



Beyond social capital: Structural barriers and digital adaptation in Community-Based Tourism at Coban Jahe, Malang Regency

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<i>Keywords:</i> digital adaptation structural constraints social capital Community-Based Tourism digital transformation	This study aims to analyze the dynamics of digital adaptation in Community-Based Tourism management by examining the interaction between structural constraints and social capital at Coban Jahe Tourism, Malang Regency. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using Anthony Giddens' structuration theory and Robert Putnam's concept of social capital to understand the relationship among structure, agency, and the community's adaptive capacity. The findings indicate that digital adaptation remains at a stage of partial transition, where digital media have been introduced but have not yet been integrated into a sustainable tourism management strategy. Structural constraints, including limited electricity supply, inadequate internet access, insufficient training opportunities, and weak institutional support, restrict the managers' capacity to develop digital innovation. Meanwhile, social capital, manifested in internal solidarity, trust, and collective participation, contributes to maintaining the continuity of tourism management but has not been sufficient to foster digital transformation due to weak external networks. This study demonstrates that the digitalization of Community-Based Tourism is a social process shaped by the interplay of structural conditions, available resources, and the configuration of community social capital.

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Introduction

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has increasingly been recognized as an important approach to destination development that positions local communities as the primary actors in managing tourism resources. This model is oriented not only toward local economic growth but also toward social empowerment through community participation, the strengthening of collective capacity, and community sustainability (Yamin, 2024). From a sociological perspective, the success of this model is closely associated with the strength of social capital, particularly in the form of trust, shared norms, and collaborative networks that enable communities to organize collective action effectively (Putnam, 2000). Within the context of Community-Based Tourism, social capital is commonly regarded as the foundation that facilitates local participation, community solidarity, and the sustainable management of tourism destinations (Aji & Faniza, 2022; Alfiansyah, 2023).

Nevertheless, digital transformation in the tourism sector has fundamentally reshaped the ways destinations are managed, promoted, and accessed. Digitalization is no longer merely a complementary tool but has become a crucial determinant of competitiveness in the contemporary tourism industry through social media, digital platforms, online reservation systems, and data-driven marketing strategies. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasizes that digital transformation has created a new divide between tourism enterprises that are digitally connected and small-scale tourism operators that continue to rely on conventional practices (OECD, 2020). In this context, Community-Based Tourism managers face considerable adaptive pressures, particularly

because digitalization requires technological capabilities, infrastructure access, and networking resources that are not always available to local communities.

This issue is particularly significant because digital transformation in tourism is often understood from a technocratic perspective, implying that the primary barriers are limited technological infrastructure or insufficient individual technical skills. In reality, the capacity to adapt to digital change is a far more complex social process shaped by the interaction among actors' capacities, institutional structures, resource distribution, and existing social networks. According to Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, social action never occurs independently of structure, since structures simultaneously provide opportunities (enabling) and impose constraints (constraining) through rules and the distribution of resources (Giddens, 1986). Consequently, the slow pace of digitalization in Community-Based Tourism should not be viewed merely as a technical skills deficit but also as the outcome of social relations that shape the possibilities for action available to tourism managers.

Previous studies have examined tourism digitalization from various perspectives. Wilhelmina and Mistriani (2025), for example, demonstrate that optimizing social media can enhance destination image and tourist attractiveness. Ferdian and Munawaroh (2025) likewise argue that digital technologies support cultural preservation while expanding the reach of tourism promotion. More broadly, the OECD reports that although digitalization offers significant opportunities for the tourism sector, its benefits are distributed unevenly, particularly among small enterprises and community-based destinations facing limited capacities and restricted access to resources (OECD, 2020). However, most

of these studies primarily conceptualize digitalization as a matter of technological innovation or marketing strategy rather than as a social phenomenon shaped by power relations, institutional capacity, and the structural conditions of local communities.

Similarly, studies on social capital in tourism management generally emphasize its positive contribution to community development. Ningsih and Wijaya (2023) show that both bonding and bridging social capital strengthen community solidarity and adaptive strategies in tourism communities. Aji and Faniza (2022) likewise highlight the importance of social capital in fostering community participation in tourism destination development. Nevertheless, these studies tend to regard social capital as an inherently productive resource. Such a perspective provides limited room for a more critical understanding that social capital does not necessarily generate adaptive capacity. Under certain circumstances, strong internal social ties may instead produce network exclusivity (social closure), thereby limiting community access to new information, external networks, and opportunities for innovation.

Meanwhile, studies addressing structural barriers in tourism development have largely focused on policy, institutional support, and infrastructure. Putra and Syafiola (2023), for instance, demonstrate that local policies can function either as barriers or as opportunities for tourism development. Beda and Supardal (2022) likewise emphasize the importance of institutional arrangements and supporting infrastructure in tourism management. However, these studies generally examine structural barriers independently of the dynamics of community social capital. As a result, there remains limited understanding of how structural constraints and the configuration of social capital may reinforce one another in slowing digital transformation.

Based on this review, three important gaps remain in the literature on digital adaptation in Community-Based Tourism. First, studies on tourism digitalization continue to be dominated by technological and marketing perspectives, rather than conceptualizing digitalization as a social process shaped by the interaction between structure and agency. Second, research on social capital predominantly emphasizes its productive functions while paying insufficient attention to the possibility that certain forms of social capital may constrain innovation. Third, few studies have simultaneously examined the relationship between structural barriers and the limitations of social capital in the context of digital adaptation among Community-Based Tourism managers.

Building upon these gaps, this study argues that the slow pace of digital adaptation in Community-Based Tourism management is not solely attributable to technological limitations but results from the interaction between structural constraints and the configuration of community social capital. In certain contexts, strong internal solidarity sustains the continuity of tourism management but does not necessarily generate digital innovation when social relationships are dominated by bonding social capital rather than bridging social capital. At the same time, limited infrastructure, weak institutional support, and the absence of mentoring or capacity-building programs further restrict the community's ability to adapt.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the question of how the interaction between structural constraints and the configuration of social capital influences the process of digital adaptation in Community-Based Tourism management at Coban Jahe Tourism, Malang Regency. It also aims to explain how infrastructure limitations, institutional

support, and the forms of community social capital shape the digital adaptive capacity of local tourism management.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of digital adaptation in Community-Based Tourism management. A qualitative approach was selected because the study did not aim to measure relationships among variables but rather to explore social experiences, management practices, and the meanings constructed by actors involved in the process of digital adaptation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This design was considered appropriate because the digitalization of local tourism involved not only technical issues but also social relations, structural constraints, and the community's capacity to respond to change.

The study was conducted at Coban Jahe Tourism, Malang Regency, East Java, from October to December 2024. The site was purposively selected because it represented a Community-Based Tourism destination managed by local residents while simultaneously facing increasing demands for digital transformation in tourism management and promotion. In addition, Coban Jahe constituted a relevant case because its management community demonstrated relatively strong social solidarity but experienced limitations in utilizing digital technologies.

A total of six informants participated in the study. They were selected using purposive sampling, whereby participants were chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives (Yusuf, 2014; Patton, 2015). The informants were individuals directly involved in tourism management who possessed knowledge of operational

dynamics and practical experience in addressing the challenges of digital adaptation. This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to obtain information-rich cases concerning structural constraints and the dynamics of social capital in the context of Community-Based Tourism management.

Data were collected through three techniques: non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Non-participant observation was conducted to examine the physical conditions of the tourism site, supporting infrastructure, management practices, and promotional activities without the researcher's direct involvement in operational activities (Angrosino, 2007). This technique was essential for capturing empirical contexts that might not have been fully revealed through interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide opportunities for exploring the informants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in responding to the challenges of digitalization. This format enabled the researcher to maintain a focus on the central research issues while allowing sufficient flexibility to investigate emerging themes during the interview process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews focused on the managers' experiences in using digital media, infrastructure-related challenges, institutional support, patterns of internal collaboration, and access to external networks relevant to digital transformation.

Documentation was used as supplementary data to strengthen the findings obtained through observation and interviews. The collected documents included field photographs, activity records, digital promotional materials, and other documents related to tourism management activities. The use of multiple data sources supported data triangulation and enhanced

the credibility of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data were analyzed interactively following the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consisted of three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data condensation stage, the researcher selected, organized, and focused on information relevant to digital adaptation, structural constraints, and social capital. The organized data were subsequently presented through thematic categorization to facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, and emerging dynamics. In the final stage, these patterns were interpreted to develop a conceptual understanding of the relationship between structural constraints and social capital in the process of digital adaptation.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, methodological triangulation was applied by comparing findings derived from observations, interviews, and documentation, thereby preventing the interpretation from relying on a single source of evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach enhanced the credibility, consistency, and dependability of the qualitative findings.

Results and Discussion

Digital adaptation in a state of partial transition

Digital transformation in the tourism sector has fundamentally reshaped how tourism destinations establish visibility, reach potential visitors, and manage interactions with the public. In the contemporary tourism industry, a digital presence is no longer merely complementary but has become an integral component of destination management strategies, particularly through

the use of social media, digital platforms, and content-based communication that enables destinations to engage broader and more dynamic audiences (OECD, 2020; Xiang et al., 2015). However, the findings of this study indicate that the process of digital adaptation in the management of Coban Jahe Tourism remained at a stage of partial transition. Although digitalization had begun to emerge in management practices, it had not yet evolved into a planned, consistent, and integrated tourism governance strategy.

Empirically, the managers of Coban Jahe Tourism demonstrated an initial awareness of the importance of establishing a digital presence. This awareness was reflected in their efforts to create official social media accounts as promotional channels. Nevertheless, these digital platforms had not yet fulfilled the strategic functions expected in digital tourism promotion. Rather than serving as active instruments for public engagement, expanding promotional reach, or developing the destination's identity in a sustainable manner, the existing social media accounts primarily symbolized the destination's presence in the digital space.

One informant described the situation as follows:

"We have an official Instagram account, but it has not been used optimally because we rarely upload either posts or stories. Nowadays, people mostly look at TikTok, but Coban Jahe does not have a TikTok account. As a result, the destination may not be widely recognized, and its promotion still relies mainly on word-of-mouth." (Interview with a tourism manager)

This statement suggests that the managers possessed a reflexive awareness of the changing landscape of tourism promotion. They recognized that patterns of tourism information consumption had shifted toward more dynamic digital media,

particularly short-video platforms such as TikTok, which increasingly shape travel preferences, especially among younger generations (Abidin, 2021; Leung et al., 2022). However, this awareness had not yet been translated into concrete organizational action. The gap between recognizing the importance of digitalization and the capacity to implement it effectively indicates that digital adaptation had not yet reached the stage of institutionalization.

This condition demonstrates that digital adoption in the management of Coban Jahe Tourism remained largely symbolic rather than strategic. It was symbolic because the existence of digital media was not accompanied by structured management practices, clearly defined responsibilities, content planning, or digital communication strategies aimed at increasing public engagement. Social media functioned primarily as a marker of the destination's entry into the digital sphere rather than as a communication infrastructure that actively strengthened its competitiveness.

This finding is significant because it demonstrates that the availability of technology does not automatically lead to digital transformation. Digitalization is not merely a matter of having social media accounts or access to digital platforms; rather, it depends on the capacity to integrate technology into everyday organizational practices (Buhalis & Law, 2008). In the case of Coban Jahe, the use of digital media remained at the level of sporadic early adoption and had not yet become an integral component of the collective tourism management strategy. This state of partial transition was also associated with the social characteristics of the tourism managers. Based on field interviews, most managers were local community members whose primary occupations were outside the digital sector, including farming,

manual labor, and other forms of informal employment. These backgrounds influenced not only their level of digital literacy but also the ways in which they perceived the role of technology in tourism management. One informant explained:

"Most of the managers here are older, so they find it difficult to create up-to-date content. Besides that, there has never been any training."
(Interview with a tourism manager)

This statement indicates that barriers to digital adaptation were related not only to technical limitations but also to generational differences and digital culture. Digital transformation in tourism requires more than access to technology; it also demands the ability to understand the evolving logic of digital communication, including the rhythms of content production, visual branding, and online audience engagement (Hays et al., 2013). For management communities whose experience has been shaped primarily by locally based practices and face-to-face interactions, these demands present substantial adaptive challenges.

As a consequence, tourism promotion continued to rely heavily on conventional mechanisms, particularly word-of-mouth communication. Within local communities, this strategy possesses important social value because it is grounded in interpersonal trust and established social networks. However, within the highly competitive landscape of digital tourism, excessive reliance on conventional promotion constrains a destination's capacity to expand its visibility beyond its immediate social networks. This situation reveals a clear paradox: although tourism managers recognized the importance of digitalization, their actual practices remained embedded in the logic of traditional communication.

Structural constraints as barriers to digital adaptation

The slow pace of digital adaptation in the management of Coban Jahe Tourism could not be explained solely by the individual limitations of tourism managers in using digital technologies. The findings revealed that this issue was also rooted in structural constraints that restricted the community's capacity to develop more effective digital strategies. In this context, digital transformation was not merely a matter of actors' readiness but was also closely associated with the availability of resources that enabled such actions to be undertaken. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory provides a useful perspective for understanding this condition by conceptualizing structure not simply as an external force constraining individuals but as a set of rules and resources that simultaneously enable and constrain social action (Giddens, 1984). In the case of Coban Jahe, structural constraints illustrated how limited access to material and institutional resources narrowed the managers' capacity to adapt digitally.

One of the most fundamental barriers identified in this study was the limited availability of basic infrastructure, particularly electricity and internet access. In the context of digital tourism, infrastructure is not merely a supporting technical facility but a fundamental prerequisite for digital promotion, online communication, and tourism information management. However, field observations indicated that the managers continued to face serious infrastructural limitations. One informant explained:

"The main obstacles here are the lack of electricity and the poor road conditions. During the rainy season, the roads become very dangerous. There

have been discussions about installing electricity, but nothing has been implemented yet."
(Interview with the tourism coordinator)

This statement indicates that the digital limitations experienced at Coban Jahe could not be reduced to a simple lack of technological literacy. When basic infrastructure such as electricity is unavailable, the managers' capacity to develop digital activities becomes severely constrained from the outset. From the perspective of structuration theory, this reflects the absence of allocative resources, namely the material resources required for actors to carry out particular social practices (Giddens, 1984). In other words, even when the managers recognized the importance of digitalization, their actions remained constrained by structures that failed to provide the necessary supporting resources.

A similar condition applied to internet connectivity. Digital tourism depends upon reliable connectivity that enables managers to communicate with prospective visitors in real time, update promotional content, respond to public inquiries, and maintain the destination's online visibility. Previous studies have demonstrated that limited digital connectivity constitutes one of the primary factors widening the digital divide in community-based and rural areas (van Dijk, 2020; Salemink et al., 2017). In the context of Coban Jahe, inadequate internet access reinforced the managers' reliance on conventional communication practices while hindering the development of more strategic forms of digital integration.

However, the structural constraints identified in this study were not limited to material resources but also encompassed institutional barriers. One of the most prominent issues was the absence of training or mentoring programs that could enhance the managers' digital competencies. In many

cases, digital transformation in the tourism sector requires not only the provision of technology but also the strengthening of human capacities to enable technology to be integrated into organizational practices (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). Nevertheless, the experience of the Coban Jahe managers reflected the opposite situation.

One informant stated:

"There are no tourism management training programs here, either from the government or from the management itself, because the managers also have limited knowledge and none of us has an educational background in tourism." (Interview with the tourism coordinator)

This statement suggests that barriers to digital adaptation were also associated with limited authoritative resources that would enable actors to develop new capacities. According to Giddens, resources are not confined to material assets but also include the social and institutional capacities that enable individuals and groups to organize collective action (Giddens, 1984). When access to training, mentoring, or knowledge transfer is unavailable, the community's ability to independently develop digital strategies becomes increasingly constrained.

This situation was further reinforced by the social characteristics of the tourism managers, most of whom were local residents whose primary occupations were outside the professional tourism sector. One informant explained:

"Most of the managers at Coban Jahe are farmers, laborers, or livestock breeders because all of the managers come from the local community. So, our understanding of tourism management is still quite limited." (Interview with a tourism manager)

This finding is important not because it portrays the local community as lacking competence, but because it demonstrates that the digitalization of tourism often presupposes a set of capacities that are not automatically available within communities whose expertise has been shaped by local experience. Digital transformation is frequently designed on the assumption that local actors will readily adapt once technology becomes available. However, the social reality reveals significant disparities in capacity that require institutional intervention. In this context, the absence of training and institutional support further widened the gap between the demands of digitalization and the managers' actual capabilities.

This study also found that government support for promoting the digital transformation of local tourism remained weak. Although tourism development policies frequently identify digitalization as a strategic priority, their implementation at the local level has not always been effective. Previous studies have shown that local government support through training, infrastructure development, and institutional strengthening constitutes a critical factor in the success of Community-Based Tourism management (Khotimah & Pawestri, 2022; Putra & Syafiola, 2023). However, in the case of Coban Jahe, such support remained very limited.

From the perspective of structuration theory, these findings indicate that structure had not functioned as an enabling condition but instead operated predominantly as a constraining structure. Rather than providing the resources, opportunities, and institutional support necessary for digital transformation, existing structures failed to adequately facilitate the process.

Consequently, digital adaptation at the community level occurred under conditions of systemic structural constraints.

Strong bonding, weak bridging: The limitations of social capital

One of the most significant findings of this study was that the slow pace of digital adaptation in the management of Coban Jahe Tourism was not caused by the absence of social capital. Rather, it occurred despite the presence of relatively strong social capital within the community. In many studies of Community-Based Tourism, social capital has generally been regarded as a key resource that enables local communities to foster collective participation, sustain tourism management, and strengthen social solidarity in responding to various challenges (Putnam, 2000; Aji & Faniza, 2022; Ningsih & Wijaya, 2023). However, the findings of this study present a more nuanced picture. Although social capital was clearly embedded in the management of Coban Jahe Tourism, its dominant form primarily reinforced internal cohesion rather than facilitating access to the external resources required for digital transformation.

The management community of Coban Jahe Tourism exhibited strong social ties rooted in local relationships. Tourism management emerged from the participation of local residents whose social relationships had long been established before the destination developed into a tourist attraction. In this context, tourism management was not merely an economic activity but also a collective practice grounded in social proximity, a shared sense of place, and enduring interpersonal relationships among community members. One informant explained:

“Initially, Coban Jahe Tourism was managed by a group of local youth. Later, to provide a formal organizational structure, the management was transferred to CV Cahaya Pratama in 2019.”
(Interview with the tourism management coordinator)

This statement indicates that tourism management originated from internal community initiatives rather than external intervention. It represents an important indicator of bonding social capital, a form of social capital based on close relationships, solidarity, shared identity, and strong internal ties among community members (Putnam, 2000). In certain contexts, this type of social capital constitutes a major strength because it fosters collective responsibility, cooperation, and commitment to the sustainability of tourism management.

The field findings further revealed that relationships among the tourism managers were supported by a relatively high level of trust. Most managers came from the same local community, shared close social relationships, and possessed similar life experiences. According to Putnam (2000), social trust is a fundamental element of social capital because it enables cooperation to occur at lower social costs. In the context of Coban Jahe, this trust served as the foundation sustaining Community-Based Tourism management, particularly in terms of internal coordination and informal role distribution.

To a considerable extent, this condition represented one of the community's greatest strengths. Without strong internal social capital, Community-Based Tourism management would likely have been more vulnerable to economic challenges, fluctuations in tourist arrivals, and the impacts of the post-pandemic period. Thus, this study does not portray social capital

as a problem; rather, it demonstrates that the effectiveness of social capital depends largely on the form and orientation of the networks through which it operates.

This is where the central finding of the study emerged. Despite strong internal solidarity, the managers' social networks remained concentrated within the local community and had not developed into broader strategic external connections. Drawing upon Putnam's framework, this condition reflected the predominance of bonding social capital, which was not adequately complemented by bridging social capital. While bonding social capital strengthens internal cohesion, bridging social capital plays a crucial role in expanding access to broader networks, including new information, collaborative opportunities, knowledge transfer, and innovation (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001).

In the context of digital transformation, the limited presence of bridging social capital became a significant constraint. Digital adaptation requires connections with actors beyond the local community, including digital trainers, government institutions, creative communities, tourism marketing consultants, and broader tourism promotion networks. However, the findings indicated that such connections remained highly limited. This condition explains why awareness of the importance of digitalization did not automatically translate into the capacity to act.

The fact that most tourism managers were local residents with relatively homogeneous social backgrounds further reinforced this dynamic. One informant stated:

"Most of the managers at Coban Jahe are farmers, laborers, or livestock breeders because all of the managers come from the local community."
(Interview with a tourism manager)

Such social homogeneity undoubtedly strengthened the community's sense of solidarity. At the same time, however, it limited the diversification of social networks and the circulation of new knowledge. The sociology of social networks suggests that excessively closed networks may generate social closure, a condition in which strong internal relationships inadvertently reduce access to external resources (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 2005). In the case of Coban Jahe, this limitation was reflected in the slow adoption of digital practices, not because the managers lacked motivation, but because they lacked connections capable of linking the community to relevant digital resources.

These findings also extend the discussion of social capital within Community-Based Tourism. Previous studies have largely portrayed social capital as a productive resource that naturally supports tourism development (Aji & Faniza, 2022; Alfiansyah, 2023). This study offers a more nuanced perspective by demonstrating that, although social capital can indeed be a valuable resource, not all forms of social capital generate the same level of adaptive capacity. When social capital is concentrated primarily on internal cohesion without the expansion of external networks, strong solidarity does not necessarily produce innovation.

In this regard, the paradox of Coban Jahe becomes evident. The management community exhibited high levels of social trust, strong internal solidarity, and active local participation. Nevertheless, these strengths had not been translated into effective digital transformation because existing social networks functioned primarily to maintain internal stability rather than to expand access to external innovation. Accordingly, this study demonstrates that the limitations of digital adaptation were not caused by weak social capital but rather by an imbalanced configuration of social capital, in

which internal cohesion was not adequately complemented by external connectivity.

This finding represents an important contribution because it challenges the common assumption that social capital is inherently an enabling factor in Community-Based Tourism management. In the context of digitalization, strong social capital is undoubtedly important. However, its productive potential can only be realized when it extends beyond internal solidarity to build bridges toward broader resources, knowledge, and external networks.

The interaction between structure and social capital

The principal finding of this study was that the slow pace of digital adaptation in the management of Coban Jahe Tourism could not be adequately explained by treating structural constraints and social capital as two independent factors. Such an interpretation tends to oversimplify the issue by assuming that the delay in digitalization resulted solely from inadequate infrastructure or, conversely, from limited community capacity. The empirical findings, however, revealed a far more complex relationship. Structural constraints and the configuration of social capital did not operate independently; rather, they interacted with and reinforced one another in shaping the slow progress of digital transformation. This constitutes the study's primary conceptual contribution.

In many discussions of Community-Based Tourism development, structural constraints have been conceptualized as external challenges, whereas social capital has been viewed as an internal resource assumed to enable communities to overcome various limitations (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001). The case of Coban Jahe, however, demonstrated that social capital

was not always sufficient to compensate for weak structural conditions, particularly when the dominant form of social capital remained inward-looking and disconnected from broader external networks. Conversely, structural weaknesses also directly reduced the effectiveness of social capital itself. Accordingly, the relationship between structure and social capital in this context is more appropriately understood as a reciprocal interaction that generated a cycle of constraints.

From the perspective of Giddens' structuration theory (1984), social action always occurs through a dialectical relationship between agency and structure. Structure does not merely constrain action but also enables it through the distribution of rules and resources. In the context of Coban Jahe, the problem did not lie in the absence of community agency. On the contrary, the tourism managers demonstrated a collective commitment to maintaining and developing the local tourism destination. They established a management organization, sustained tourism operations, and recognized the importance of moving toward digitalization.

These management practices indicate that the slow pace of digitalization cannot be interpreted as a form of cultural resistance to technology. The managers were aware of the changing digital landscape and understood the relevance of digital technologies for tourism promotion. In other words, their reflexive capacity as social actors remained intact. Nevertheless, this awareness did not automatically translate into strategic action because of the limited structural resources available to support such initiatives.

Within this context, weak structural conditions diminished the value of the social capital that the community already possessed. Strong internal solidarity, mutual trust among members, and a shared sense of

ownership of the destination undoubtedly constituted important social resources that sustained tourism management. However, when the structural environment failed to provide essential material resources such as electricity, internet connectivity, training opportunities, and institutional support, this social capital lost much of its transformative potential. In other words, solidarity alone could not substitute for infrastructure. Trust did not automatically generate digital competencies. Collective participation did not, by itself, create access to new resources when the surrounding structural environment remained restrictive.

These findings demonstrate that social capital does not operate in a vacuum. Its effectiveness depends heavily on the structural context within which a community operates. Under conditions of weak structural support, social capital tended to function primarily as a mechanism for maintaining internal stability rather than promoting innovation. This explains why the management community at Coban Jahe was able to sustain tourism operations while simultaneously struggling to make the adaptive leap toward meaningful digital transformation.

Conversely, this study also found that the community's relatively closed configuration of social capital reinforced existing structural exclusion. As discussed previously, the dominant form of social capital within Coban Jahe's tourism management was bonding social capital, characterized by strong internal relationships among local residents. Although this form of social capital was highly effective in fostering solidarity, it proved less effective in establishing connections with external actors possessing access to digital resources. Consequently, the community remained insufficiently connected to training opportunities, innovation networks, supporting institution,

and broader digital marketing networks.

In this context, the limitations of social capital were not merely a consequence of structural constraints but also became a factor that reinforced those constraints. Relatively closed social networks limited the community's capacity to overcome restrictive structural conditions. Had stronger bridging social capital existed, certain structural barriers might have been negotiated through external collaboration, partnerships with creative communities, or access to broader capacity-building programs. However, as long as social networks remained concentrated within the internal community, the managers continued to operate within the same structural limitations.

These findings are consistent with Granovetter's (1973) argument regarding the importance of weak ties in providing access to new information and opportunities. Networks that are excessively homogeneous and inward-looking may be highly effective in maintaining internal cohesion but tend to be less conducive to innovation because they restrict the circulation of new knowledge. In the context of Coban Jahe, the limited presence of weak ties reinforced the condition of digital exclusion that had already been shaped by structural constraints.

Accordingly, what occurred at Coban Jahe was not simply the sum of two separate problems—structural barriers combined with limited social capital—but rather a reciprocal relationship that generated mutually reinforcing constraints. Weak structural conditions reduced the effectiveness of social capital, while a closed configuration of social capital diminished the community's capacity to overcome structural barriers. This cycle produced a condition of adaptive stagnation, in which the community remained socially

resilient yet struggled to move toward more substantive forms of digital innovation.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its explanation of this relational dynamic. Previous studies have generally examined tourism digitalization as a technological issue, whereas studies of social capital have tended to emphasize the positive functions of community solidarity (Aji & Faniza, 2022; Wilhelmina & Mistriani, 2025). This study offers a more relational perspective by demonstrating that the success of digital transformation in Community-Based Tourism cannot be adequately explained by the presence of technology or the strength of social capital in isolation. Rather, what matters is how structural conditions and the configuration of social networks interact to shape the community's adaptive capacity.

The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that the slow pace of digital adaptation in Community-Based Tourism was influenced not only by structural barriers or technological limitations but also by an imbalanced configuration of social capital characterized by strong bonding social capital and weak bridging social capital. Unlike much of the previous literature, which has generally regarded social capital as an inherently productive resource in tourism development, this study demonstrates that social capital may be inherently ambivalent. Strong internal solidarity was capable of sustaining tourism management, but it did not necessarily generate digital innovation unless it was accompanied by broader connections to external networks. Consequently, this study advances a relational perspective that conceptualizes digital transformation as the outcome of interactions among structural conditions, available resources, and the configuration of community social networks.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this study carry several important implications at both the theoretical and practical levels, particularly for research on Community-Based Tourism and digital transformation. Theoretically, the study suggests that the long-standing assumption in the social capital literature requires a more critical interpretation. Many studies have conceptualized social capital as an inherently productive social resource that is almost always associated with collective capacity, community participation, cooperation, and successful local development (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001; Aji & Faniza, 2022). Within the context of Community-Based Tourism, social capital has frequently been regarded as the primary resource enabling local communities to organize themselves, foster solidarity, and sustain tourism destinations. Although this perspective is not entirely inaccurate, the findings of this study indicate that it is insufficient to explain the complexity of digital transformation.

The case of Coban Jahe demonstrated that social capital was indeed capable of sustaining Community-Based Tourism management, but it did not automatically generate the capacity for innovation, particularly in the context of digital transformation. Strong internal solidarity, high levels of social trust, and a strong sense of community ownership of the destination contributed to maintaining the continuity of local tourism management. Nevertheless, these strengths proved insufficient when the challenges required access to new knowledge, external networks, and technological competencies that were unavailable within the community's existing social circles.

These findings are significant because they extend the discussion of social capital beyond the quantity of social relationships to

the configuration of those relationships. What matters is not merely whether a community possesses social capital, but rather which form of social capital predominates and how it operates within a particular social context. In the case of Coban Jahe, the predominance of bonding social capital generated strong internal cohesion but was insufficient to provide access to innovative resources beyond the community. Accordingly, this study reinforces the argument that social capital is not inherently enabling but may instead be ambivalent depending on the configuration of social networks (Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

More specifically, this study demonstrates that, within the context of digitalization, social capital that is excessively concentrated on internal relationships may actually constrain adaptive capacity. This represents an important theoretical contribution because much of the existing literature on Community-Based Tourism continues to portray social capital as an almost universally positive normative resource. However, under certain conditions, highly closed social relationships may generate new forms of structural constraints, including information exclusion, limited network diversification, and restricted access to innovation. In other words, this study advocates a more relational understanding of social capital by examining how social relationships interact with broader structural conditions rather than treating social capital as an independent social asset.

The findings also reinforce the relevance of Anthony Giddens' structuration perspective for understanding digital transformation at the community level. Digitalization is often interpreted as a matter of individual or organizational readiness to adopt technology. However, this study demonstrates that digital adaptive capacity emerged from the interaction between agency

and structure. The managers of Coban Jahe exhibited a clear reflexive awareness of the importance of digital transformation.

This study further demonstrates that the slow pace of digitalization did not result from a lack of awareness or resistance to technology. Instead, this awareness failed to develop into strategic action because the structural environment did not provide adequate resources to support such initiatives. These findings suggest that the challenge of digital transformation is not merely one of digital willingness but also of digital capability, which is profoundly shaped by the distribution of social and institutional resources (van Dijk, 2020).

At the practical level, the findings indicate that tourism digitalization policies should not remain confined to technocratic approaches focused primarily on the provision of physical infrastructure. Digital interventions have often been narrowly framed in terms of internet access, technological equipment, or digital promotion. However, the findings of this study reveal that barriers to digital transformation are far more complex. Although limited electricity supply and internet connectivity constituted significant obstacles, infrastructure provision alone was insufficient to produce meaningful transformation when communities remained socially disconnected from innovation networks, training opportunities, and institutional support.

In this context, digital policy should move beyond an infrastructure-oriented approach toward one centered on strengthening social capacity. Digital interventions should therefore emphasize human resource development, continuous mentoring, collaborative network building, and the creation of learning environments that enable local communities to collectively develop digital competencies. This is essential because digital transformation

in Community-Based Tourism involves not merely technology transfer but also a broader process of social and organizational transformation.

The case of Coban Jahe demonstrates that the local community already possessed a strong social foundation for collective tourism management. The principal challenge lay in connecting these internal strengths with relevant external resources. Clearly, the responsibility for digitalization cannot be placed entirely upon local communities. When social capacity exists but institutional support remains limited, digital transformation is likely to progress slowly and remain partial. Consequently, digital tourism development policies should be designed not only to connect destinations to the internet but also to connect communities to broader innovation ecosystems.

Accordingly, the practical implication of this study is the need to reposition strategies for the digitalization of Community-Based Tourism. Digitalization should not be understood merely as an agenda of technological adoption but rather as an agenda of strengthening social relationships, improving the distribution of resources, and expanding access to knowledge networks. Without such a comprehensive approach, digitalization risks producing only a symbolic presence in the digital sphere without genuinely enhancing the competitive capacity of local tourism destinations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings discussed above, this study demonstrates that digital adaptation in the management of Coban Jahe Tourism cannot be understood merely as a matter of technological readiness or the individual capabilities of tourism managers. Rather, it emerged from the complex interaction between structural constraints

and the configuration of community social capital. The findings indicate that digitalization at Coban Jahe remained at a stage of partial transition, in which digital media had begun to be adopted but had not yet evolved into an integrated, long-term management strategy. Limited basic infrastructure, including electricity and internet connectivity, insufficient training opportunities, and weak institutional support from the government constrained the managers' capacity to develop digital innovation effectively.

At the same time, the management community possessed relatively strong social capital in the form of internal solidarity, social trust, and collective participation, all of which sustained the continuity of tourism management. However, these strengths were insufficient to drive digital transformation because the dominant social networks remained largely internal (bonding social capital) and had not developed adequately into external networks (bridging social capital) capable of providing access to knowledge, resources, and opportunities for innovation. Accordingly, this study demonstrates that social capital is not inherently enabling in the context of digital transformation; rather, its effectiveness depends on how it interacts with the surrounding structural conditions.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focused on a single case of a Community-Based Tourism destination, and therefore its findings cannot be broadly generalized to the diverse social and institutional contexts of Community-Based Tourism across Indonesia. Second, the study primarily reflected the perspectives of internal tourism managers and did not fully capture the views of external stakeholders, such as local government authorities, actors in the digital creative industry, or tourists as users of digital tourism services. Future

research could therefore adopt a comparative approach across multiple Community-Based Tourism destinations while incorporating a broader range of stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of digital transformation in local tourism. From a practical perspective, this study recommends that Community-Based Tourism digitalization strategies should extend beyond the provision of technological infrastructure to emphasize the strengthening of community digital capacity through continuous training, institutional mentoring, and the expansion of collaborative networks that connect local communities with broader digital innovation ecosystems. Through such an approach, digitalization can become not merely a symbol of modernization but a genuine instrument of empowerment for Community-Based Tourism management.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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