



Communicating the Digital Turn: Social Media Strategy, Live Commerce, and Quadruple Helix Governance in Indonesia's Creative Economy Tourism Destination

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Abstract

Digital transformation among creative economy micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia's Super Priority Tourism Destinations remains structurally uneven despite growing international visibility, and existing scholarship predominantly explains this gap through technological and economic variables while overlooking its communicative dimension. This study aims to reposition digital transformation as a communication-governance phenomenon, examining how narrative construction, content-mediated identity performance, and multi-stakeholder dialogue shape MSME digital adoption in Mandalika, Lombok Tengah Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. A qualitative design was employed, comprising 32 in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation across four sites conducted between April and May 2026, analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis and integrated with the Quadruple Helix communication governance framework. Findings identify three overlapping communication challenges: fragmented digital communication competency along generational and spatial lines; underutilized culturally anchored narrative identity in social media content; and the structural absence of institutionalized cross-helix communication linking the Mandalika Special Economic Zone's international tourism economy with the regency's indigenous creative economy base. The study advances a Communication Mediated Digital Transformation (CMDT) model built on four pillars, each carrying a specific practical implication: narrative localization, requiring producers to embed documented cultural provenance into content to build purchase trust; live commerce as communicative performance, requiring platform and government-supported training in real-time video presentation; cooperative content infrastructure, offering shared-resource clusters as a scalable alternative for infrastructure-poor artisan communities; and Quadruple Helix dialogue institutionalization, requiring formal communication protocols connecting government, tourism industry actors, academia, and village-level civil society to close the boundary gap between the Special Economic Zone and the local creative economy.

Keywords *Digital Transformation, Creative Economy, Social Media Marketing, Live Commerce, Quadruple Helix, Communication Governance, Tourism Destination*

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of digital communication and economic development has become one of the most consequential terrains in contemporary social science. For creative economy micro, small, and medium enterprises embedded in culturally rich yet infrastructurally constrained regions, digital transformation is both a lifeline and a labyrinth. This tension is nowhere more visible than in Lombok Tengah Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, where the government's designation of Mandalika as a Super Priority Tourism Destination since 2020 has generated extraordinary demand-side pressure on a creative economy ecosystem that remains, by most digital metrics, substantially offline.

As of 2024, approximately 10,340 creative economy enterprises were registered in Lombok

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Tengah, anchored in traditional Sasak weaving (*tenun songket*), culinary products rooted in indigenous food traditions, and bamboo rattan handicrafts produced across village cooperatives. The MotoGP World Championship at the Pertamina Mandalika International Circuit, which hosted the event for the first time in March 2022, increased visibility for these enterprises among international audiences, both in person and digitally. Yet, field data collected during this study reveal that only about 16 percent of registered units actively engage digital platforms for commerce, a figure that contrasts sharply with the 1.2 million tourist arrivals recorded in 2024 and the national target of 30 million digitally active MSMEs by the end of the same year ([Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, 2023](#)).

Existing scholarship on MSME digitalization has predominantly approached this gap through economic ([Gouveia & Mamede, 2022](#); [Anatan & Nur, 2023](#)), technological ([Verhoef et al., 2021](#); [Papadopoulos et al., 2020](#)), and organizational lenses ([Malodia et al., 2023](#); [Skare et al., 2023](#)). What remains underdeveloped is a communication-centered account of how MSMEs in cultural tourism destinations construct their digital presence, and how multi-stakeholder communication governance shapes the pace of digital transformation. This gap is what the present study addresses.

We argue that digital transformation in creative-economy tourism destinations is not primarily a technology-adoption problem but a communication-governance challenge. The platforms available to Lombok Tengah's weavers, culinary producers, and artisans, namely Instagram, TikTok, Shopee, and WhatsApp Business, are accessible and demonstrably effective when deployed by enterprises with sufficient communication competency. The structural problem is that the communicative infrastructure required for this deployment, including digital content literacy, culturally appropriate narrative identity, cross-helix institutional dialogue, and cooperative content production, remains absent or severely underdeveloped for most enterprises. Addressing this gap requires better communication rather than better technology alone, between enterprises and their audiences, between enterprises and institutional partners, and among the four helices of the Quadruple Helix governance ecosystem.

This study makes three contributions. First, it introduces the Communication Mediated Digital Transformation model, centering narrative identity construction, content strategy, institutional dialogue, and platform-mediated performance as the primary mediating variables between structural conditions and digital transformation outcomes. Second, it provides detailed qualitative evidence from 32 interviews and ethnographic observation across four sites in Lombok Tengah. Third, it extends the Quadruple Helix framework from a primarily innovation-systems lens to an explicitly communicative governance model, showing how communication failures among helices produce systemic blockages that technology provision alone cannot resolve.

The remainder proceeds as follows. Section two reviews the theoretical landscape spanning digital transformation, social media marketing, culturally anchored content strategy, and Quadruple Helix governance. Section three describes the research design. Section four presents findings on the communicative dimensions of digital transformation in Lombok Tengah. Finally, section six concludes with implications for theory, policy, and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Transformation as a Communicative Phenomenon

The tripartite framework of digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation elaborated by [Verhoef et al. \(2021\)](#) has become the dominant conceptual scaffold for MSME digital transformation research. Its central insight, that transformation is a reconfiguration of business models and organizational cultures rather than a technical event, resonates with [Amit and Zott's \(2012\)](#) argument that business model reconfiguration is fundamentally about how firms communicate value to stakeholders. Digital platforms do not simply distribute products; they

construct communicative relationships.

Recent scholarship articulates this communicative turn explicitly. [Gutierriz et al. \(2023\)](#), reviewing 167 studies on digital transformation in tourism, demonstrate that the most transformative digital innovations reconfigure the communicative relationship between producers and consumers, enabling co-creation of experience and narrative sharing. [Zhang et al. \(2025\)](#) argue that digital transformation performance in tourism enterprises is mediated by knowledge communication, the capacity to translate technical capabilities into narratives customers understand and trust.

In the MSME context, [Malodia et al. \(2023\)](#) show that the strongest predictor of digital self-efficacy among SMEs is not platform access but communicative confidence, the entrepreneur's belief that they can construct compelling content and represent their enterprise in ways that resonate with digital audiences. [Feroz et al. \(2023\)](#) similarly identify communicative dynamic capability as one of three core capacities enabling sustainable digital transformation. These findings suggest that treating digital transformation as primarily technological or economic underestimates the communicative work it requires.

Social Media Marketing as Communication Practice

Social media marketing has been extensively theorized as a marketing tool, but its significance as a communicative practice requiring identity construction, audience relationship management, and narrative coherence has received less systematic attention in the MSME literature. [Dwivedi et al. \(2021\)](#) establish that social media marketing effectiveness depends on the quality of communicative engagement, namely content relevance, interaction responsiveness, narrative consistency, and authentic brand personality, which are communication competencies rather than technical specifications.

[Felix et al. \(2017\)](#) proposed a strategic framework distinguishing conservative and progressive social media orientations along dimensions of scope, culture, structure, and governance, a framework substantiated by [Shareef et al. \(2019\)](#), who show that social media marketing credibility is the primary driver of consumer engagement and purchase intention in social commerce.

For tourism-adjacent creative economy enterprises, the communicative stakes are heightened by what [Kaplan and Haenlein \(2019\)](#) call the authenticity imperative: the expectation that content produced by artisanal enterprises will convey genuine cultural provenance rather than manufactured marketing discourse. This creates opportunities and challenges alike: products carry authentic cultural value that could become a powerful communicative asset, yet converting that authenticity into compelling digital content requires narrative skill, visual production competence, and platform literacy that most enterprises currently lack.

The emergence of live commerce, real-time video-based selling through platforms such as TikTok Live, Instagram Live, and Shopee Live, has added a significant communicative dimension to MSME strategy. [Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut \(2020\)](#) demonstrate that live-streaming commerce functions as a form of parasocial communication, creating a perceived social presence that alters purchase-decision dynamics. For artisanal goods whose value is embedded in the production process, live commerce enables producers to perform their craft in real time and convert the production process itself into a marketing asset that static formats cannot replicate.

Culturally Anchored Content and Heritage Communication

The strategic deployment of cultural identity in digital content, termed here culturally anchored content strategy, is an emerging field within communication studies and tourism marketing research. [Tung and Ritchie \(2011\)](#) established that heritage tourism experiences derive

value from the authenticity of cultural encounters, an argument [Kim and Jamal \(2007\)](#) extended to the performance of cultural identity. For MSMEs in heritage tourism destinations, digital content functions not merely as advertising but as a medium of cultural performance through which it communicates authenticity to distant audiences.

[Yang et al. \(2024\)](#) empirically demonstrate that tourism MSMEs whose digital content integrates cultural identity markers, such as documented production processes, named artisan identities, and ceremonial contexts, achieve higher engagement, stronger brand recall, and greater willingness to pay premiums than enterprises that use generic product photography. This has direct implications for Lombok Tengah, where Sasak cultural heritage, including songket motif vocabulary, provenance-specific culinary sourcing, and intergenerational craft knowledge, constitutes a rich but underexploited communicative resource. [Rosario and Dias \(2022\)](#) argue that cultural content authenticity functions as communicative capital resistant to competitive replication, consistent with the competitive advantage logic applied by [Ratten \(2022\)](#). For Lombok Tengah's enterprises, the primary competitive differentiator in a crowded digital marketplace is not product quality alone but the non-replicable cultural narrative embedded in their products.

Quadruple Helix as Communication Governance Framework

The Quadruple Helix model, which conceptualizes innovation as emerging from structured interaction among government, academia, industry, and civil society ([Carayannis & Campbell, 2009](#); [Cloitre et al., 2023](#)), has been theorized primarily as an innovation systems framework. Its application to communication governance is nonetheless logically consistent: the model's core mechanism, recursive bidirectional dialogue among four institutional actor groups, is fundamentally a communication claim, asserting that the quality of inter-helix communication determines the quality of innovation outcomes.

[Prayudi et al. \(2020\)](#) demonstrated that sustained innovation requires institutionalized bidirectional communication channels across all four helices rather than top-down knowledge transfer alone. [Leminen et al. \(2021\)](#) establish that Quadruple Helix governance effectiveness depends on helix communication fidelity, the degree to which information and knowledge outputs are accurately transmitted across helix boundaries.

[Kurniati and Suryanto \(2023\)](#) argue that tourism MSME digitalization in peripheral Indonesian destinations fails primarily because of communication failures within and between governance helices: training programs are not coordinated with industry requirements, research insights do not reach practitioners, and community-level knowledge is not incorporated into policy design. This diagnosis provides the theoretical foundation for the present study's CMDT model. [Lindner et al. \(2024\)](#) further find that the most resilient innovation outcomes emerge when civil society actors, including artisan communities and cultural custodians, are accorded genuine communicative agency within Quadruple Helix governance rather than merely receiving decisions made by the other three helices.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative design grounded in the interpretive epistemology articulated by [Creswell and Poth \(2024\)](#), suited to understanding the meanings and communicative practices through which creative economy MSMEs navigate digital transformation, phenomena not reducible to quantifiable variables. The design integrates in-depth semi-structured interviewing and systematic ethnographic observation, following the multi-method approach recommended by [Braun and Clarke \(2019\)](#) for reflexive thematic analysis.

The study situates itself within what [Denzin and Lincoln \(2018\)](#) term the interpretive paradigm, privileging the understanding of social phenomena from the perspectives of those who

experience them while remaining attentive to structural conditions. This suits research on digital transformation in marginalized economic contexts, where the gap between structural possibility and lived reality requires attention to subjective meanings and communicative practices rather than technological determinism.

Fieldwork was conducted in Lombok Tengah Regency between April and May 2026, following the MotoGP season. Four sites were selected through purposive criterion sampling: Praya town, the administrative hub; Sukarara Village, the primary songket-weaving community; Sade Village, a protected Sasak heritage site; and the Mandalika Special Economic Zone perimeter market adjacent to Kuta Beach, representing the tourist-producer interface.

Thirty-two informants were recruited through purposive sampling, targeting active operators who had used at least one digital platform within the preceding twelve months. Informants comprised craft producers (n=14), culinary operators (n=11), and fashion and accessories vendors (n=7). Semi-structured interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and were conducted primarily in Bahasa Indonesia, with Sasak language elements incorporated where preferred. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and member-checked with five key informants.

Thematic analysis following [Braun and Clarke's \(2019\)](#) framework proceeded through six phases: familiarisation, initial coding (1,247 codes generated), theme construction, theme review, theme naming, and report production. NVivo 14 assisted code management but did not automate interpretive decisions. Secondary data triangulation drew on [BPS Lombok Tengah \(2024\)](#), [Dinas Pariwisata NTB \(2025\)](#), [World Bank's \(2025\)](#) report, [Satu Data NTB \(2025\)](#), and [APJII's \(2024\)](#) broadband survey data. The Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Yogyakarta Research Ethics Committee granted ethical clearance before data collection.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Landscape of Digital Engagement: A Communicative Audit

Lombok Tengah's creative economy presents a communicative landscape more structurally constrained than aggregate statistics suggest. Of the 10,340 registered enterprises, approximately 16 percent are achieving basic digital activation, meaning an active social media account or marketplace listing with at least two digital transactions monthly, and do not form a homogeneous category. Rather, they constitute a heterogeneous population differentiated by subsector, geography, operator age, and the quality of their communicative engagement with digital platforms.

Field data reveal three communicative orientations among digitally active enterprises. Passive digital presence, observed in about 9 percent of the population, is characterized by a profile or listing that is not actively curated or used to engage customers. Active content communication, about 5 percent, involves regular posting and consistent audience engagement without integration into the marketplace e-commerce. Integrated digital commerce, about 2 percent, encompasses enterprises operating across multiple platforms in a coordinated manner, combining content production with marketplace listings, digital payment, and, in advanced cases, live commerce.

Table 1 presents the distribution of digital activation across subsectors, based on field data and records from [Satu Data NTB \(2025\)](#).

Table 1. Creative Economy Enterprise Distribution and Digital Activation by Subsector, Lombok Tengah (2024)

Subsector	Enterprises (n)	% of Total	Digitally Active (%)	Primary Platform
Handicrafts (<i>tenun</i> , pottery, rattan)	3,791	41%	11%	WhatsApp Business
Culinary Products	3,051	33%	19%	Instagram, Shopee
Fashion & Textiles	1,757	19%	22%	Instagram, TikTok
Other (arts, music, performance)	648	7%	8%	Facebook, YouTube
Total	9,247	100%	~16%	Mixed

Source: [Satu Data NTB \(2025\)](#); Authors' field data (2026)

Communicative Barriers: Fragmentation, Fear, and the Generational Divide

The most significant finding is not the absence of digital platforms, but the lack of communicative competency to use them effectively. Of the 32 informants, the nine demonstrating the most sophisticated engagement, curated storefronts with keyword-optimized listings and responsive messaging, were uniformly aged between 22 and 35 and had formal education beyond secondary school or extended exposure to digital commerce through urban family networks. By contrast, the 14 informants aged 45 or above relied exclusively on WhatsApp and uniformly delegated platform-facing communication to younger family members when such a capability existed in the household.

This age-stratified divide carries implications beyond individual skill gaps. The deep holders of Sasak craft knowledge, the master penenun of Sukarara, predominantly women aged 40 to 70 who are custodians of the traditional songket motif vocabulary, are precisely those most distanced from the digital platforms through which their products could reach the widest market. One informant described this as a translation problem that is simultaneously linguistic, cultural, and economic.

A second cluster of barriers centers on what informants described as fear of public communication failure. For enterprises accustomed to face-to-face commerce, producing digital content that would be publicly visible, potentially criticized, and permanently archived triggered significant anxiety, resonating with the digital communication apprehension identified by [Malodia et al. \(2023\)](#), who show that reluctance to adopt social media marketing is often less about cost than about the perceived risk of public communicative failure.

Infrastructure constraints added a third layer. Of the 32 informants, 26 (81 percent) reported frequent internet outages disrupting sustained online activity, with a mean daily downtime of 3.2 hours at rural sites compared to 0.9 hours in Praya town. Eleven informants relied exclusively on mobile data, rendering data-intensive practices such as video production and live streaming prohibitively expensive relative to enterprise revenues. These findings substantiate the pattern identified by [APJII \(2024\)](#), which records NTB's smartphone penetration at 67 percent against a national average of 78 percent, indicating that communicative connectivity inequality is itself a structural barrier to digital transformation.

Communicative Strategies of Digitally Capable Enterprises

Among the nine enterprises operating at the integrated digital commerce phase, a coherent

communicative strategy emerged: the systematic deployment of Sasak cultural identity, including production process, provenance, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, as the primary differentiating narrative in digital content. Rather than presenting products as generic artisanal goods, these enterprises narrated their products' cultural biographies, including the village where a songket was woven, the weaving master's identity, the motif's ceremonial context, and the hours required to complete a piece.

This strategy produced consistent effects: higher engagement with posts featuring production-process documentation than with static photography; a higher proportion of buyers willing to pay premium prices once cultural provenance was narratively established; and a qualitatively different customer relationship, marked by follow-up inquiries and referrals. One weaver in Sukarara explained that when she posts videos of herself weaving, customers ask about the pattern and about the mother who taught her, and that they buy differently from tourists who simply walk past the stall, encapsulating the authenticity imperative described by [Kaplan and Haenlein \(2019\)](#).

TikTok Live and Instagram Live sessions emerged as the format most suited to this context. Unlike static listings, live commerce enables real-time cultural performance, turning the production process into a marketing event. Across eight observed and informant-reported sessions, a consistent structure emerged: an opening demonstration establishing cultural authority, a narrative explanation directed to viewers unfamiliar with Sasak tradition, a product presentation linked to the demonstrated process, and real-time question-and-answer interaction. [Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut \(2020\)](#) theorize this precisely, showing that live streaming commerce creates perceived social presence that increases willingness to pay for experience-embedded products. Observed sessions ranged from 40 to 340 concurrent viewers, including domestic tourists and international diaspora audiences, indicating that culturally anchored live commerce can generate reach substantially exceeding static posts.

Perhaps the most distinctive strategy documented is cooperative content infrastructure, a grassroots response to constraints on communicative resources that individual enterprises cannot overcome alone. Small groups of three to seven adjacent producers have developed informal arrangements to share infrastructure: a jointly maintained router, a shared social media account administered by the most digitally competent member, coordinated content-production sessions, and collective courier arrangements that achieve minimum shipment volumes for reliable logistics. This model demonstrates that when formal institutional support is insufficient, communities develop indigenous solutions addressing infrastructure, literacy, logistics, and confidence simultaneously, suggesting that the appropriate unit of analysis may be the cooperative cluster rather than the individual enterprise, consistent with [Leminen et al.'s \(2021\)](#) argument that SME digital transformation in resource-constrained regions requires collective solutions.

Quadruple Helix Communication Failures: A Diagnostic Account

The Quadruple Helix governance structure in Lombok Tengah shows partial activation and systematic communication failures that account for much of the aggregate digital underperformance documented above. Government and academic helices are visible through periodic training events and publications. The industry helix, specifically Mandalika Special Economic Zone tourism operators whose international visitor base represents the most significant potential digital market for local products, operates in substantial communicative isolation from the creative economy base.

Field observation of two government-organized digital literacy workshops revealed a pattern of communication failure that is structural rather than incidental. Program content was designed without systematic prior consultation with village-level operators about their specific

communicative needs, training curricula addressed generic MSME contexts rather than culturally anchored product marketing, and post-training support structures were absent, leaving participants without the sustained communicative scaffolding that [Hidayati et al. \(2025\)](#) identify as essential for fragile digital adoption to become durable practice.

The industry-community helix gap emerged in interviews with hotel concierge staff and adjacent-village producers. Concierge staff consistently reported being unaware of specific producers or their digital channels; producers reported having no means to reach the hotel guest network. This mutual invisibility, despite geographic proximity, represents a clear case of what [Carayannis and Campbell \(2009\)](#) identify as helix boundary communication failure, the structural incapacity of actors in one institutional sphere to communicate effectively with actors in an adjacent sphere despite shared interests and co-location.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the communicative dimensions of digital transformation among creative economy MSMEs in Lombok Tengah Regency, Indonesia's Mandalika Super Priority Tourism Destination. Through qualitative fieldwork comprising 32 interviews and ethnographic observation at four sites, it has demonstrated that the gap between the 16 percent of enterprises achieving meaningful digital activation and the 84 percent remaining substantially offline is not principally explained by technology access or financial constraints, significant as these are, but by communicative conditions more tractable to analysis and intervention than the structural variables conventionally foregrounded in the literature.

The Communication Mediated Digital Transformation model proposed here offers both theoretical reframing and a practical framework. Theoretically, it repositions digital transformation as a communicative achievement requiring narrative competency, cultural content strategy, live performance capability, cooperative content infrastructure, and institutionalized Quadruple Helix dialogue. Practically, it identifies four pillars, namely narrative localization, live commerce as performance, cooperative content infrastructure, and cross-helix dialogue, whose development represents a more sustainable path to digital transformation than technology-centered approaches alone.

More broadly, this study invites communication scholars to engage more actively with the digital transformation literature, which has much to gain from communication theory's attention to meaning-making, narrative, performance, and dialogue governance, and much to offer in return in empirical precision and policy relevance. The creative economy MSMEs of Lombok Tengah, weaving Sasak patterns on backstrap looms while their neighbors scroll TikTok, sit at the frontier of one of the most consequential communicative transformations of our era. Their stories deserve both theoretical attention and practical support.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The qualitative design, appropriate for the study's exploratory objectives, precludes statistical generalization. The fieldwork period captures a specific seasonal moment in the creative economy cycle. The focus on Lombok Tengah requires reflexivity about the transferability of findings to other tourism destinations with different characteristics. Future research should employ mixed-methods designs incorporating quantitative instruments to measure the prevalence of the communicative orientations identified here, and extend the comparative scope to other Indonesian Super Priority Tourism Destinations to test the model's generalisability.

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