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Participatory Digital Narratives in Community-Based Tourism: A Festival Case Study in Cirebon

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of tourism communication, yet participatory and sustainable digital narrative construction models in community-based tourism remain underexplored. This article aims to analyze the process of digital narrative construction in the Milm Kampung Festival in Cirebon and develop a communication model for sustainable destination transformation. Employing a qualitative approach with case study method and digital narrative analysis, this research involved 12 purposively selected informants from government organizers (Cirebon City Department of Communication, Information, and Statistics/DKIS), neighborhood association (RW) heads participating in the festival, MSME actors, and local cultural figures. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and analysis of social media content and 85 documentary films produced by participating RWs. The findings reveal three phases of digital narrative construction: (1) the pre-production phase emphasizing cross-generational participatory communication, (2) the production phase integrating local knowledge with digital technology, and (3) the distribution phase utilizing social media for narrative expansion. The festival successfully mobilized community participation across 247 RWs, documented diverse culinary heritage assets, and contributed to post-pandemic economic recovery for participating MSMEs. This research develops the Participatory Digital Narrative Communication Model (PDNCM) consisting of four main components: participatory actors, authentic content, integrated channels, and sustainable impacts. The model contributes to tourism communication theory by integrating participatory, narrative, and digital perspectives within sustainable destination development frameworks. Practically, this model offers policymakers a framework for shifting from top-down promotional approaches to facilitative-participatory strategies that empower communities as primary narrative producers across Indonesian tourism destinations.

Keywords: *Community-based tourism; participatory communication; festival communication strategy; digital narrative; Milm Kampung Festival*

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation era has fundamentally restructured tourism communication paradigms, shifting narrative authority from institutional gatekeepers to distributed networks of content producers [11], [30]. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for destination management organizations, particularly in developing contexts where community-based tourism (CBT) serves as a critical pathway for sustainable development [21], [22]. Within this landscape, digital narratives have emerged as a vital framework for understanding how destinations construct identity through participatory storytelling that privileges local voices and authentic experiences [17], [29]. The capacity of communities to produce their own narratives, rather than being merely represented by external actors, is increasingly recognized as essential for equitable and sustainable tourism outcomes [5], [24]. This recognition reflects a broader epistemological shift in tourism scholarship, moving from positivist approaches that treat destinations as objects of study toward interpretive frameworks that center community agency and subjective experience [4], [23].

Community-based tourism emphasizes local empowerment, cultural preservation, and equitable distribution of economic benefits [8], [27]. However, a persistent gap remains between the theoretical ideals of participatory CBT and practical implementation, particularly regarding digital technology integration [5], [24]. This gap is especially pronounced in post-pandemic contexts, where digital literacy and online visibility have become indispensable for tourism recovery [11], [25]. The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated significant economic decline across tourism-dependent sectors,

accelerating the shift toward digital platforms [10], [33]. In this context, festivals have emerged as strategic vehicles for revitalizing local economies while fostering social cohesion [7], [31]. Scholars have documented how festivals function as sites of cultural production where communities negotiate their identities and aspirations in relation to external audiences [31], [7].

The use of festivals as development interventions is not unique to Indonesia. Across Southeast Asia, governments and civil society organizations have increasingly turned to community-based festivals as mechanisms for economic revitalization and cultural preservation. In Thailand, the "One Tambon One Product" movement has leveraged local festivals to promote rural handicrafts and culinary traditions [12]. In Vietnam, community festivals have been employed to revitalize traditional craft villages affected by urbanization and industrialization [18]. In the Philippines, local government units have utilized festivals as platforms for tourism promotion and MSME development [12]. Despite the proliferation of such initiatives, systematic analysis of the communication processes underlying festival-based community development remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining how digital narrative construction operates within a festival context, contributing to broader conversations about participatory communication in development practice across the region.

The Festival Milm Kampung in Cirebon, Indonesia, presents a compelling case for examining participatory digital narrative construction within a CBT framework. Initiated by the Cirebon City Department of Communication, Information, and Statistics (DKIS) as an annual program, the festival mobilizes residents across 247 neighborhood associations (RWs) to produce documentary films showcasing their communities' cultural and economic assets. The 2023 festival, themed "Dapoer Ngebul" (Smoking Kitchen), aimed to promote local culinary heritage and support micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) recovery following pandemic disruptions. Prior research by Swastiningsih [28] examined DKIS communication strategies, highlighting the importance of strategic formulation accounting for temporal and spatial factors. However, what remains underexplored is the process through which communities actively construct digital narratives within institutional frameworks—the micro-level interactions, negotiations, and learning processes that shape how communities engage with digital technologies and represent their cultural assets.

This research makes three original contributions to tourism communication scholarship. First, it identifies three empirically-grounded phases of digital narrative construction—pre-production, production, and distribution—in community-based festival contexts, providing a processual understanding absent in existing static frameworks. Second, it develops the Participatory Digital Narrative Communication Model (PDNCM), which integrates participatory communication, digital narrative, and integrated marketing communication perspectives into a unified framework, a synthesis not present in existing models [11], [17], [22]. Third, it provides a practical implementation roadmap with measurable indicators, responding to calls for actionable knowledge in sustainable tourism development [5], [27]. By shifting analytical focus from institutional strategy formulation to community-level narrative production, this research complements and extends Swastiningsih [28] while offering a transferable framework for destinations pursuing participatory approaches to tourism communication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digital Narrative and Destination Communication

Digital narratives leverage digital technologies to construct, disseminate, and interactively engage with stories shaping perceptions of people, places, and cultures [17], [23]. Characterized by multimodality, interactivity, and distributed authorship, digital narratives enable multiple stakeholders to contribute to and reshape stories over time [11], [29]. In tourism contexts, travelers increasingly rely on user-generated content and social media platforms to inform destination choices [21], [30]. This democratization of tourism communication alters power dynamics between destinations and their audiences [22], [24]. Unlike traditional marketing approaches where destinations controlled their official narratives, contemporary destination branding must contend with a multiplicity of competing and complementary stories produced by diverse stakeholders [11], [17].

The effectiveness of digital narratives depends on their capacity to evoke emotional engagement and persuade audiences [17], [29]. Swastiningsih [28] demonstrated that in the Milm Kampung Festival, audio-visual storytelling through documentary drama serves as a powerful medium for conveying messages that encourage viewer contemplation. The documentary genre—with its associations with authenticity and truth—may be particularly effective for CBT initiatives seeking credibility and emotional connection [17], [23]. However, scholars critique the tendency to treat digital narratives as primarily promotional rather than as sites of cultural negotiation and identity construction [5], [24]. Ryan [23] argues digital narratives possess transformative potential beyond marketing, serving as vehicles for community expression, cultural preservation, and social change. This perspective aligns with emerging scholarship on narrative tourism that emphasizes the role of storytelling in fostering sustainable destination development through enhanced community engagement and visitor connection [17], [29].

Digital narrative analysis as a methodological framework draws from multiple disciplinary traditions, including narratology, media studies, and discourse analysis [23]. Building on the work of Ryan [23], digital narratives can be analyzed across three dimensions: narrative content (what stories are told), narrative form

(how stories are structured and presented), and narrative agency (who controls the storytelling process and for what purposes). The Milm Kampung Festival provides a rich context for examining all three dimensions. Narrative content is shaped by the Dapoer Ngebul theme, which foregrounds culinary heritage while allowing communities to articulate diverse local variations. Narrative form is constrained by the documentary genre, which imposes conventions regarding authenticity and evidentiary representation. Narrative agency is distributed across multiple actors: government facilitators who set thematic parameters, community producers who make creative decisions, and audiences whose engagement shapes narrative circulation. Understanding these dimensions is essential for analyzing how digital narratives function in community-based tourism contexts.

2.2. Communication in Community-Based Tourism

Participatory communication prioritizes dialogue, collaboration, and horizontal relationships over unidirectional information transmission [5], [8]. Drawing on Freirean traditions of critical pedagogy and participatory development, participatory communication approaches emphasize empowering communities to articulate their own development priorities and represent their own experiences [24], [27]. In tourism contexts, participatory communication is conceptualized as both a process and an outcome, encompassing the mechanisms through which communities engage in tourism planning and the resulting distribution of benefits and decision-making authority [8]. Effectiveness depends on meaningful engagement rather than tokenistic consultation, where community members are merely informed of decisions already made by external actors [5].

CBT initiatives characterized by high community participation achieve better economic, social, and environmental outcomes [8], [24]. However, challenges persist, including power asymmetries between government agencies and local communities, limited community capacity for meaningful engagement, and the tendency for participation to be circumscribed within predetermined boundaries [5], [27]. These challenges are particularly acute in contexts where government agencies retain significant control over resources and decision-making authority, potentially undermining the participatory ideals that CBT initiatives espouse [8], [24]. Digital integration introduces opportunities and tensions: platforms can expand reach but risk exacerbating inequalities [11], [24]. Neuhofer et al. [22] argue effective digital participation requires deliberate attention to issues of digital literacy, access, and alignment with local cultural practices and communication preferences.

The operationalization of participatory communication in development contexts has been extensively theorized, yet empirical documentation of participatory mechanisms in festival-based tourism initiatives remains limited [5], [8]. Building on the work of Dolezal and Novelli [5], this research identifies three participatory mechanisms that enabled community engagement in the Milm Kampung Festival: structural mechanisms (the use of existing RW governance structures as organizational platforms), relational mechanisms (the cultivation of trust relationships between government facilitators and community leaders), and pedagogical mechanisms (workshops and technical assistance that built community capacity for digital production). These mechanisms operated in combination, creating conditions that enabled meaningful participation. The structural mechanism reduced participation barriers by leveraging established social networks. The relational mechanism ensured that participation was grounded in trust rather than mere compliance. The pedagogical mechanism built the skills necessary for communities to exercise creative autonomy. Together, these mechanisms constitute a participatory infrastructure that can inform the design of similar initiatives.

2.3. Integrated Marketing Communication and Festival Strategy

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) coordinates diverse channels to deliver coherent, consistent messages [1], [14]. The 7P model (product, price, promotion, place, participant, process, physical evidence) emphasizes aligning all marketing communication elements to create unified brand experiences [13], [20]. In festival contexts, IMC principles guide coordination across traditional media, social media, event experiences, and stakeholder communications [7], [9]. The capacity to integrate multiple communication channels while maintaining message consistency is essential for maximizing the impact of festival-based tourism initiatives [31]. However, community-based contexts require adaptation, as communities may have limited capacity for message control and may prioritize authenticity over consistency [1], [20].

Festivals generate authentic, emotionally resonant narratives through immersive visitor experiences [7], [31]. Unlike conventional advertising, festival experiences allow visitors to become active participants in narrative construction, contributing to the co-creation of destination stories through their own social media content and word-of-mouth communications [17], [29]. This characteristic makes festivals especially valuable for destinations seeking to transition from broadcast-style promotion to more participatory, narrative-driven communication strategies [7], [31]. Swastiningsih [28] demonstrates that in the Milm Kampung Festival, audio-visual storytelling enables dissemination of persuasive messages that engage viewers and encourage reflection. Research by Indraswari [12] and Mahardika & Perwirawati [18] demonstrates how festival strategies can be adapted to local cultural contexts while achieving promotional objectives. However, these studies focus primarily on external marketing outcomes rather than internal

participatory processes, leaving a gap in understanding how festivals simultaneously serve promotional and community development functions [5], [27].

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative case study design, selected for its capacity to capture the complexity and contextual embeddedness of participatory digital narrative construction within the Milm Kampung Festival [26], [32]. The case study approach is particularly appropriate for investigating contemporary phenomena within real-world contexts where boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and where multiple sources of evidence can be triangulated to produce robust findings [3], [32]. The research adopts an interpretive paradigm, recognizing digital narratives as socially constructed phenomena whose meanings emerge through the interactions of multiple stakeholders [4]. This epistemological stance aligns with the study's objective of understanding how communities construct meaning through their participation in festival activities, rather than attempting to measure objective outcomes in isolation from their social context.

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

Research was conducted in Cirebon City, West Java, Indonesia, between February and April 2023. Cirebon was selected for its cultural diversity, tourism potential, and implementation of the Milm Kampung Festival as a strategic community development initiative. The research location encompassed DKIS offices and multiple RW locations where festival participants produced their films. Cirebon's unique cultural position as a meeting point of Sundanese, Javanese, and Chinese cultural traditions makes it an ideal site for examining how diverse cultural assets can be represented through digital narratives [28].

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholder groups. The sample comprised 12 informants across four categories:

Table 1. Profile of Research Informants

Code	Category	Role in Festival	Data Collection Method
INF-G1	DKIS Government	Festival Coordinator	In-depth interview (90 min)
INF-G2	MeSTI Division	Technical Facilitator	Interview + Observation
INF-G3	DKIS Government	Program Manager	In-depth interview (75 min)
INF-R1	RW Head	Community Organizer, District A	Interview + Observation
INF-R2	RW Head	Community Organizer, District B	In-depth interview (60 min)
INF-R3	RW Head	Community Organizer, District C	Interview + Observation
INF-M1	MSME Actor	Culinary Producer, Featured in Film	In-depth interview (60 min)
INF-M2	MSME Actor	Culinary Producer, Featured in Film	Interview + Observation
INF-M3	MSME Actor	Culinary Producer, Featured in Film	In-depth interview (55 min)
INF-C1	Cultural Figure	Narrative Consultant, District A	In-depth interview (80 min)
INF-C2	Cultural Figure	Narrative Consultant, District B	In-depth interview (70 min)
INF-C3	Cultural Figure	Narrative Consultant, District C	Interview + Observation

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection employed three methods to enable triangulation. In-depth interviews served as the primary method, with each interview lasting 60-90 minutes using semi-structured protocols [15]. Interviews focused on festival experiences, communication processes, and impacts on community participation and economic outcomes. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, with quotes translated into English for publication

Participatory observation was conducted during production workshops and screening events, documenting interaction patterns, communication dynamics, and practical challenges [3], [6]. Field notes captured both descriptive accounts and interpretive reflections, particularly valuable for understanding cross-generational collaboration.

Document analysis encompassed 85 documentary films produced by participating RWs, social media content (Instagram and Facebook), and official festival documents. Film analysis focused on narrative structures, representation of local assets, and integration of economic and cultural themes. Social media content was analyzed for distribution patterns and audience engagement. Official documents provided program context.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed systematic, iterative thematic analysis [2], [19]. The process was organized into three phases: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Coding used both inductive approaches (codes emerging from data) and deductive approaches (codes derived from participatory communication, digital narrative, and IMC frameworks).

The coding process employed a hybrid approach that combined a priori codes derived from theoretical frameworks with emergent codes identified through close reading of interview transcripts and field notes. A priori codes included: "participatory mechanisms," "digital literacy," "cross-generational collaboration," "authenticity negotiation," "channel integration," and "sustainable impacts." Emergent codes included: "kampung pride," "generational respect," "technology anxiety," "creative autonomy," and "community networks." Coding was conducted using NVivo 12 software, which facilitated systematic retrieval and comparison of coded segments. Two researchers independently coded 20% of the data to establish inter-rater reliability, achieving 87% agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and refinement of code definitions. The final coding scheme consisted of 18 codes organized under four thematic categories corresponding to the study's research questions.

Data display involved constructing matrices and visual representations to facilitate pattern identification [19]. Films were analyzed using digital narrative analysis techniques examining content and form. Triangulation across data sources validated findings through cross-checking between interview accounts, observation records, and documentary evidence [4], [6]. NVivo

software was used to organize and code qualitative data, enabling systematic retrieval of coded segments for analysis.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was addressed through multiple strategies consistent with qualitative research standards. Prolonged engagement with the research setting (approximately three months) allowed for deeper understanding of contextual factors influencing festival implementation. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify accuracy of interpretations. Triangulation across methods and data sources provided multiple perspectives on phenomena, enhancing confidence in findings [3], [16]. Inter-rater reliability was established through independent coding of 20% of transcripts by two researchers, with 87% agreement; discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Following Yin's [32] framework for case study research, this study pursues analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization. The findings are intended to extend theoretical propositions about participatory digital narrative construction rather than to be statistically representative of all community-based tourism initiatives. The thick description provided enables readers to assess the transferability of findings to their own contexts.

Ethical considerations guided all research aspects. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear explanation of research purposes, voluntary participation, and confidentiality protections. Anonymity has been maintained through generic role identifiers. Research was conducted in compliance with institutional ethical review requirements.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Three Phases of Digital Narrative Construction

Digital narrative construction within the Milm Kampung Festival occurred through three distinct yet interconnected phases: pre-production, production, and distribution. These phases operated in dynamic interaction, with later-phase insights informing earlier stages as participants gained experience. This phased structure reflects the intentional design of the festival program, which sought to guide participants through a structured yet flexible process of narrative creation.

Pre-production phase was characterized by intensive participatory communication building community capacity and establishing narrative frameworks. Festival organizers conducted workshops introducing participants to digital technologies, explaining documentary production requirements, and articulating the Dapoer Ngebul theme. Workshops emphasized cross-generational collaboration. As one informant explained:

"We designed workshops for mixed generations because young people understand technology, but elders understand the traditional recipes. When they work together, both learn something new." (INF-G2, interview, March 15, 2023)

The pre-production phase also involved significant community-level decision-making about which culinary traditions to feature. Interviews with RW heads revealed that these decisions were often made through collective deliberation, with communities weighing multiple factors: the availability of elders who could demonstrate traditional techniques, the marketability of featured products, and the narrative potential of different dishes. One RW head explained: *"We had five families who wanted to be in the film. We decided to feature all of them, but in different ways. Some would be interviewed, some would demonstrate cooking, some would talk about history."* (INF-R3, interview, March 20, 2023). This deliberative process reflects the participatory ethos that characterized the festival, distinguishing it from top-down initiatives where content decisions are made by external producers. The pre-production phase thus served not only as a technical training ground but also as a space for negotiating the relationship between tradition and innovation, where community members could collectively determine how to represent their heritage.

Production phase involved community-based teams identifying, filming, and narrating culinary heritage stories. Analysis of 85 films revealed consistent narrative structures: depiction of traditional food preparation, interviews with local producers and elders, cultural and historical contextualization, and emphasis on economic potential. Participants navigated tensions between representing authentic traditions and adapting to documentary conventions. A cultural figure noted:

"We had discussions about how much to 'stage' for the camera versus showing things as they naturally happen. We decided that showing the real process—even with its imperfections—would be more meaningful than creating something that looks like television." (INF-C1, interview, March 28, 2023)

Analysis of the documentary films revealed community voices articulating local identity and economic aspirations. One film from RW 08 Kesambi stated*: "Dapur ngebul bukan sekadar asap dapur, tapi semangat gotong royong yang mengebul dari setiap rumah" ["Smoking kitchen is not just kitchen smoke, but the spirit of mutual cooperation emanating from every household"]* (Film RW 08, 2023). Another film from RW 15 emphasized the economic significance of culinary heritage: *"Resep ini warisan nenek, sekarang jadi mata pencaharian keluarga" ["This recipe is grandmother's heritage, now it's the family's livelihood"]* (Film RW 15, 2023). A third film from RW 23 Kesepuhan articulated the festival's broader social meaning: *"Film ini bukan cuma tentang makanan, tapi tentang kita yang punya cerita" ["This film is not just about food, but about us who have stories to tell"]* (Film RW 23, 2023). These narrative excerpts demonstrate how participating communities used the documentary form to simultaneously preserve cultural knowledge and assert their economic agency.

Distribution phase leveraged social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook) to expand narrative reach. A coordinated approach combined centralized messaging with decentralized community sharing. An informant described the strategy:

Decided to feature all of them, but in different ways. Some would be interviewed, some would demonstrate cooking, some would talk about history." (INF-R3, interview, March 20, 2023).

"We created a schedule for posting official content, but we also encouraged each RW to share their own behind-the-scenes photos and invite their neighbors to watch. The combination gave us both consistency and authenticity." (INF-G1, interview, April 5, 2023)

Audience engagement metrics indicated that content featuring direct community voices generated highest interaction. One MSME actor observed:

"After our film was posted, people started coming to my stall asking about dishes they saw in the video. They said they wanted to try what looked so delicious in the film." (INF-M1, interview, April 10, 2023)

4.2 Participatory Mechanisms and Community Empowerment

Participatory mechanisms operated through existing community governance structures (RW system), leveraging established social networks and trust relationships. RW heads served as bridges between government and community. An informant explained:

"Because we already had monthly RW meetings, it was easy to introduce the festival program. People trusted the invitation because it came from their neighborhood leader, not just from government." (INF-R1, interview, March 18, 2023)

Community empowerment emerged as both a process and an outcome of participatory digital narrative construction. Beyond individual skill development, the festival contributed to collective empowerment through the collaborative nature of the production process. The requirement that films be produced collectively fostered community collaboration, with participants reporting strengthened social bonds and enhanced collective efficacy. One RW head noted:

"Before the festival, we had meetings but people mostly kept to themselves. Making the film brought us together. We visited each other's homes, shared stories, and discovered things about our neighbors we didn't know." (INF-R3, interview, April 8, 2023).

This finding aligns with Swastiningsih's [28] observation that the festival promotes social welfare and unity amidst global challenges, suggesting that the process of collaborative production generates social capital that extends beyond immediate festival outcomes. The festival thus functioned not merely as a platform for content production but as a catalyst for community development, strengthening the social fabric that underlies sustainable tourism.

Economic empowerment was achieved through visibility festival films provided to participating MSMEs. Several actors reported increased sales following the festival. However, benefits were not uniformly distributed, suggesting additional factors influenced translation of narrative visibility into economic outcomes. An informant noted:

"My sales increased about 30% after the festival, but my neighbor who also participated didn't see the same increase. Maybe because her product is more seasonal, or maybe because she didn't share the video as widely." (INF-M3, interview, April 15, 2023)

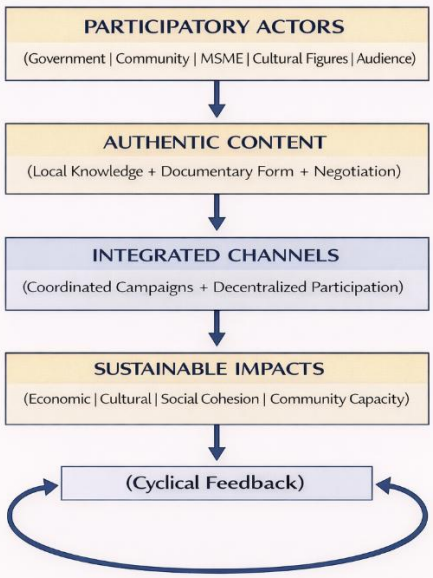
4.3 Participatory Mechanisms and Community Empowerment

Based on findings, this research develops the Participatory Digital Narrative Communication Model (PDNCM), comprising four interconnected components:

Table 2. Participatory Digital Narrative Communication Model Components in Milm Kampung Festival

Component	Description	Operationalization in Milm Kampung Festival
Participatory Actors	Diverse stakeholders including governmen-t facilitators, commu-nity producers, MSME actors, cultural figures, audiences	247 RWs, 12 key informants across four categories, coordinated by DKIS and MeSTI
Authentic Content	Narratives reflecting community identities, priorities, assets, emerging through negotiation	85 documentary films blending traditional knowledge with documentary conventions
Integrated Channels	Strategic coordination of communication platforms enabling centralized coordination and decentralized	Instagram/Facebook official campaigns + community-driven distribution through personal networks
Sustainable Impacts	Economic benefits, cultural preservation, enhanced social cohesion, increased community capatty	Increased MSME sales, documented culinary heritage, strengthened social bonds

Figure 1: Participatory Digital Narrative Communication Model (PDNCM)



The PDNCM conceptualizes participatory digital narrative construction as a cyclical process. Participatory actors (government facilitators, community producers, MSME actors, cultural figures, and audiences) collaboratively produce authentic content through negotiation between local knowledge and documentary conventions. This content is disseminated through integrated channels that combine coordinated campaigns with decentralized participation, generating sustainable impacts (economic benefits, cultural preservation, social cohesion, community capacity). These impacts feedback to strengthen participatory actors and enable further narrative construction, creating a virtuous cycle.

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Theoritocal Contributions: Model Comparisons

The PDNCM contributes to tourism communication theory by integrating participatory, narrative, and digital perspectives previously treated as separate domains. Comparing the PDNCM with existing frameworks illuminates its distinct contributions:

Table 3. Comparison of PDNCM with Existing Theoretical Frameworks

Framework	Focus	Key Concept	Limitation	PDNCM Extension
Tourism Co-creation Framework (Neuhofer et al, 2020)	Technology-enabled experiences	Co-creation	Limited attention to community participation in production	Adds participatory actors as central component
Participatory Narrative Framework (Lund et al., 2021)	Social media storytelling	Distributed authorship	Focus on external audiences rather than internal impacts	Adds participatory actors as central component
Digital Destination Branding Model (Gretzel et, 2020)	Destination management	Digital transformation	Government-centric, limited community agency	Adds sustainable impacts as fourth component
IMC Framework (Kotler & Keller, 2016)	Message consistency	Digital transformation	Covernment-centric, limited community agency	Replaces control with coordination, centers community producers
IMC Framework (Kotler & Keller, 2016)	Message consistency	Integrated channels	Assumes organizational message control	Adapts for distributed narrative authority
IMC Framework (Kotler & Keller, 2016)	Message consistency	Integrated channels	Assumes organizational message control	Adapts for distributed narrative authority

The PDNCM extends participatory communication theory by specifying how digital technologies can enable community engagement when aligned with local social structures. While Dolezal and Novelli [5] documented risks of digital participation reproducing inequalities, this case demonstrates that cross-generational collaboration can mitigate such risks. This finding aligns with Salazar's [24] argument that effective digital participation requires embedding technology within existing social practices. The PDNCM also contributes to IMC theory by substituting control with coordination, recognizing that community participation entails message variation. As Getz and Page [7] suggest, festivals generate multiple authentic narratives that collectively contribute to destination appeal without requiring message uniformity.

4.3.2. Comparison with Swastiningsih

Swastiningsih [28] examined DKIS communication strategies, emphasizing strategic formulation accounting for temporal and spatial factors. The present study complements this by shifting analytical focus to community-level narrative production processes. While Swastiningsih [28] identified the importance of considering context, this research specifies mechanisms through which context is operationalized: cross-generational collaboration, negotiation between tradition and innovation, and integration of local knowledge with digital technology. Together, these studies provide a more comprehensive understanding of participatory digital narrative construction from both institutional and community perspectives.

The complementarity between this study and Swastiningsih [28] reveals the multi-level nature of participatory digital narrative construction in community-based tourism. Swastiningsih's analysis focused on the institutional level—how DKIS designed communication strategies that accounted for the temporal and spatial characteristics of Cirebon's communities. This study examines the community level—how residents interpreted, adapted, and implemented those strategies through their own creative processes. Together, these studies suggest that successful participatory digital narrative initiatives require alignment between institutional frameworks and community capacities. Where institutional strategies provide clear parameters while respecting community autonomy (as in the Milm Kampung Festival), participatory processes can flourish. Where institutional strategies are overly prescriptive or insufficiently supportive, community engagement may become tokenistic. This finding has important implications for policymakers designing similar initiatives

4.3.3. Practical Implications and Implementation Rodmap

For government agencies, findings suggest shifting from producer to facilitator roles. A practical roadmap includes:

Table 4. Implementation Roadmap for Participatory Digital Narrative Initiatives

Phase	Activity	Success Indicator	Responsible Party
Pre-Production	Conduct stakeholder mapping to identify community governance structures	≥80% of targeted RWs engaged	DKIS Planning Division
Pre-Production	Design cross-generational digital literacy workshops	≥70% of RW teams include participants under 25 and over 50	MeSTI with community facilitators
Production	Provide technical facilitation respecting narrative autonomy	Minimum 1 film per participating RW	MeSTI technical team
Distribution	Develop integrated channel strategy (coordinated + decentralized)	Engagement rate ≥5% on official channels	DKIS Communication Division
Evaluation	Track process indicators and outcome measures	Annual assessment with longitudinal component	DKIS Communication Division
Evaluation	Track process indicators and outcome measures	Annual assessment with longitudinal component	DKIS Research Division

The implementation roadmap can be further elaborated with specific guidance for each phase. For the stakeholder mapping activity, agencies should identify not only formal governance structures (such as RWs) but also informal community networks, including religious organizations, women's groups, and youth associations that may serve as additional channels for participation. For cross-generational workshops, agencies should consider co-designing curricula with community members to ensure that content is culturally appropriate and addresses locally relevant learning needs. For technical facilitation, agencies should develop clear protocols that distinguish between enabling support (helping communities achieve their creative visions) and directive intervention (imposing external standards). For channel strategy, agencies should recognize that decentralized participation through personal networks may be more effective for reaching certain audiences than official campaigns, and should allocate resources accordingly. For evaluation, agencies should develop indicators that capture both process (participation rates, satisfaction, learning outcomes) and outcome (economic impacts, cultural preservation, social cohesion) dimensions.

For community organizations, findings highlight the importance of collaborative approaches. The collective production model strengthens social bonds beyond content outcomes. Communities should organize production teams to maximize participation across demographics and document lessons learned for future initiatives.

For tourism practitioners, the research demonstrates that authentic narratives generated through participatory processes may be more effective than professionally produced promotional content. Practitioners should allocate resources to support community content production and develop metrics capturing engagement with authentic content.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Agenda

Several limitations suggest avenues for future inquiry. The single-case design limits statistical generalizability; however, following Yin's [32] framework, this study pursues analytical generalization by extending theoretical propositions about participatory digital narrative construction. Comparative studies across diverse contexts are needed to test the transferability of findings. Future research should employ a longitudinal quasi-experimental design comparing MSME economic outcomes across 12 months post-festival, with a control group of non-participating MSMEs in the same region. Such research would test whether economic benefits persist and what factors predict sustainability.

The absence of systematic audience reception analysis suggests need for reception studies or experimental designs examining relationships between narrative characteristics and audience outcomes. Future research should investigate which narrative features (e.g., community voice, authentic settings, intergenerational collaboration) most effectively generate engagement and behavioral change.

Finally, power dynamics within participatory processes warrant critical examination. Future research employing critical or postcolonial frameworks could illuminate how participation may reproduce or challenge existing inequalities, complementing Swastiningsih's [28] focus on strategy formulation with attention to power relations within which strategies are implemented.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Consolidation: Synthesis of Findings

This research analyzed digital narrative construction in the Milm Kampung Festival, revealing three phases: pre-production emphasizing cross-generational capacity building; production integrating local knowledge with digital technology; and distribution leveraging social media for narrative expansion. The festival successfully mobilized 247 RWs, produced 85 documentary films, and contributed to post-pandemic MSME recovery. The three-phase process identified in this research provides a framework for understanding how participatory digital narratives are constructed in community-based festival contexts, offering insights that can inform similar initiatives in other settings.

The Participatory Digital Narrative Communication Model (PDNCM) comprises four components: participatory actors, authentic content, integrated channels, and sustainable impacts. Comparing with existing frameworks [11], [17], [22] demonstrates PDNCM's distinct contributions: centering community producers, specifying mechanisms for authentic content production, and integrating sustainable impacts as a core component. The model's cyclical structure, where sustainable impacts feed back to strengthen participatory actors, distinguishes it from linear communication models and highlights the potential for self-sustaining virtuous cycles in community-based tourism development.

Complementing Swastiningsih [28], which focused on institutional strategy formulation, this research provides a comprehensive account of how participatory digital narratives can be constructed to achieve sustainable development outcomes. The findings confirm that communication strategies play pivotal roles in achieving festival objectives while adding specificity about how strategies should be designed to enable genuine community participation. Together, these studies offer a multi-level perspective on participatory communication in community-based tourism.

5.2 Implementation: Spesific Recomendations

For government agencies: shift from producer to facilitator roles through (1) stakeholder mapping to identify community governance structures, (2) cross-generational digital literacy programs that leverage complementary skills across age groups, (3) facilitation protocols respecting community autonomy in narrative development, (4) integrated channel strategies combining coordinated campaigns with decentralized participation, and (5) monitoring systems tracking both process indicators and outcome measures.

For community organizations: leverage collaborative production to strengthen social bonds through (1) diverse production teams that maximize participation across demographic groups, (2) equitable decision-making processes that ensure fair distribution of efforts and benefits, (3) documented lessons learned to build institutional memory for future initiatives, and (4) inter-community networks for sharing practices and experiences.

For tourism practitioners: rebalance strategies to emphasize authenticity through (1) resources supporting community content production rather than outsourcing to professional producers, (2) distribution strategies elevating community-generated content alongside official communications, (3) metrics capturing engagement with authentic content as indicators of communication effectiveness, and (4) partnerships sustaining narrative production beyond festival cycles.

5.3 Projection: Future Research Agenda

Future research should: (1) conduct comparative studies across diverse contexts to test PDNCM generalizability, examining how variations in community governance structures, digital infrastructure, and cultural traditions affect outcomes; (2) employ longitudinal quasi-experimental designs with control groups to assess sustainability of economic benefits, tracking MSME outcomes across multiple post-festival years; (3) use audience reception studies or experiments to examine relationships between narrative characteristics and outcomes, identifying which features most effectively generate engagement and behavioral change; and (4) apply critical frameworks to examine power dynamics within participatory processes, investigating how participation may reproduce or challenge existing inequalities.

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