hands-on experiences is believed to strengthen interactions between tourists and the local community and create a distinct destination experience, thereby potentially significantly increasing visitor numbers and community economic income, as well as reducing financial dependence on agricultural land (Chen et al., 2025:1).

Factors contributing to the decline in tourism activity outside of the festival

According to statements from the Village Head, MSME operators, and parking attendants in the Taman Pule area, the number of tourist visits saw a significant increase during the festival. However, post-event observations indicate that this surge in visits was not sustainable, as the number of tourists dropped drastically once the festival ended. Large groups of tourists typically arrive from other villages via tourist trains, which have become a popular mode of collective transportation due to their ease of access and relatively affordable costs. These tourist trains position Pule Village as both a primary destination and a stopover point before or after visiting other destinations in the Madiun and Ngawi regions. On Sundays, more than five tourist train sets are recorded visiting Pule Village, with a carrying capacity of approximately 30 adults per set. Tourist activities are generally limited to light recreational activities at Pule Park, while others utilize the facilities at Tirta Ceria Swimming Pool. Visitor numbers tend to increase on weekends and during school holidays.

In addition to general tourists, Pule Village also receives visits from a cycling community known as “Sepur” (Retired Veterans’ Bicycle Group). This community visits Pule Village two to three times a month. Its members come from several villages in Magetan Regency and are predominantly elderly individuals with backgrounds as retirees, including former members of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the Indonesian National Police (Polri), medical personnel, law enforcement officers, educators, and other professions who have entered retirement. The community has approximately 35 members, who regularly go cycling every Wednesday and Sunday. Their visits to Pule



Village are generally brief stops to rest and enjoy the local cuisine available at the food court.

In-depth interviews also revealed that efforts had previously been made to develop experience-based tourism activities, such as the creation of bamboo obstacle courses utilizing river currents, as well as the distribution of thematic tourist attractions across each neighborhood unit. For example, one area has developed a medicinal plant garden, while another area showcases the processing of rice-based food products made from locally grown crops. However, these various initiatives have not been sustained and tend to stall, thus failing to yield significant long-term impacts on tourism growth.

In the early stages of tourism area development, Pule Village also provided supporting facilities in the form of Cafe De Pule as a recreational space for visitors to rest, enjoy drinks, or relax after physical activities such as jogging and swimming. During the festival, the café experienced high visitor numbers and at one point employed up to 24 people. The initiative to establish this café was driven by the hope that local residents would have an alternative recreational space without having to travel to the center of Madiun City.

However, over time, the café's operations could not be sustained and it eventually ceased operations. The decline in visitor numbers was influenced by increasing competition from themed cafés in Madiun City, which offered more attractive interior design concepts and a wider variety of menu options. On the other hand, organizing a festival typically involves around 30 committee members drawn from the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) and village youth who participate voluntarily. This committee is responsible for various technical aspects, such as setting up decorations, managing equipment, and ensuring event security.

All funding for the event comes from the Village Fund, covering equipment rental costs, honoraria for art groups from outside the region, and event organizer services. The high budgetary requirements and the significant amount of effort required to organize the festival are key considerations for the village government in evaluating the sustainability of the activity, particularly regarding the decision of whether the cultural festival should be held annually. Based on field observations and an understanding of tourism dynamics in Pule Village, several key factors contributing to the decline in tourism activity can be identified, as follows.

Reliance on Event Organization

Tourism activities in Pule Village still show a fairly high dependence on the organization of specific events, particularly the Rendengan Festival and weekend visits. Outside of these peak periods, regularly scheduled tourist attractions remain limited, both in terms of variety and schedule reliability. This results in tourist visitation patterns that tend to be fluctuating and unsustainable, as surges occur during events, while on regular days tourism activity drops significantly. Consequently, the local economic turnover from the tourism sector in Pule Village remains unstable due to the seasonal nature of revenue. Reliance on events also poses management challenges, as festivals require substantial operational costs and a large workforce, while their economic benefits remain limited and



are absorbed by operational expenses. Under this pattern, festivals have not yet functioned as a sustainable source of income but remain temporary in nature.

This situation indicates that Pule Village lacks a “backbone” for tourism when there are no major events. When daily attractions are unstructured, tourists have limited activity options. As a result, *the length of stay* tends to be short, opportunities for tourist spending are low, and a consistent tourism experience has yet to be established. Ultimately, this situation risks hindering the establishment of Pule Village’s image as a “vibrant” year-round destination, as the village is currently perceived more as an event-based destination rather than one offering regularly accessible experiential packages. Therefore, a strategy is needed that is not only event-oriented but also builds routine activities based on experiences and education, such as agricultural calendar-themed packages, cultural workshops, live-in programs, and village cycling tours, to ensure more stable visitor numbers and a more sustainable economic impact for the community.

Limitations in Tourism Product Diversification

Tourism development in Pule Village still shows limitations in the diversification of tourism products. Tourism activities tend to be concentrated on Pule Park and the Rendengan Cultural Festival without more varied, thematic, and scheduled product offerings. Consequently, tourism experience options are relatively limited and heavily dependent on these two main attractions, indicating that the village’s potential has not yet been fully translated into clear “tourism products” such as daily packages, educational packages, cultural packages, or year-round *live-in* packages. In fact, Pule Village possesses resources that can be developed into diverse tourism products, such as its agricultural landscape, the Rendengan tradition, community cooperation, arts and cultural skills, and rural social life; however, these have not yet been widely packaged as agricultural-based educational tourism packages, *experiential tourism*, thematic *homestays*, or participatory creative tourism. When tourists merely “observe” without “experiencing,” the quality of the experience becomes less profound, and the absence of structured packages also hinders promotion because the village lacks products that are easily understood by the market.

Conceptually, tourism development requires transforming potential into products that are ready to be offered, unique, and tailored to the needs of specific market segments. In Pule Village, product diversification is essential to reach segments such as students (educational tourism), cultural communities (arts tourism), families (rural recreation), and specialty interest tourists (agricultural and landscape tourism). Limited product innovation results in low long-term appeal, potential tourist saturation, low repeat visits, short stay durations, and suboptimal economic circulation. Therefore, the village needs to focus on product innovation through thematic tour packages, scheduling of routine activities, and participatory tourism models that involve tourists in agricultural, cultural, and social village life to make Pule Village’s appeal stronger and more sustainable.

Weak Promotion and Utilization of Digital Media

Promotional efforts and the utilization of digital media for Kampung Wisata Ceria Desa Pule have not been managed optimally. Although the village has an Instagram and



YouTube account, the frequency of posts, consistency of scheduling, and variety of content remain low because content management is ad hoc and centered on event-based moments. Consequently, destination communication is not sustained, digital exposure is unstable, and audience brand recall is difficult to establish in the long term. Ideally, digital media should function as an active, narrative, and continuous destination communication tool, covering information on attractions, access, schedules, tour packages, image building, and consistent interaction with potential tourists. When content appears only sporadically, the audience does not get a complete picture of the travel experience outside of events, thereby weakening their interest in visiting. In other words, the weakness of digital promotion makes Pule Village less “present” in the minds of tourists on ordinary days.

In strengthening promotion, influencers have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of digital tourism media (Cornellia et al., 2024: 1154). However, collaborations must consider the alignment of the influencer’s persona with the destination, the quality of interaction with followers, content creativity, and sustained visual and storytelling-based communication. If designed well, influencers can expand the audience reach and increase tourists’ trust in the destination. A *storytelling* approach is also relevant to Pule Village’s character as an agrarian-cultural village. Narratives about farmers’ daily lives, the planting-harvesting cycle, the Rendengan tradition, rice field landscapes, and cooperative practices can foster emotional connection with the audience and boost engagement and more stable visitation interest. To achieve this, a structured content calendar is needed that combines informative content (packages, routes, facilities), experiential content (educational tours, *live-in stays*, *workshops*), narrative content (stories of traditions and farmers), and interactive content (polls, Q&A, live streams). With this approach, digital promotion for “ ” is no longer *event-driven* but becomes a sustainable destination communication strategy that strengthens Pule Village’s competitiveness as a thematic tourism village.

Limitations in Tourism Management Capacity and Institutional Structure

Institutional capacity and human resources in the management of tourism in Pule Village still face various limitations. The Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) has not yet played an optimal role in initiating and managing sustainable destination development. Additionally, there are no specialized training programs focused on enhancing tourism management capacity, attraction packaging, tourism services, and the development of management successors. Management succession has also not been optimized, as evidenced by the continued dominance of the village head as the primary driving force. This situation makes the sustainability of tourism management highly dependent on specific individuals.

Changes in Tourists’ Interests and Preferences

According to Almeida et al (2023: 10), contemporary tourism trends indicate a shift in tourist preferences toward experiential tourism, participatory interactions, and attractions that adapt to the needs of digital content. If the development of tourist attractions in Pule Village fails to respond to these changing dynamics, the destination’s competitiveness may



decline and become less competitive compared to other destinations that are more adaptable to current tourism trends.

Limitations in Tourism Collaboration and Networking

Pule Village is not yet fully integrated into a broader tourism network, whether with other tourism villages, tourism industry stakeholders, or the private sector. This lack of collaboration limits opportunities for developing cross-village tourism packages, joint promotions, and access to funding support and capacity-building initiatives that could actually strengthen the destination's competitiveness. This situation also means that Pule Village operates relatively in isolation, so its market reach and tourism distribution networks (e.g., through travel agents, tourism enthusiast communities, or corporate/CSR partners) have not yet been firmly established.

According to Pilving et al. (2019: 219), the development of collaboration requires improved communication, the formulation of clear objectives, and funding stability as key factors for the sustainability of collaboration. In the context of Pule Village, this implies that networks cannot be sufficiently built through short-term cooperation but require regular coordination mechanisms, a clear division of roles among actors, and a relatively consistent resource support scheme. Therefore, strengthening tourism collaboration and networks is a strategic aspect, not only to expand the market and enrich tourism products but also to ensure that destination development proceeds more sustainably.

Thematic Tourism Development Strategies

After discussing the factors causing the decline in tourism activity above, several recommendations regarding thematic tourism development strategies can be concluded. Some of these proposals include:

Agricultural Cultural Thematic Tourism Based on the Seasonal Calendar

According to Masilela et al. (2024: 523), assessing the authenticity of a cultural event must take into account the cultural context of the local community as the custodians of the tradition. In Pule Village, the agrarian identity is strongly evident through the Rendengan tradition, daily agricultural activities, and collectively performed harvest rituals. This cultural capital or cultural asset has the potential to be developed into thematic tourism based on the calendar of planting, cultivation, harvest, and post-harvest seasons, so that tourism activities can take place year-round and not solely depend on annual festivals. This thematic tourism also addresses the issue of a destination's reliance on specific events, as tourism products are structured to follow the relatively stable and predictable rhythms of agricultural life.

The forms of tourism activities that can be offered include educational tours about the rice planting process and traditional harvesting, accompanied by explanations of the agrarian values and social practices associated with them. These activities can be enhanced by inviting tourists to participate in the kenduri tani ritual and listen to the Rendengan cultural narratives from tradition bearers, ensuring that the tourism experience goes beyond the visual aspect and also conveys an understanding of cultural meaning.



To enrich the experience while connecting activity points within the village landscape, cycling tours along rice field and residential paths can be integrated as part of an interpretive tour of the agrarian landscape—for example, with stops at several points to observe cultivation phases, watch community activities, and engage in brief interactions with farmers. This entire series can be packaged into a thematic tour titled “A Day as a Pule Farmer,” which combines seasonal agricultural learning, participation in local culture, and participatory exploration of the village landscape.

Cultural and Local Tradition Educational Tourism

According to Syafrini et al. (2026:2590), cultural tourism not only opens new business opportunities that can improve the well-being of local communities but also helps preserve local culture, shape collective memory, strengthen cultural identity, and enhance the appeal of traditional villages. In other words, cultural tourism can provide dual benefits: economic benefits for residents and socio-cultural benefits for the sustainability of traditions. Balancing cultural heritage preservation and its application in tourism development is key to sustainable development (Tang et al., 2023).

In Pule Village, the richness of local traditions such as the Rendengan dance, traditional ceremonies (*tingkeban*, *mitoni*, *wiwitan*), and the value of mutual cooperation are cultural assets of high educational value. These traditions are not only worth watching but can also serve as learning materials because they contain knowledge about agrarian life, the value of togetherness, and how the community maintains social relationships and their connection with nature. Therefore, the development of educational tourism is relevant, particularly to reach segments such as students, university students, and cultural communities. In addition to expanding the tourism market, educational tourism can also serve as a means of regenerating traditional practitioners, as the involvement of the younger generation in tourism activities encourages them to learn, practice, and understand the meaning of traditions firsthand.

Activities that can be developed include Rendengan dance workshops (covering movements, history, and performance context), karawitan music workshops to strengthen performance arts, and cultural interpretation classes discussing the symbolic meanings in agrarian rituals—such as the values of gratitude, community, and traditional harvest practices. Additionally, village cultural *immersion* programs can be specifically designed for students and college students, such as living with local families, participating in daily activities, learning cooperative work practices, and taking part in a series of cultural activities according to the village calendar. For ritual activities such as *labuhan*, their implementation must be organized in accordance with ethical principles and community consent, ensuring that tourists understand the limits of their roles (as learners/observers or limited participants) so that the activities continue to respect sacred values and applicable customary rules. With such a design, cultural tourism in Pule Village can function as an engaging educational activity that respects traditions while generating more sustainable economic and social impacts for the community.

Experiential Tourism

According to Agarwal and Singh (2022), tourism is viewed as a catalyst for curiosity about how others live within local communities; it also underscores that travelers seek to escape routine and experience the authentic side of a destination. Pule Village possesses the social and cultural capital that enables travelers to engage directly in village life, rather than merely watching attractions. The tourism activities conducted include staying in *homestays* owned by residents, riding a horse-drawn carriage to tour the village, participating in the making of woven bags from plastic fibers, preparing traditional rice-based dishes, and engaging in activities such as the waste bank, community service, or village social initiatives. Additionally, the tourism experience can be enriched through cycling tours through the village as a more flexible and intimate way to enjoy the rural landscape, rice fields, and areas of community activity, while also creating opportunities for direct interaction with the community in a relaxed and participatory atmosphere. Tourists can also be invited to participate in games in the rice fields, such as the annual activities held by residents during the Rendengan Cultural Festival, including duck-catching contests, water fights, and competitions to carry a water jug on one's head.



Figure 5. Duck Catching Competition

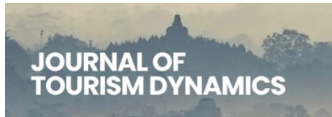


Figure 6. Water Fight Competition

CONCLUSION

The development of the Ceria Tourism Village in Pule Village reveals a rather contrasting dynamic between the success of the Rendengan Cultural Festival and the sustainability of daily tourism activities. On one hand, the Rendengan Festival has successfully highlighted Pule Village's cultural identity, attracted tourist visits, and temporarily boosted the local economy. However, on the other hand, the high reliance on the event has caused tourism activities outside the festival to decline drastically, resulting in an unstable flow of tourism revenue throughout the year. This situation is further evident in the limited diversification of tourism products, weak digital promotion management, limited institutional capacity of the management body, and a lack of collaborative networks with external parties.

Given these realities, the development of tourism in Pule Village needs to shift from an event-based model toward a sustainable thematic tourism model rooted in agrarian values and local wisdom. Key relevant strategies include developing seasonal agricultural



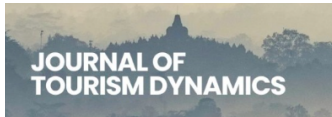
calendar-based thematic tourism, fostering cultural and traditional education tourism, and strengthening *experiential tourism* approaches that directly engage tourists in village life. This strategy must be supported by consistent digital promotion based on *storytelling*, capacity building for the Pokdarwis (Village Tourism Working Group), and the expansion of collaborative networks with communities, other tourism villages, and tourism partners. With this approach, Pule Village has the potential to transform from a festival-based destination into a year-round thematic tourism village that is competitive and capable of maintaining the socio-cultural and economic sustainability of its community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thank you to those who assisted in the completion of this article and kindly served as sources, including Mr. Anton Setyoko, Head of Pule Village; Ms. Alfrista, Secretary of the Pule Village Pokdarwis; Mrs. Reni, the Pule Village library clerk; Mrs. Dwi, the clerk at the Tirta Ceria Swimming Pool; Mr. Kamto, the tourist horse-drawn carriage driver; Mr. Rindho, the parking attendant; Mrs. Maretha, the clerk at the BUMDes minimarket; Mrs. Endang, the MSME manager; and all other parties who cannot be mentioned one by one.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, S., & Singh, P. (2022). Tourist experiences, authenticity, and everyday life. In Routledge Handbook of Trends and Issues in Tourism Sustainability, Planning, and Development. Routledge.
- Akbar, T., & Alfian, F. (2018). Thematic Villages as a Form of Community Participation in Addressing Slum Issues in Malang City. *Scientific Journal of Science and Education*, 70(2), 37–48.
- Almeida, S. B., et al. (2023). Tourist Experiences and/or Experiential Tourism? *Scientific Journal of Applied Social and Clinical Science*. *International Journal of Human Sciences Research* ISSN 2764-0558(1-12) DOI 10.22533/at.ed.55832523270711
- Binkhorst, E., & Den Dekker, T. (2009). Agenda for co-creation tourism experience research. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(2–3), 311–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368620802594193>
- Chen, Q., Cai, L. A., & Chen, J. (2025). Collaborative governance for rural tourism in a centralized state: a tale of two villages in China. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 63, 329–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2025.05.007>
- Cornellia, A. H., et al. (2023). The Role of Influencer Marketing for Tourism Destinations in Improving Brand Awareness through Instagram. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Studies*, Vol. 07, DOI: 10.47191/jefms/v7-i2-34, Impact Factor: 8.044, Pages 1147–1157



-
- Giampiccoli, A., & Saayman, M. (2018). South African community-based tourism operational guidelines: Analysis and critical review. *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development*, 10(6), 759–770. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20421338.2018.1531594>
- Głuszak, B. (2012). Where Places Have a Soul: A Model for Creating Thematic Towns (E. Sokołowska & A. Olszewska (eds.)). Elbląg Association. pp. 8–13
- Judijanto, L. (2025). Bibliometric Analysis of the Role of Local Wisdom in Sustainable Tourism Management. *Sciences Du Nord Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(01), 45–53. <https://doi.org/10.71238/snhss.v2i01.53>
- Kristiana, E., & Kusumoarto, A. (2019). The Development of Babakan Siliwangi Village as a Thematic Tourism Village. *National Scientific Symposium*, 1146–1155. <https://doi.org/10.30998/simponi.v0i0.445>
- Lambert, V. A., & Lambert, C. E. (2012). Qualitative descriptive research: An acceptable design. *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research*, 16(4), 255–256.
- Lane, B., & Kastenholz, E. (2015). Rural tourism: The evolution of practice and research approaches – towards a new generation concept? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(8–9), 1133–1156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2015.1083997>
- Li, J., Yang, Y., & Ye, Y. (2025). Rural Tourism, Economic Growth, and Environmental Sustainability: Empirical Evidence Based on County-Level Data in China. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 17(20). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17209215>
- Marsdenia, & Pranita, D. (2019). Thematic Villages as a Solution for Village Economic Self-Reliance in Cimareme Village, Ngamprah Subdistrict, West Bandung Regency, West Java. *Conference on Innovation and Application of Science and Technology, Ciastech*, 51–56
- Masilela, M., Hoogendoorn, G., & Visser, G. (2024). The Authenticity of Cultural Festivals as Perceived by Host Communities: A South African Case Study. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 13(3), 523–530. <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.536>
- Neuhofer, B., Buhalis, D., & Ladkin, A. (2012). Conceptualizing technology-enhanced destination experiences. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 1(1–2), 36–46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2012.08.001>
- Parantika, A., Wibowo, F. S., & Wiweka, K. (2020). The Development of Thematic Tourist Village of Mulyaharja Bogor Based on Community Empowerment Approach. *Tourism Research Journal*, 4(2).
- Pilving, T., Kull, T., Suškevics, M., & Viira, A. H. (2019). The tourism partnership life cycle in Estonia: Striving towards sustainable multisectoral rural tourism collaboration. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 31, 219–230.
- Pule Village Government. (2023). Document on the advancement of culture in Pule Village, Sawahan District, Madiun Regency, East Java. Pule Village Government.
- Putri, S. P. (2025). Innovative Tourism Sustainability: Case Study of Three Thematic Villages in Semarang City. *PERSPEKTIF*, 14(3), 529–537. <https://doi.org/10.31289/perspektif.v14i3.14291>



-
- Richards, G. (2018). Cultural tourism: A review of recent research and trends. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 36, 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.03.005>
- Sugiyono, D. (2013). Quantitative, qualitative, and R&D research methods. Alfabeta.
- Sukowati, R. T. (2022). The Thematic Village Program: Issues in the Transformation of Urban Villages into Tourist Destinations. *Journal of Humanistic Educational Sociology*, 7(3), 27–43. <http://journal2.um.ac.id/index.php/jsph/>
- Sutanudjaja, E., Kusumawijaya, M., Qisthi, M. Z., & Gumilang, I. (2018). Strategy for a Social City in Indonesia.
- Syafrini, D., Amelia, L., Sasmita, S., Susilawati, N., Dinda Permata, B., Saputri, F., Yolanda, M. N., & Sari, M. D. (2026). Transforming traditional villages into cultural heritage tourism destinations: Insights from the Minangkabau community in Indonesia. *Social Sciences and Humanities Open*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2026.102475>
- Tamara, A. P., & Rahdriawan, M. (2018). Study of the Implementation of the Thematic Village Concept in the Hydroponic Village of Tanjung Mas, Semarang City. *Journal of Region and Environment*, 6 (1), 40–57. <https://doi.org/10.14710/jwl.6.1.40-57>
- Tang, C., Yang, Y., Liu, Y., & Xiao, X. (2023). Comprehensive evaluation of the cultural inheritance level of tourism-oriented traditional villages: The example of Beijing. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2023.101166>
- UNWTO. (2018). *Tourism and Culture Synergies*. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284418978>
- Yanan, L., Ismail, M. A., & Aminuddin, A. (2024). How has rural tourism influenced the sustainable development of traditional villages? A systematic literature review. In *Heliyon* (Vol. 10, No. 4). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e25627>