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Digital Participatory Development Communication and Community Engagement in Tourism Governance: Evidence from Bur Telege

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ABSTRACT

Digital communication increasingly facilitates community engagement in tourism governance, yet access to digital platforms does not necessarily translate into meaningful participation in decision-making. This study examines the effectiveness of digital participatory development communication (DPDC) and its relationship with community participation in Bur Telege tourism governance in Hakim Bale Dedalu Village, Indonesia. The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, combining a quantitative survey with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. The quantitative findings indicate relatively low levels of DPDC effectiveness and community participation, despite a significant positive relationship between the two. Regression analysis shows that DPDC accounts for 37% of the variance in community participation. The qualitative findings further explain this relationship, identifying local economic opportunities and social capital as enabling factors, while limited digital and human-resource capacities, weak institutional coordination, and insufficient transparency constrain meaningful community engagement. These findings suggest that digital communication serves primarily as an enabling infrastructure for participation rather than an autonomous driver of engagement. Theoretically, this study integrates Participatory Communication Theory, Network Society Theory, and Arnstein's Ladder of Participation to explain how digital access, communicative capacity, and decision-making power shape community participation in tourism governance. Practically, the findings underscore the need to complement existing digital communication channels with capacity development, institutional coordination, greater transparency, and inclusive decision-making processes to strengthen community engagement and promote sustainable tourism governance.

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INTRODUCTION

Community engagement is widely recognized as a fundamental component of sustainable tourism, as local communities are not merely beneficiaries of tourism development but also stakeholders in negotiating tourism resources, cultural identities, and development priorities. In contemporary tourism contexts increasingly shaped by digital mediation, community engagement extends beyond direct participation in tourism activities

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and physical presence at formal meetings. Digital media provide additional channels for communities to access information, articulate perspectives, interact with tourism stakeholders, and potentially contribute to decision-making. From a communication perspective, digital media matter not only because they disseminate information, but also because they create communicative environments that support community visibility, voice, deliberation, and influence in tourism governance.

Theoretically, this potential aligns with participatory communication, which views communication as a dialogic process through which communities' articulate interests, negotiate meanings, and contribute to collective decisions (Kheerajit & Flor, 2013; Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Digital platforms can expand these processes by connecting dispersed actors and enabling more continuous interaction. Network Society Theory further explains that digital networks reshape patterns of visibility, connectivity, and access to information (Castells, 2009). However, inclusive involvement does not always follow from the development of digital networks. Institutional frameworks, disparities in digital capabilities, unequal access, and current power dynamics can shape whose voices are heard and whose interests remain marginalized. Therefore, whether digital communication is structured to turn information availability into meaningful involvement matters more than whether tourist stakeholders have access to digital media.

Existing tourism research has established the importance of community participation in sustainable tourism development and local welfare, while also identifying institutional, cultural, and structural barriers that may limit meaningful involvement (Iqbal et al., 2022; Khazaei et al., 2015; Reindrawati, 2023). In the Indonesian context, community-based tourism has been shown to support local welfare and strengthen community involvement when underpinned by appropriate institutional arrangements and collective governance (Suyatna et al., 2024). However, these studies offer limited insight into how digital communication contexts shape how communities access information, engage in dialogue, and influence tourism-related decision-making. Related research emphasizes that meaningful participation requires communication processes that extend beyond information dissemination to facilitate reciprocal interaction, dialogue, and opportunities for community input (Murtiningsih et al., 2024; Ritasari et al., 2024). Taken together, these findings point to the need to examine not merely the availability of digital communication channels, but how they enable or constrain participatory processes in tourism governance.

A second body of research focuses on digital media and tourism communication, particularly their capacity to increase visibility, promotion, audience reach, and stakeholder engagement. Digital platforms can strengthen tourism communication and provide economic opportunities for local communities, including through digital marketing and social media promotion (Ainin et al., 2020; Maulana et al., 2025; Yudaninggar & Damastuti, 2023). However, much of this literature evaluates digital media primarily in terms of promotional effectiveness, communication reach, or engagement metrics. Such approaches do not sufficiently distinguish between communication that generates attention or economic activity and communication that enables communities to deliberate, influence decisions, and participate in governance. This distinction is particularly important because high levels of digital visibility may coexist with low levels of decision-making power.

A third strand of scholarship examines digital participation and governance, highlighting the potential of online communication to support civic engagement, transparency, and social connectedness. However, these outcomes are not guaranteed by technological adoption alone, as they remain shaped by digital inequality, institutional transparency, and the design of participatory mechanisms (Bertot et al., 2010; Boulianne, 2015; Meijer et al., 2012). This perspective is further informed by Network Society Theory, which explains how communication networks connect actors while potentially reproducing inequalities in access and communicative power (Castells, 2009). Despite these insights, existing research remains insufficiently integrated to explain how local digital media environments, communication processes, and institutional conditions interact to shape community engagement in tourism governance. This issue is particularly relevant given the recognition of local residents as essential actors in tourism governance, whose knowledge and involvement can contribute to collaborative planning and locally responsive development

(Bichler, 2021). Whether such involvement translates into meaningful influence, however, depends on the institutional arrangements and participatory mechanisms through which community voices are incorporated into tourism-related decision-making.

Therefore, the research gap extends beyond a lack of studies on digital tourism in Aceh. More importantly, previous research has not sufficiently described how digital media become, or fail to become, participatory in local tourism governance. Prior research often treats governance conditions, digital tourist communication, and community involvement as distinct aspects. The interplay among these dimensions- how digital media accessibility and configuration shape communication processes, how those processes affect participation quality, and how institutional, cultural, and technological factors mediate the transformation of communication into meaningful community influence- remains underexplored. Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969) helps determine whether participation reflects true influence or token inclusion. Still, it cannot explain how modern digital communication systems facilitate or impede movement between levels. Similarly, Network Society Theory describes the structural characteristics of digital connectedness, while Participatory Communication Theory emphasizes discussion and inclusivity. Therefore, rather than considering these viewpoints as separate theoretical lenses, the analytical problem is to link them.

Central Aceh's Bur Telege offers a pertinent empirical context for filling this gap. Community participation in tourist governance remains scarce and uneven despite rising tourism and expanding internet communication. According to the Central Aceh Tourist Office, only around 15% of locals actively participate in tourist management, and local surveys show that views of low participation in decision-making remain prevalent. These circumstances highlight a conflict between achieving meaningful engagement and the accessibility of communication channels. Although digital media are available, their primary purposes still seem promotional and informative rather than collaborative and deliberative. Therefore, this case offers a chance to investigate not just whether digital media are used, but also the institutional, cultural, and technological circumstances under which their use might lead to meaningful community participation.

This study's innovation is an integrated Digital Participatory Development Communication (DPDC) model that describes community engagement as the result of interactions among three analytically related dimensions: participatory communication processes, digital media ecology, and institutional, cultural, and technological mediating conditions. The model views digital media as a socio-technical environment whose participatory consequences depend on how access, platform use, communicative practices, and governance arrangements align, unlike approaches that treat digital media primarily as communication or promotional tools. The model also applies participatory communication and Arnstein's participation framework to a local tourism context, explaining why digital communication channels can lead to instrumental/token participation or more substantive community influence. Thus, rather than focusing on whether digital media boosts involvement, the study explores how and when digital communication might be converted into participatory tourism governance.

Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) examine the extent to which Digital Participatory Development Communication is associated with meaningful community engagement in tourism governance in Bur Telege; and (2) identify the technological, cultural, and institutional factors that facilitate or constrain the transformation of digital communication into substantive community participation. This study aims to contribute to the development communication and media studies literature by offering a context-sensitive explanation of digital participation in tourism governance, particularly in emerging and structurally constrained tourism destinations. It does this by combining quantitative evidence on the relationship between digital participatory development communication and community engagement with qualitative evidence on the mechanisms and contextual conditions that shape that relationship.

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METHOD

This study employed an Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods (ESMM) design to examine the relationship between Digital Participatory Development Communication (DPDC) and community participation in tourism governance at Bur Telege, Hakim Bale Dedalu Village, Central Aceh, Indonesia. The research was conducted in two sequential phases, beginning with a quantitative survey to assess the levels of development communication and community participation and to examine their statistical relationship. The subsequent qualitative phase explored the institutional, communicative, and contextual factors underlying the quantitative findings. The two phases were integrated during interpretation to explain whether and how digital communication was associated with community participation, and under what conditions it facilitated meaningful engagement in tourism governance. The study was guided by Participatory Communication Theory (Melkote & Steeves, 2001), Network Society Theory (Castells, 2009), and Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969). These perspectives informed the operationalization of research variables, the development of the questionnaire and interview guide, and the interpretation of findings. Specifically, they provided a framework for examining how digital communication facilitates information exchange and community engagement, and how dialogue, institutional responsiveness, and opportunities for decision-making shape the extent of community participation in tourism governance.

The quantitative phase was conducted among residents of Hakim Bale Dedalu Village, the community associated with Bur Telege tourism development. The study used purposive sampling to select 100 respondents based on their knowledge of, or involvement in, tourism-related activities and community participation. The study examined tourism development's potential to create alternative employment, business, and income-generating opportunities, particularly for residents with limited employment options, including retirees. The study also considered respondents' exposure to digital communication channels, such as WhatsApp and social media. The respondents were generally between 35 and 65 years old, predominantly male, and mainly senior high school (SMA) graduates, with a substantial proportion being pensioners. To accommodate differences in digital access, the researchers distributed questionnaires online and offline, including via Google Forms, WhatsApp, and direct administration.

The qualitative phase involved six purposively selected informants with direct experience or institutional knowledge of BUMK operations, Bur Telege tourism management, and community participation. Informants were selected based on four criteria: (1) membership in the BUMK organizational structure; (2) prior participation in focus group discussions (FGDs) concerning BUMK governance; (3) active involvement in BUMK activities, particularly in the management of Bur Telege's entrepreneurial and economic initiatives; and (4) sustained commitment to BUMK membership. The FGDs were conducted before the interviews and served as an initial forum to explore issues related to BUMK governance and identify individuals with relevant experience and knowledge for the subsequent interviews. The selected informants comprised Fauzuluddin (Director of BUMK Bur Telege), Asbul (Head of Hakim Bale Dedalu Village), Albar Abdullah (Chairperson of the BUMK Bur Telege Supervisory Board), Syahrul Ramadhan (Secretary of Hakim Bale Dedalu Village), Erwin Pratama (Head of the Central Aceh Tourism Office), and Khalisuddin (tourism observer). Their diverse institutional and professional perspectives provided information-rich insights into communication practices, transparency, institutional responsiveness, and community participation, enabling triangulation and contextual explanation of the quantitative findings.

The quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire with 20 items: 10 measuring Development Communication (X1–X10) and 10 measuring Community Participation (Y1–Y10). Each item was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Development communication was operationalized through indicators covering information accessibility, clarity, timeliness, transparency, opportunities for input, accessibility of communication channels, communication reach, institutional responsiveness, opportunities for discussion, and participation in tourism-management meetings. Community participation was measured through indicators covering the

expression of community opinions, involvement in tourism management, willingness to contribute, tourism-related income and employment opportunities, business opportunities, environmental sustainability, the perceived importance of participation, and obstacles associated with information access, invitations, and activity schedules. The qualitative instrument used a semi-structured interview guide covering digital communication practices, information availability, dialogue, institutional responsiveness, transparency, representation, decision-making, economic benefits, and barriers to meaningful community involvement.

The validity of the quantitative instrument was assessed using the Pearson Product-Moment corrected item-total correlation. Based on a sample of 100 respondents and 98 degrees of freedom, the critical correlation value at the .05 significance level was r = 0.1966. All 20 questionnaire items (X1–X10 and Y1–Y10) demonstrated corrected item-total correlation coefficients exceeding the critical value of 0.1966, indicating that all items met the established criterion for validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The instrument achieved a Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70. This indicates that the questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and was considered reliable for this study.

Quantitative data from the 100 respondents were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics summarized response patterns and mean scores. Pearson's Product-Moment correlation and simple linear regression also examined the relationship between Development Communication and Community Participation. They estimated the extent to which development communication accounted for variation in community participation. The qualitative data were examined to identify institutional, communicative, and contextual factors that helped explain the quantitative findings, particularly those concerning digital communication practices, institutional coordination, transparency, responsiveness, and opportunities for community involvement. The qualitative findings were then integrated with the quantitative results during interpretation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between DPDC and community participation in tourism governance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Effectiveness Of Digital Participatory Development Communication

The quantitative findings indicate that Digital Participatory Development Communication (DPDC) in Bur Telege remains relatively limited (M = 2.10), with the lowest scores for participation in deliberative forums (M = 1.70), communication reach (M = 1.80), and information timeliness (M = 1.90). Community participation recorded an overall mean of 2.40, with low deliberative involvement (M = 2.00), despite comparatively higher scores for employment (M = 3.00), income generation (M = 2.90), willingness to contribute (M = 2.80), and the perceived importance of participation for tourism sustainability (M = 2.70). DPDC was positively and significantly associated with community participation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$), while regression analysis showed that it explained 37% of the variance in community participation ($R^2 = 0.37$; $b = 0.52$, $p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that more effective development communication is associated with greater community participation in tourism governance. However, the remaining 63% of unexplained variance suggests that social, economic, and institutional factors also shape participation.

The qualitative findings further explain the patterns observed in the quantitative results. Figure 1 illustrates the thematic distribution of communication and community participation in Bur Telege, highlighting the relative strengths and limitations of existing communication and engagement arrangements. The strongest thematic dimension was economic benefit (M = 2.95), followed by commitment and sustainability (M = 2.63) and participation barriers (M = 2.50). Dialogue and responsiveness recorded a mean score of 2.30, while access and information reach, timeliness and transparency, and involvement in decision-making each scored 2.00. The overall item mean was 2.31. This pattern indicates that community

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engagement is more evident in economic opportunities and collective commitment than in the communication processes that enable participation in tourism governance.

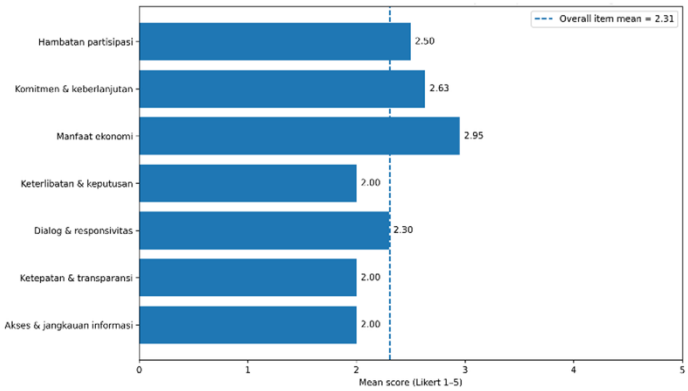


Figure 1. Thematic Pattern of Communication and Community Participation in Bur Telege
Source: Primary Data (2025)

This distinction is clearest in the contrast between community willingness to contribute and actual involvement in decision-making. Participation in management meetings received a low score (M = 1.70), whereas willingness to participate without compensation (M = 2.80) and the perceived importance of participation for sustainability (M = 2.70) were comparatively higher. This suggests that limited participation is not solely due to a lack of community willingness. Instead, a gap exists between willingness to contribute to tourism development and opportunities to influence its planning and management.

Digital communication practices help explain this gap. Digital platforms, particularly WhatsApp, primarily disseminate information and coordinate collective activities. As Informant C stated, "*Kalau ada rapat atau gotong royong, langsung diberitahu di grup WA, jadi cepat sampai*." This account illustrates WhatsApp's role in facilitating information sharing and coordinating community activities. However, the availability of digital channels does not guarantee equal access to information. Informant E explained, "*Kami tidak tahu pakai internet, jadi kalau ada info di WA kadang ketinggalan*." This account highlights how differences in digital capacity may prevent some community members from accessing information circulated through digital platforms. Consequently, the effectiveness of digital communication depends not only on the availability of communication channels but also on community members' capacity to access and use them.

Economic motivation also emerged as an important factor shaping community involvement. Informant I stated, "*Kalau ada imbalan kami ikut, kalau tidak ya susah*." This account corresponds with the relatively high thematic score for economic benefits (M = 2.95), suggesting that economic incentives encourage participation in tourism-related activities. Nevertheless, participation motivated by income-generating opportunities does not necessarily extend to involvement in tourism planning or decision-making. Economic participation and governance participation therefore represent distinct dimensions of community engagement.

At the institutional level, fragmented coordination further constrains meaningful participation. Informant F stated, "*Setiap pihak jalan sendiri-sendiri, belum ada panduan jelas*." This account reflects the lack of coordinated institutional arrangements for facilitating community engagement. The qualitative analysis also identified economic opportunities and social capital as enabling conditions, while limited digital and human-resource capacity, weak coordination, and insufficient transparency emerged as constraints. These findings suggest that DPDC effectiveness depends on the institutional and social conditions in which digital communication is implemented.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings shows that DPDC in Bur Telege is more effective for information dissemination and activity coordination than for deliberation and

decision-making. The quantitative results show a positive, statistically significant relationship between DPDC and community participation (r = 0.61), with DPDC accounting for 37% of the variance in participation (R^2 = 0.37). However, the relatively low scores for communication reach, information timeliness, deliberative engagement, and decision-making involvement indicate that the existing communication arrangements have not yet enabled substantial community influence in tourism governance.

The qualitative findings explain the conditions underlying this relationship. WhatsApp and other digital channels facilitate information distribution and collective coordination, but differences in digital capacity limit equitable access. Economic incentives encourage participation in tourism activities, but do not necessarily provide opportunities to influence governance. Meanwhile, fragmented institutional coordination and insufficient transparency constrain the translation of communication into meaningful participation. These findings show that the relationship between DPDC and community participation depends not only on digital communication itself but also on the social, economic, and institutional conditions that facilitate participation.

This distinction is consistent with recent research showing that digital platforms can create opportunities for participatory tourism governance, while digital inequality and institutional barriers may constrain their realization (Jamalludin et al., 2025). In Bur Telege, digital communication channels have facilitated information exchange, but access to information does not automatically translate into opportunities for dialogue, consultation, or influence over decision-making. Meaningful participation therefore requires more than providing communication channels; it also depends on whether community members can access information, express their views, receive institutional responses, and influence tourism-related decisions.

Taken together, the findings suggest that DPDC functions primarily as an enabling infrastructure for community participation rather than an autonomous driver of engagement. This interpretation is consistent with previous research showing that digital transformation does not automatically lead to community empowerment or substantive participation, as its effects depend on local capabilities and institutional conditions (Lapuz, 2023; Xu & Hu, 2021). In Bur Telege, inclusive access, communicative capacity, institutional coordination, transparency, and opportunities for deliberation shape how digital communication contributes to participation. These conditions influence whether community members can move beyond receiving information to expressing concerns, engaging in dialogue, and contributing to tourism-related decision-making. Strengthening these conditions is therefore essential to bridge the gap between community willingness to participate and actual involvement in tourism governance, ultimately supporting more inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

Digital Media Enablers and Barriers to Community Engagement

The NVivo analysis identified interconnected enabling and constraining factors shaping community engagement in Bur Telege tourism governance. The findings indicate that local economic opportunities, social and religious capital, and accessible communication channels facilitate engagement. In contrast, limited human-resource capacity, digital constraints, weak coordination, and insufficient transparency impede it. These findings suggest that digital media does not determine community participation on its own; rather, its influence depends on the social, economic, and institutional contexts in which it operates.

In Table 1, coding references indicate the number of NVivo references assigned to each factor, while informants mentioning refers to the number of informants who referred to the factor. Intensity follows the NVivo coding matrix. The coding matrix identifies local MSME economic potential and social and religious capital as the most prominent enabling factors. At the same time, inadequate human-resource competence and digital limitations emerge as the most prominent barriers. Effective communication through village meetings and WhatsApp, along with government support, creates additional conditions conducive to engagement. These findings suggest that community participation depends not only on

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digital communication but also on resources and relationships embedded in the local social and economic context.

Table 1. NVivo Coding of Digital Media Enablers and Barriers to Community Engagement

Category	Factor	Coding References	Informants Mentioning	Intensity
Enabler	Local MSME economic potential	12	5	High
Enabler	Social and religious capital	10	4	High
Enabler	Effective communication (village meetings and WhatsApp)	8	3	Moderate
Enabler	Government optimism/support	6	3	Moderate
Barrier	Digital limitations	9	4	High
Barrier	Inadequate human-resource competence	11	5	High
Barrier	Weak inter-actor coordination	7	3	Moderate
Barrier	Limited transparency	8	4	Moderate
Barrier	Community pragmatism	6	3	Moderate
Barrier	Weak environmental policy implementation	5	2	Low

Source: Primary Data (2025)

Economic opportunities provide a tangible incentive for community involvement. Informant A explained, "*Kalau banyak pengunjung, otomatis warung kopi kami laku. Dari situ masyarakat jadi semangat ikut menjaga tempat wisata ini*." This account illustrates how tourism-related economic benefits can motivate residents to support and participate in tourism activities. Social and religious capital also facilitates collective action by providing established networks and spaces for interaction. As Informant B noted, "*Biasanya kalau ada masalah, kami bicarakan di balai desa setelah shalat*." Village and religious networks therefore serve as social spaces for communication, trust-building, and collective discussion.

Existing communication channels further facilitate engagement by supporting information dissemination and activity coordination. Informant C stated, "*Kalau ada rapat atau gotong royong, langsung diberitahu di grup WA, jadi cepat sampai*." WhatsApp and village meetings consequently function as practical mechanisms for informing residents about meetings and collective activities. However, these channels' effectiveness depends on community members' ability to access and use them, as well as on the availability of complementary communication arrangements.

The most prominent barriers concern digital limitations and inadequate human-resource competence. Informant E reported, "*Kami tidak tahu pakai internet, jadi kalau ada info di WA kadang ketinggalan*." This account shows that having a digital platform does not necessarily ensure effective access to information or participation in communication. Digital inequality thus extends beyond technological availability to include the capacity to receive, understand, and respond to information. Consequently, reliance on digital channels may inadvertently exclude community members with limited digital skills or access.

Institutional constraints further limit translating communication into collective action. Informant F stated, "*Setiap pihak jalan sendiri-sendiri, belum ada panduan jelas*," pointing to fragmented coordination among the actors involved in tourism governance. Similarly, Informant H reported, "*Kami tidak pernah tahu laporan keuangan dari hasil wisata ini*," reflecting concerns about limited transparency. These accounts align with the NVivo coding of weak inter-actor coordination and limited transparency, suggesting that institutional arrangements and information-sharing practices remain insufficiently integrated to support sustained community engagement.

The study also identified community pragmatism as a moderate barrier. Although economic benefits strongly motivate participation, involvement driven primarily by immediate economic interests may not translate into sustained engagement in planning and decision-making. This distinction suggests that economic participation does not necessarily translate into participation in tourism governance. Finally, weak environmental policy implementation received a lower intensity rating and was therefore identified as a secondary constraint relative to the more prominent digital, human-resource, and institutional barriers.

Participatory Communication and Community Dialogue

From a Participatory Communication perspective, Digital Participatory Development Communication (DPDC) in Bur Telege remains largely informational rather than fully dialogic. Participatory communication extends beyond information availability to include reciprocal interaction, feedback, negotiation, and opportunities for stakeholders to influence decision-making (Ariti et al., 2019; Kwatra et al., 2020). Digital communication can support these processes by strengthening engagement and facilitating participatory interaction (Marschlich & Ingenhoff, 2021; Yudarwati & Gregory, 2022). However, having communication channels does not necessarily translate into meaningful dialogue or participation.

The findings from Bur Telege illustrate this distinction. WhatsApp provides a practical way to distribute information and coordinate activities. Yet, low scores for deliberative participation ($M = 1.70$) and decision-making involvement ($M = 2.00$) indicate that communication remains predominantly informational rather than deliberative. Community members may receive information about meetings and activities without having meaningful opportunities to set agendas, shape decisions, or ensure that their preferences are incorporated into tourism management. The positive association between DPDC and community participation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) nevertheless indicates that digital communication has participatory value.

The central challenge, therefore, is not simply to expand information dissemination but to strengthen the dialogic dimension of communication. Digital platforms need to facilitate opportunities for community members to articulate their interests, exchange perspectives, provide feedback, and participate in deliberation. The findings suggest that DPDC contributes to community engagement when communication extends beyond informing residents to enabling interaction and opportunities to influence tourism planning and management.

Digital Communication and Unequal Participation

The findings can also be interpreted through Network Society Theory (Castells, 2009), which highlights the significance of networked communication in shaping social interaction and participation. In networked environments, participation depends not only on access to communication technologies but also on the capacity to use them effectively. Unequal digital capabilities may therefore constrain meaningful participation (Ainin et al., 2020). Community members' experiences of missing information circulated through WhatsApp illustrate this distinction. Digital inequality in Bur Telege extends beyond technological access to differences in the ability to receive, understand, respond to, and engage with information. Consequently, expanding digital platforms without strengthening users' capabilities may perpetuate existing participation gaps. Community members who cannot access or effectively use digital channels may remain excluded from information exchange and engagement opportunities.

This finding suggests that digital communication does not automatically translate into inclusive participation. Although access to digital platforms provides an important foundation, meaningful participation depends on whether community members can actively engage in communication networks and influence tourism-related decisions. Research on tourism-related social media highlights how communication practices and user interactions shape digital engagement (Pachucki et al., 2022; Nusair et al., 2024; Salsabila & Amali,

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2025). However, online activities such as liking, commenting, and sharing content do not necessarily provide opportunities to influence tourism governance. Where limited responsiveness and weak two-way interaction constrain audience engagement despite the use of digital platforms (Deslia & Amali, 2026; Yaros, 2026). DPDC therefore requires complementary interventions, including digital capacity building, accessible communication formats, and alternative channels to involve digitally excluded individuals. These findings extend existing research by distinguishing digital engagement from meaningful participation and emphasizing the institutional conditions through which community voices can influence tourism decision-making.

Community Participation and Decision-Making Power

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) further clarifies the distinction between community involvement in tourism activities and participation in tourism governance. The strongest thematic dimension was economic benefit (M = 2.95), while decision-making involvement remained relatively low (M = 2.00), and participation in management meetings was even lower (M = 1.70). This discrepancy indicates that community engagement in Bur Telege is more evident in tourism-related activities and economic benefits than in decision-making processes. Community members may benefit economically from tourism and contribute to tourism activities without exercising substantial influence over planning and management. Nevertheless, the relatively high willingness to participate without compensation (M = 2.80) and recognition of participation's importance for sustainability (M = 2.70) suggest that limited involvement is not solely due to a lack of motivation. Instead, the findings suggest that opportunities to translate community willingness into influence over decision-making remain limited.

In Arnstein's terms, participation has not yet translated into substantial decision-making power. Although opportunities for information sharing and consultation may exist, community input remains limited when it does not meaningfully influence decisions. This highlights a key finding: economic participation does not necessarily equate to participatory tourism governance. While digital platforms enable residents to express concerns and exchange perspectives (Ting, 2022), online engagement alone does not guarantee influence over institutional decisions. Meaningful participation requires communities to move beyond benefiting from tourism toward actively shaping its planning, management, and development.

Institutional Conditions for Participatory Tourism Governance

The findings suggest that digital communication's participatory potential depends on institutional conditions. Fragmented coordination, limited transparency, and weak decision-making mechanisms constrain digital platforms' role in tourism governance. While platforms facilitate information circulation, they cannot independently ensure feedback, responsiveness, or the integration of community input into formal decisions. Consequently, improved access to information does not necessarily translate into greater community influence. Weak coordination among government, BUMK, and community actors may leave digital communication focused on activity-related information, while limited transparency regarding tourism revenues, resource management, and decision-making reduces communities' ability to assess governance practices and participate meaningfully.

These findings align with Ansell and Gash (2008), who emphasize the importance of institutional arrangements in collaborative governance, and with Bertot et al. (2010) and Meijer et al. (2012), who link transparency and accessible information to trust and public participation. The absence of a sufficiently integrated digital tourism strategy within RIDPAR further reinforces these institutional limitations. The qualitative findings indicate that communication among government, BUMK, and community actors remains largely reactive, reflecting the absence of a shared planning framework that connects communication activities with tourism governance and decision-making. The findings therefore suggest that the challenge extends beyond digital literacy or the availability of communication channels. It concerns institutional integration and responsiveness: whether communication networks

connect to governance procedures that consider, address, and incorporate community input into tourism planning and management. This helps explain why DPDC is positively associated with community participation but does not necessarily translate into substantial community influence over tourism governance.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that DPDC is necessary but not sufficient for meaningful community participation. The quantitative results show a significant relationship between DPDC and community participation, while the qualitative findings explain the social, economic, digital, and institutional conditions that shape it. Economic benefits currently drive community engagement more than decision-making participation, even though community members are willing to participate and recognize its importance for tourism sustainability. Meaningful participation therefore requires digital access, dialogic communication, and institutional responsiveness to operate together. Without dialogue, digital access provides information rather than involvement; without institutional responsiveness, communication may amount to consultation with limited impact.

The central finding is that Bur Telege does not primarily lack communication channels; rather, it lacks the communicative and institutional conditions required to convert those channels into meaningful influence. The pathway toward participatory tourism governance can consequently be conceptualized as a process in which digital access and communication create opportunities for dialogue, dialogue enables community input to be heard and addressed through institutional responsiveness, and these conditions collectively support meaningful community participation in tourism planning and decision-making. This pathway highlights how digital communication can move beyond information dissemination and activity coordination to enable communities to articulate their interests, influence tourism decisions, and contribute to the sustainable governance of tourism resources.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of Digital Participatory Development Communication (DPDC) and its relationship with community participation in Bur Telege tourism governance in Hakim Bale Dedalu Village, Indonesia. The findings reveal a positive, significant relationship, with DPDC explaining 37% of the variance in participation. However, its effectiveness is constrained by the predominantly informational nature of digital communication and limited community involvement in deliberation and decision-making. While digital platforms facilitate information exchange and coordination, economic opportunities and social and religious capital also motivate community engagement. Unequal digital capabilities, limited human-resource capacity, weak coordination, and insufficient transparency further restrict meaningful community influence. These findings suggest that DPDC effectiveness depends not only on digital connectivity but also on the communicative and institutional conditions supporting participation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding Digital Participatory Development Communication (DPDC) as an enabling condition for participatory tourism governance rather than an independent driver of community participation. Integrating Participatory Communication Theory, Network Society Theory, and Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, the findings highlight that digital access and involvement in tourism activities do not necessarily lead to dialogue or decision-making power. Meaningful participation depends on institutional responsiveness and opportunities for community input to influence tourism planning and management. Practically, the findings emphasize the need to move beyond providing digital communication channels toward more inclusive and participatory communication processes. Strengthening digital capacity, maintaining face-to-face communication, and establishing coordinated mechanisms for feedback and deliberation can help ensure that community input is meaningfully considered in tourism governance.

Future research could examine how the relationship between DPDC and community participation varies across tourism destinations with different digital capabilities, institutional structures, and levels of community involvement. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in assessing whether improvements in digital capacity, communication design, and

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institutional responsiveness lead to sustained changes in deliberative participation and decision-making influence. Comparative studies across rural tourism destinations could help establish the broader applicability of the findings and develop a more comprehensive framework for understanding how digital participatory development communication can contribute to inclusive and sustainable tourism governance.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Agung Pangeran Bungsu: Conceptualization; Methodology; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing; Validation; Supervision; Investigation. **Nur Sa'adah:** Investigation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing – review & editing; Visualization

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DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

The authors used ChatGPT (GPT-6), created by OpenAI, to help with language editing, improving academic clarity, and refining the writing structure throughout the creation of this work. AI was used only for linguistic features and paper presentation; it did not replace research data processing and interpretation. The authors have examined, confirmed, and edited all information produced with AI aid. The accuracy, originality, integrity, and ethical compliance of this manuscript are entirely the author's responsibility.

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