

## **Digitalization of Indigenous Tourism Village Management: A Literature Review on the Readiness of Indigenous Communities**

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### **Abstract**

Indigenous-managed tourism villages are a key part of cultural tourism in Indonesia. Digital technology offers opportunities for promotion, local product marketing, and visitor management, yet the readiness of indigenous communities to adopt it is uneven. This article aims to develop a readiness framework for adopting digital technology in the management of indigenous tourism villages by synthesizing the literature on readiness factors, opportunities, and barriers. Using a narrative-thematic literature review, it analyzes 27 sources published in 2016–2026 (except one classic work), consisting of journal articles, a book, institutional reports, and media coverage, selected through explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. Five readiness dimensions are identified: infrastructure and digital access, digital literacy and human capacity, customary institutions and governance, cultural values and control over representation, and external support in the form of policy, partnerships, and business models. Opportunities lie in promotion, the local economy, cultural preservation, governance, and social engagement, while barriers include unequal access, limited capacity, dependence on platforms and external facilitators, and the risk of cultural commodification. The review concludes that digitalization of indigenous tourism villages is sustainable when it is participatory and the community retains control over its cultural narratives.

**Keywords:** Tourism Village, Indigenous Community, Digital Readiness, Technology Adoption, Community-Based Tourism

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism trends in Indonesia continue to change with time and circumstances, prompting tourism actors to adapt to current conditions. At present, tourism villages stand out as an alternative destination that is increasingly popular among travelers (Makiya, 2021). Tourism villages are one of the pillars of community-based tourism development in Indonesia. A tourism village can be understood as a development model that integrates attractions, accommodation, and supporting facilities into villagers' everyday lives, with local traditions as an integral part. This model is consistent with the principles of community-based tourism, in which local people act as the main implementers and as the beneficiaries (Suwidnyana et al., 2025). Examples include Penglipuran (Bali), Wae Rebo (East Nusa Tenggara), Kampung Naga (West Java), and various customary villages (*kampung adat*) in Nusa Tenggara (Beeh, 2017).

Village-level innovation is also an important strategy for narrowing the development gap between urban and rural areas. Several regions in Indonesia have adopted innovative approaches built on local potential to improve residents' welfare. One example is Kayangan Village, where leading local products are developed with the active involvement of women in entrepreneurship, showing that local wisdom can serve as a basis for sustainable economic innovation (Prasetyo & Reynansyah, 2023).

At the same time, information technology has changed how destinations are promoted and managed. Buhalis and Law (2008) showed that the internet has transformed the relationships among destinations, businesses, and tourists, while the concept of *smart tourism* emphasizes the use of data and technology to enhance visitor experiences and management efficiency (Gretzel et al., 2015). Tourists are now accustomed to searching for information, comparing reviews, and booking and paying online, so tourism villages without a digital presence risk being overlooked. Social media platforms and online travel agents (OTAs) have become the main promotional channels. The government also encourages the digital transformation of villages through digital village and tourism village programs (Prasetyo et al., 2025).

However, technology adoption among Indigenous communities has distinctive dimensions that set it apart from that in tourism villages in general. First, what is "marketed" is often knowledge, symbols, and sacred practices governed by customary (*adat*) rules. Second, decisions are made collectively through customary institutions, so the process can be slower and follow a different logic from business-based management. Third, many Indigenous communities live in remote areas with limited infrastructure and resources (Abdullah et al., 2026). In addition, technology can accelerate cultural commodification if it is not controlled by the community (Cohen, 1988). The readiness of Indigenous communities therefore needs to be examined before digitalization is expanded.

The existing literature has not yet fully addressed this need. Studies of *smart tourism* and the digital transformation of tourism villages generally focus on infrastructure, skills, and marketing (Gretzel et al., 2015; Prasetyo et al., 2025), whereas studies of commodification and cultural representation highlight the risks of digitalization (Cohen, 1988; Dananjaya, 2025). These two strands have rarely been brought together. Findings on specific Indigenous communities, such as the Baduy (Azus & Raharjana, 2024), Penglipuran (Astara et al., 2025), and the Abda'u tradition in Tulehu (Tatuhey & Hayat, 2026), also remain scattered as individual case studies. The gap this article addresses is therefore the absence of a literature synthesis that combines technical factors with factors specific to Indigenous communities, namely customary authority, the sacredness of culture, and collective decision-making, into a single framework of readiness to adopt digital technology.

The purpose of this article is to develop a framework of readiness to adopt digital technology in the management of Indigenous tourism villages based on a synthesis of the literature. The review addresses two questions: (1) What factors shape the readiness of Indigenous communities to adopt digital technology for tourism village management? (2) What opportunities and barriers does adoption entail? The resulting framework is intended to serve as a reference for community service programs and for further empirical research.

## METHOD

This study employed a literature review (*literature review*) with a narrative-thematic approach, which is suitable for interdisciplinary topics such as tourism, anthropology, and information systems (Snyder, 2019). This approach was chosen because the aim was to build a conceptual framework from diverse findings rather than to measure the size of an effect.

Literature was collected through Google Scholar, Scopus, Garuda, and DOAJ using keywords including *digital readiness*, *community-based tourism*, *indigenous tourism*, *desa wisata*

(tourism village), and *masyarakat adat* (Indigenous community). The search was limited to publications from 2016 to 2026, with the exception of classic works serving as conceptual references (e.g., MacCannell, 1973). Institutional reports and media coverage were used only as supporting data, for example for internet penetration figures and events on the ground.

Sources were included if they (1) addressed community-based tourism, tourism villages, or Indigenous communities; (2) discussed digital technology, literacy, governance, cultural representation, policy, or partnerships; (3) took the form of a journal article, book, or traceable institutional report; (4) were published between 2016 and 2026 or were classic works; and (5) were written in Indonesian or English. Sources were excluded if they (1) were not available in full text; (2) addressed technology alone without a connection to communities, culture, or tourism; (3) were opinion pieces without supporting data or references; or (4) were duplicate publications.

On the basis of these criteria, 27 sources were analyzed thematically: 19 journal articles, one book, and seven institutional reports or media items. Conceptual sources such as Buhalis and Law (2008), Gretzel et al. (2015), Cohen (1988), and Snyder (2019) were used to build the theoretical and methodological foundation and are therefore not counted among the 27 sources.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the main findings of each source were extracted and grouped according to the factors shaping readiness and the opportunities and barriers of adoption. Second, the groups of findings were compared across sources to identify patterns, similarities, and differences. Third, the results were integrated into a conceptual framework of five readiness dimensions, together with knowledge gaps that can guide further research.

The review closes with conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions summarize the main findings and their implications, while the recommendations offer practical guidance for those who wish to implement digitalization in the management of Indigenous tourism villages. Because this review did not formally assess source quality and covered only accessible sources, the resulting framework is conceptual and requires empirical testing.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The synthesis of 27 sources grouped the readiness of Indigenous communities into five dimensions: (1) infrastructure and digital access, (2) digital literacy and human resource capacity, (3) customary institutions and governance, (4) cultural values and control over representation, and (5) external support in the form of policy, partnerships, and business models. Opportunities and barriers across these dimensions are summarized in the table at the end of this section.

### **Infrastructure and Digital Access**

The literature on the digital transformation of villages consistently shows a digital divide between urban and rural areas, evident in limited network infrastructure and low digital literacy and skills among the population (Koswara et al., 2024). Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association estimate rural internet penetration in 2024 at approximately 74%, compared with approximately 82.2% in urban areas (APJII, 2024). The Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions (Kemendes PDT) also recorded that 22,544 villages still had difficulty accessing the internet and 2,919 villages were not yet electrified (Kemendes PDT, 2025).

These conditions tend to be more severe in customary villages. A study of smart villages in Merauke linked remote locations, limited infrastructure, and the cultural diversity of Indigenous

communities to challenges in implementing digitalization (Hombore, 2025). Wae Rebo, for example, is known for its very limited electricity and almost nonexistent mobile signal (Tribun Jogja, 2025). Similar patterns appear in Indigenous communities in other countries. In remote First Nations communities in Australia, access is the largest gap because telecommunications infrastructure is limited, and prepaid plans chosen to control spending turn out to be more expensive per gigabyte (*Australian Digital Inclusion Index*, 2023). Data costs and connectivity should therefore be understood as structural barriers rather than merely a matter of community willingness.

At the same time, tourists expect connectivity, whereas some communities restrict it for customary reasons. In 2023, the customary leaders of Inner Baduy asked the district government to remove or redirect the internet signal from their customary land (*tanah ulayat*), while Outer Baduy still needed a signal for business and communication with the government (Asumsi.co, 2023). The Ministry of Communication and Information (Kominfo) was subsequently reported to have cut the internet signal in the Inner Baduy area in line with that request (Teknologi.id, 2023). Such restrictions do not necessarily mean a total rejection of technology. A study of the Abda'u tradition in Tulehu found that community members' digital participation is selective and continues to respect customary norms, particularly in sacred rituals (Tatuhey & Hayat, 2026).

Inequality of access also exists within communities. The difference between Inner and Outer Baduy shows that digital needs and limits can differ between groups within a single Indigenous community. The main reason for the Inner Baduy request to cut the signal was to protect young people from the negative influence of the internet, and the village head acknowledged that some residents still use mobile phones secretly. In terms of gender and age, a study of urban and rural communities found that older women have more limited access to and use of digital technology than men (Zhang et al., 2025). Women in low- and middle-income countries are 16 percent less likely to use mobile internet, with a sharper gap in rural areas. Globally, about 71% of young people are online compared with 57% of the rest of the population, and 62% of men are online compared with 57% of women (global digital divide report). The digital readiness of Indigenous communities therefore cannot be measured at the community level alone; it must also be examined by generation and gender.

### **Digital Literacy and Human Resource Capacity**

The barrier most frequently cited in the literature is the low digital literacy of managers, which covers social media management, online marketing, reservation systems, digital financial record-keeping, and data security (Astuti, 2025). In Indigenous tourism villages, this limitation directly affects the community's ability to control the image and data of its own destination, making it easier for the community to become dependent on outside parties.

Technical knowledge concentrated in a few people, generally young people, creates a risk of dependence on individuals and weak regeneration. Training in Kunyi Village, for example, noted that although village administrators had been trained, the number of people involved in managing social media remained limited, so that the administrators' workload risked becoming too heavy and sustainability depended on the commitment of the village government and the community (Ramadhani et al., 2025).

A community service (KKN) study in Ambarawa Village concluded that sustained digital promotion requires consistency and the involvement of village youth, so digital literacy training

for young people is needed (Falah & Zaky, 2025). However, relying entirely on young people without a regeneration mechanism may in fact reinforce that dependence.

Support from government, universities, and NGOs generally takes the form of time-limited projects. The study in Ambarawa Village noted the short duration of the KKN program as one constraint. Jackson (2026), studying community-based tourism entrepreneurial ecosystems, recommends that development partners shift from short-term project funding to ecosystem investment in training, mentoring, infrastructure, digital connectivity, and market access, accompanied by a plan for the gradual transfer of responsibility to community governance. In Indigenous communities, a study of facilitation in Baduy reported that the sustainability and effectiveness of facilitation depend heavily on collaboration among institutions, including the village government and customary leaders (Azus & Raharjana, 2024). New digital skills can thus be internalized when facilitation is designed together with customary institutions and includes the regeneration of managers.

### **Customary Institutions and Governance**

Customary structures have strong social legitimacy and can potentially serve as the foundation of accountable digital governance. In Bali, Customary Village Regional Regulation No. 4/2019 recognizes customary villages as subjects of customary law communities, and participatory training in drafting cooperation agreements in Penglipuran shows that clear rules can strengthen the legal legitimacy of customary villages while combining economic interests with cultural preservation (Astara et al., 2025). A study in the Ngadas Indigenous Tourism Village, Malang, also reported that tourism management depends on the participation of the Indigenous community in traditional organizations under the guidance of customary leaders, and that active involvement of the community can increase the effectiveness of the tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis) without setting aside customary values (Azus & Raharjana, 2024). In other words, customary institutions are not only guardians of culture but can also serve as the basis for legitimate decision-making that is trusted by residents.

However, this legitimacy does not automatically answer the new questions that digitalization raises: who has the authority to decide digital matters, who may upload ritual content, who manages official accounts, and who receives platform revenue. The CARE framework for Indigenous data governance offers a useful reference. The principle of *authority to control* affirms the right of communities to establish cultural governance protocols over their data and to lead the management of and access to that data, while the principle of *collective benefit* requires that the benefits of data return to the community (Carroll et al., 2020). Ritual content, photographs of customary houses, and visitor data can be read as community data of this kind, so clarity about digital authority should be set by customary institutions before platforms and outside parties determine it.

The problem becomes more complicated when customary institutions coexist with formal tourism village managers such as Pokdarwis or village-owned enterprises (BUMDes). This dualism can cause overlapping authority and conflicts over benefit sharing. A study in Cikakak Tourism Village, for example, noted a conflict of interest between BUMDes and Pokdarwis as managers, while a study of collaboration in Sesaot Tourism Village showed that the division of tasks, coordination, and distribution of economic benefits were not yet optimal and therefore required a clear division of roles, communication, and trust (Dianti et al., 2026). Penglipuran's

experience offers one way forward: setting out profit sharing, management responsibilities, and the protection of cultural values in writing in a participatively drafted cooperation agreement (Astara et al., 2025). A similar lesson can be applied to digital governance: authority over content, accounts, and platform revenue needs to be formulated from the outset rather than waiting for conflict to arise.

### **Cultural Values and Control over Representation**

This dimension is the most distinctive in Indigenous contexts. The cultural tourism literature highlights the risks of commodification and of the front and back stages of cultural life (MacCannell, 1973): tourists' search for authenticity drives the industry to "stage" that authenticity, so that sacred rituals may shift into performances for tourist consumption. A study of a tourism village noted that a customary ceremony that was originally sacred and lengthy had been condensed into a 15–20-minute performance, and concluded that without a participatory regulatory framework, commodification risks eroding the cultural capital that constitutes the village's main attraction (Dananjaya, 2025).

Digitalization magnifies this risk because photographs, videos, and stories can spread widely without control. A literature review on digital globalization notes that customary rituals risk being recorded and disseminated without regard for privacy, sacredness, or community consent, while traditional dress may be worn as a costume without an explanation of its symbolic meaning (Zulvia et al., 2026). Three main issues emerge. The first is the violation of taboos, for example photographing areas or ceremonies that may not be documented. The second is the misuse of traditional motifs and knowledge. Traditional cultural expressions include batik and woven motifs, songs, dances, and customary rites, and their protection is intended to prevent misappropriation and to position Indigenous peoples not merely as objects of protection but as the primary subjects in managing and utilizing them (Pebrianto et al., 2026). The third is exoticizing narratives constructed by outsiders. A study of Sámi tourism marketing materials found that depictions based on exoticism persist and that such images can circulate across media through a "circle of representation," while the way destination marketing organizations portray a place may conflict with the views of local residents (de Bernardi, 2022).

Indigenous communities therefore need to decide for themselves what may and may not be digitized. The separation of sacred space and spectator space in the Perang Topat shows that such boundaries can be defined by the community itself (Zulvia et al., 2026), in line with the idea that Indigenous peoples are the primary subjects rather than objects of protection (Pebrianto et al., 2026), and with the finding that commodification is most risky when no participatory rule framework exists (Dananjaya, 2025). In digital practice, this means that customary institutions need first to establish clear protocols: which parts of rituals, areas, motifs, and knowledge may be documented, who may upload them, and what narratives may be used, before platforms and outside parties decide.

### **External Support: Policy, Partnerships, and Business Models**

Government programs promote tourism villages and digital villages but often use uniform indicators that are insufficiently sensitive to Indigenous specificity. The 2024 Indonesian Tourism Village Awards (ADWI), for example, assess tourism villages in five categories (attractions, amenities, digital, institutions and human resources, and resilience), and all tourism villages registered in the national tourism village network (JADESTA) automatically become participants.

The indicators do include elements of local wisdom, such as digital products and content that embody local wisdom, but one and the same assessment instrument is applied to villages with very different characteristics. Matters that are important to Indigenous communities, such as the boundaries of sacred space, the authority of customary institutions over content, or a decision not to be connected in certain areas, are not necessarily captured by such indicators. As a result, communities may be pushed to chase a "digital" score that is at odds with their customary values.

Partnerships with platforms and investors can open markets but often leave communities with weak bargaining positions. A study of local accommodation managers in Labuan Bajo noted that managers considered online travel agent (OTA) commissions quite high and felt dependent on OTA algorithms and rules (Ciptosari & Halim, 2025). A study of digital tourism platforms likewise concluded that independent service providers face high commissions to participate in dominant platforms, which limits their profits and increases their dependence on third-party digital markets, while the concentration of data and algorithmic decision-making reinforces structural inequality. On the data side, the platform governance literature notes that tourism data can be controlled by third-party commercial actors, so that authorities and local communities depend on incomplete or externally mediated information, and this asymmetry can reinforce data extraction and neo-colonial dynamics in the platformization of tourism (Zeqiri & Youssef, 2025). For Indigenous communities, this risk is more serious because data held by third parties may include ritual photographs, narratives, and visitor data.

The financial sustainability of digital systems, such as subscriptions, maintenance, and content updates, is also rarely calculated from the outset. A study in Kemutug Lor Tourism Village noted that before the facilitation program, the village's website contained fewer than five active content items and was not updated regularly. The program then prepared for sustainability by handing the management of the website and social media accounts to trained tourism village administrators and business operators and by establishing a digital content bank (Hidayat & Arum, 2026). This example shows that a digital system built through a project depends on who pays for, maintains, and populates it after the project ends. The costs of domain registration, hosting, maintenance, and content updates should therefore be included in the village budget plan from the outset rather than being borne by facilitators or platforms.

### **Opportunities and Barriers**

| <b>Aspect</b> | <b>Opportunities</b>                                                                       | <b>Barriers</b>                                                                             |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Promotion     | Reaching global markets at relatively low cost through social media and digital platforms. | Dependence on platform algorithms, changing trends, and competition for content visibility. |
| Economy       | Marketing craft products directly, expanding markets, and using digital payments.          | Price competition, platform costs, and limited access to and capacity for logistics.        |
| Preservation  | Documenting and archiving cultural heritage digitally so                                   | Risk of cultural commodification, loss of                                                   |

| Aspect     | Opportunities                                                                                                        | Barriers                                                                                         |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|            | that it is easier to access and study.                                                                               | local context, and inaccurate cultural representation.                                           |
| Governance | Supporting online reservations, visit recording, data management, and transparency of tourism services.              | Limited human resources, digital infrastructure, funding, and technical skills among managers.   |
| Social     | Increasing young people's involvement in promotion, documentation, and the development of local cultural innovation. | Gaps in technology access and digital literacy between generations and between community groups. |

Source: Authors' synthesis, 2026

## CONCLUSION

Digitalization of Indigenous tourism village management offers opportunities for market expansion, service efficiency, and cultural documentation, but it also brings risks of commodification and loss of control over knowledge and cultural representation. The synthesis identified five readiness dimensions: (1) infrastructure and digital access, (2) digital literacy and human resource capacity, (3) customary institutions and governance, (4) cultural values and control over representation, and (5) external support in the form of policy, partnerships, and business models. Opportunities for digitalization lie in promotion, the economy, cultural preservation, governance, and social engagement, while the barriers include unequal access, limited capacity, dependence on platforms and facilitators, and the risk of cultural commodification. This review concludes that digitalization of Indigenous tourism villages will be sustainable when it is carried out participatively and Indigenous communities retain control over their cultural narratives. The most decisive factor is the extent to which the community controls the process and its benefits; sustainable digitalization must therefore start from the community's needs and rules rather than merely from program targets.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For tourism village managers and Indigenous communities: develop adat-based digital content guidelines and involve younger generations in the management team.
2. For government and facilitators: provide continuous training and infrastructure using a participatory approach.
3. For future researchers: test the readiness framework empirically through qualitative case studies of specific Indigenous tourism villages.

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