



## Digitalization of Rural Tourism Products: Evaluating Stages and Managerial Readiness

I Gede Gian Saputra<sup>1</sup>, Ni Made Gandhi Sanjiwani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tourism Bachelor Study Program, Faculty of Tourism, University of Udayana, Bali, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Public Relation Study Program, Bali Dwipa University

**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the critical phases involved in the digitalization of tourist village products, encompassing planning, packaging, and marketing. These stages are foundational to the effective mapping of tourist village products, ultimately leading to their digital representation. To ensure the successful implementation of digitalization, the optimal preparation of human resources is imperative, as inadequate readiness risks perpetuating a lack of awareness within rural communities. The study aims to evaluate the readiness of tourist villages to adopt digital approaches in planning, packaging, and marketing their products.

The primary data collection employed a consultative methodology, integrating focus group discussions (FGDs) with workshop-based sessions. Four distinct rounds of data collection were conducted, each addressing specific themes: digital marketing, the Godevi digital platform, tour package development for tourist villages, and governance frameworks for these villages. Godevi, the partner organization driving the market localization initiative for tourist villages, served as the principal unit of analysis. A manager from one of the tourist villages in the 25th round of evaluation was selected as a key informant for this study.

The findings reveal that 25 tourist villages required assistance in the planning phase. Nevertheless, these communities demonstrated the capacity to design trip packages aligned with prior product mapping initiatives, albeit requiring continued guidance in product packaging. Conversely, in the domain of digital marketing, tourist villages were found to exhibit limited proficiency in leveraging the requisite digital systems effectively.

**Corresponding Author:**

I Gede Gian Saputra

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

As a flagship government initiative, tourist villages aim to stimulate economic growth while preserving the nation's cultural heritage. Through the implementation of this initiative, the government envisions bolstering local economies and creating employment opportunities. However, the development of tourist villages faces significant challenges, including limited human resource capabilities, inadequate infrastructure, and fragmented cooperation networks.

Godevi, or Go Destination Village, represents Indonesia's pioneering tourist village bazaar. It specializes in curating authentic tourist village experience packages, providing support for their packaging, and facilitating the creation of innovative digital promotional content. Operated under PT Banua Wisata Lestari, Godevi adopts a sociopreneurial approach leveraging digital technologies to enhance village tourism.

A persistent challenge within tourist villages is the inability to develop experience packages that align with market demands. Consequently, many of Godevi's partner villages struggle to achieve their annual targets. This shortfall is attributable to several factors, including insufficient recognition of the village's unique attributes, weak storytelling, a lack of compelling and memorable tourism taglines, generic activities that lack distinction from other villages, poorly organized programs, and a failure to understand the preferences of digital-era consumers. To attract tourists and promote exploration, tourist village experience packages must emphasize authenticity, distinctiveness, and a compelling unique selling point (USP). Godevi's mission focuses on identifying prospective partner villages for collaboration and ensuring their offerings meet the organization's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Empirical data from Godevi underscores these challenges. Among ten surveyed partner communities, only three possess dedicated websites. While Instagram emerges as the most utilized social media platform, with seven out of ten villages maintaining accounts, the majority lack a YouTube presence. Moreover, only four out of ten villages have developed and marketed tourism

packages characterized by high authenticity and quality service standards.

These deficiencies largely stem from gaps in human resource preparedness, spanning the critical areas of planning, packaging, and marketing tourism products via digital platforms. This context underscores the importance of investigating the readiness of tourist villages to implement digitalization processes for their products. This study seeks to evaluate the current state of tourist village management in this regard, offering insights into their preparedness for various digitalization stages. The study aims to:

- a. Examine the current state of tourist villages in planning their tourism products.
- b. Assess the status of tourist villages in packaging authentic tourism items.
- c. Evaluate the readiness of tourist villages in employing digital marketing strategies for their offerings.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing Creswell W. J.'s (2013) qualitative descriptive analysis approach. The primary data collection method combines focus group discussions (FGDs) with workshops, ensuring a robust exploration of the research themes. The data collection process is organized into four distinct stages, each addressing a specific issue: governance in tourist villages, tourism package development, digital marketing strategies, and the utilization of the Godevi marketplace platform.

Godevi partners were selected as the primary unit of analysis, given their pioneering role in establishing a specialized marketplace for tourist villages. This choice is justified by several factors: (1) Godevi has successfully implemented digitalization stages for its partner villages; (2) its partner villages are geographically diverse, spanning Bali and East Nusa Tenggara; and (3) Godevi's active engagement in providing critical human resource support to these villages underscores its significance in the tourism sector.

To provide comprehensive insights, 25 managers from Godevi-affiliated tourism communities were deliberately chosen as informants. These managers represent a cross-section of experiences and challenges, offering valuable perspectives on the implementation of digitalization processes in their respective villages.

### **Data Collection**

The implementation of FGDs and human resource development workshops for Godevi's partner tourist communities follows a structured, multi-stage approach. The detailed procedures for each stage are outlined below:

#### **a. Focus Group Discussion and Tourist Village Governance Workshop**

The first stage of the FGD and workshop aims to gather comprehensive information to identify and delineate the signature products of each tourist village. This process enables villages to uncover their unique selling points, transforming these characteristics into market-ready products suitable for packaging and promotion. Participants utilize resources provided by the Faculty of Tourism, Udayana University, and Godevi to enhance their capacity for tourism village management. At this stage, significant insights are collected regarding the implementation of product planning processes by the participating communities.

#### **b. Godevi Marketplace FGD and Tourism Package Development Workshop**

This stage focuses on equipping participants with the necessary skills and knowledge for packaging tourism packages based on prior mapping and governance activities. Godevi provides tailored content to support the development of tourism products. During this workshop, each tourist village presents an overview of its current progress and challenges in packaging tourism products, fostering collaborative discussions and solution-focused strategies.

#### **c. Focus Group Discussion and Digital Marketing Workshop**

This session introduces participants to the practical applications of digital marketing within the tourism context. Practitioners from the Pentingsari Tourist Village share best practices and demonstrate how digital marketing strategies can significantly enhance village tourism. The session also includes Godevi system training, where villages are categorized into three thematic classes: Wellness, Culture, and Adventure. This categorization allows for a focused assessment of current digital marketing practices within the communities.

#### **d. Godevi System and Tourism Package Readiness Workshop**

The final stage assists partner tourist villages in effectively utilizing the Godevi platform, a free digital system designed to enhance tourism management. This workshop provides a comprehensive evaluation of the readiness of tourism packages developed by each partner village. Villages are grouped into two categories: (1) those with existing accounts and established tourism packages, and (2) those without accounts or packages. This grouping facilitates targeted assistance to ensure all villages progress towards full digital integration and product readiness.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. How the Village Tourism Product is Planned**

Cooper (1993) identifies four key dimensions for evaluating the current state of tourism product development in tourist villages: attraction, accessibility, amenity, and auxiliary services. These aspects serve as a framework for assessing the conditions and potential of tourist villages. Additionally, the actual state of tourism product development can be gauged through the systematic mapping of village tourism products conducted by local management.

This study investigates the present conditions of product development in tourist villages through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and governance workshops. A total of 25 Godevi partner tourist villages from Bali and East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) participated in these activities. The findings reveal that these villages have successfully mapped their tourism potential, as illustrated by Made Budayana, a representative of the Pedawa Tourism Awareness Group, who remarked:

“Our village is in its early stages of development, and I have an idea to create a tour package that includes five Bali Aga villages, highlighting the distinctive features of each Bali Aga village. Our hamlet is near the Lovina Beach region, and there are currently plenty of lodging options.” (Discussion, August 31, 2021)

This statement underscores the participants’ awareness of their villages’ attractions, accessibility, and available amenities. However, the workshops also highlighted that not all tourist villages have comprehensive development plans. Specifically, only 19 out of the 25 Godevi partner villages have active village accounts on the Godevi marketplace, which include general tourism information. The remaining six villages continue to receive assistance in digitalizing basic tourism information.

Moreover, newly established tourist villages face institutional barriers, such as complex government regulations that hinder the legal recognition and funding of these communities. Albertus Imbe, Manager of Colol Tourist Village, noted:

“Our concern is directed towards government support in terms of legalization and funding, which imposes demanding targets in its implementation, thereby posing obstacles to village development, including the planning of Colol Village.” (Discussion, August 31, 2021)

These challenges highlight the importance of community-driven development for ensuring the long-term sustainability of tourist villages. Despite government efforts to establish tourism communities, the progress of these initiatives has been significantly hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has stalled development efforts. This issue persists even in villages considered to be relatively advanced in their tourism initiatives.

### **2. The current overview of village tourism focusing on product packaging aspects.**

The tourism packages developed by Godevi’s partner villages and uploaded to the Godevi marketplace reflect the current state of product packaging among these communities. Several tourist villages have successfully created packages aligned with the mapped potential of their unique tourism offerings. This achievement was facilitated through a packaging workshop attended by representatives from 25 Godevi partner villages. Notably, 42 packages from 19 of these villages, all of which have Godevi accounts, have been uploaded to the marketplace, showcasing their efforts in presenting tourism products.

However, some villages continue to require assistance in refining their tourism packages. In such cases, Godevi provides support by categorizing the packages into three distinct themes—Adventure, Wellness, and Culture. This categorization is based on the prior mapping of each village’s strengths, ensuring that the resulting packages are focused and align with the village’s distinctive attributes.

Through the tour package packaging training workshops, it was observed that Godevi’s partner villages demonstrated a clear understanding that the authenticity of their tourism products is essential for preserving the village’s morphology. Rather than creating artificial experiences tailored solely to visitors, these villages prioritize integrating genuine local activities into their packages. For example, Tigawasa Village exemplifies this principle, as articulated by Widarma, who emphasized:

“Tourism is an advantage we can gain, but it is crucial to focus on developing authentic tourist packages rather than altering the fundamental morphology of the village.”

Additionally, Godevi’s partner villages have shown notable efficiency in creating comprehensive and appealing descriptions for their tourism packages. These descriptions include detailed general overviews, well-structured itineraries, strategic selection of package titles, competitive pricing, market targeting, and the use of engaging language to attract potential visitors. These efforts highlight the villages’ capacity to market their products effectively on the Godevi platform.

### **3. The prevailing condition of village tourism with a focus on its product marketing efforts**

With the rapid evolution of modern times, marketing activities have increasingly shifted towards digital marketing and the growing prominence of social media platforms. This trend aligns with the continuous advancement and integration of information and communication technologies into daily life. As noted by Ayuni, Cangara, and Arianto (2019), societies must prepare to adapt to the implications of these transformations. In this context, providing digital marketing training for tourist villages represents a critical effort to unlock extensive opportunities for promoting their tourism potential online. Platforms such as Godevi, Indonesia’s pioneering marketplace for tourist villages, serve as valuable tools in this endeavor.

The marketing content uploaded to digital platforms, including websites and social media, offers insights into the current state of digital marketing among tourist villages. Specifically, this study examines the prevailing conditions of digital marketing as

facilitated through the Godevi platform. According to data from Godevi workshops focused on digital marketing training and system utilization, managers from 25 partner tourist villages have demonstrated the ability to market their products effectively via social media platforms and the Godevi marketplace. These villages benefit from their own Godevi accounts, enabling them to upload essential promotional materials, such as images and videos, which serve as powerful tools for digital outreach.

The availability of a Godevi account empowers tourist village managers to independently publish, update, or modify marketing content as needed, eliminating reliance on external support. This feature exemplifies Godevi's role in facilitating the digitalization of tourism management. Through comprehensive processes encompassing planning, packaging, and marketing, the promotion of tourism products is significantly extended within the broader marketplace community. However, despite these advancements, some tourist villages continue to face challenges in fully leveraging the Godevi marketplace to access larger markets. Addressing these limitations remains a critical area for future intervention and support.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that tourist villages have successfully mapped their attractions, accessibility, and available amenities. However, six of the 25 Godevi partner villages require additional support to plan and develop their tourism strategies comprehensively. Institutional challenges, such as funding limitations and legal complexities, further hinder progress. Moreover, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these difficulties, significantly delaying development efforts.

In terms of product packaging, tourist villages have demonstrated their ability to create tourism packages aligned with their unique potential and mapped resources. Nevertheless, ongoing guidance is required to enhance the quality and focus of these packages. Godevi plays a pivotal role in this process by categorizing tourism packages into three key themes—Adventure, Wellness, and Culture—based on the distinctive strengths of each village.

The readiness of tourist villages to engage in digital marketing has also been evaluated. Administrators of these villages have shown competence in promoting their products online via social media platforms and the Godevi marketplace. This capability is supported by the provision of individual Godevi accounts for 25 partner villages, enabling direct management of marketing content, including updates and modifications, without external assistance. Despite these advancements, some villages still struggle to fully leverage the available digital tools to access broader markets effectively, highlighting an area for continued development and support.

## RECOMENDATION

Drawing upon the findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and workshop activities focused on the digitalization of tourist village products, the following recommendations are proposed:

### 1. Community-Led Development for Sustainability

Tourism village development initiatives should originate from within the community to ensure long-term sustainability. Grassroots involvement fosters local ownership, enhances authenticity, and builds a robust foundation for continued growth.

### 2. Identification of Core Tourism Potentials

Each tourist village must define its unique tourism potential, which serves as its distinctive identity and competitive advantage. Clear identification and emphasis on these unique attributes will differentiate the village from others and enhance its marketability.

### 3. Empowerment of Youth for Digitalization

Youth empowerment within villages should be prioritized to accelerate the digitization process. By involving younger generations in tourism development, villages can leverage their familiarity with digital tools and platforms to modernize marketing efforts and streamline operations.

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