

## Local Government Policies for Empowering Heritage Tourism in Surabaya's Old City

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### Abstract

Surabaya's Old City is a heritage area with significant potential as a historical tourism destination. However, its management and the empowerment of local communities continue to face various challenges, including the dominance of top-down policies, limited community involvement, and weak digital branding strategies. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Surabaya's local government policies in supporting heritage tourism empowerment by applying the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) approach and the Pentahelix model. The research employs a qualitative method using semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The findings indicate that community participation remains symbolic, the empowerment of MSMEs is suboptimal, and collaboration among Pentahelix actors lacks synergy. Moreover, the digital promotion strategy for the heritage area is considered insufficiently innovative. This study recommends a reformulation of more participatory policies, strengthening the role of MSMEs, and optimizing digital branding to support the sustainable development of Surabaya's heritage tourism.

**Keywords** Community Empowerment, Community-Based Tourism, Government Policy, Pentahelix

### 1. Introduction

Surabaya's Old Town is an area rich in historical and cultural value, making it one of the city's key assets for developing heritage-based tourism (Mahindra & Megawati, 2022). The uniqueness of its colonial architecture, historical sites, and the presence of local communities presents great potential to transform this area into a leading tourism destination, as reflected in studies identifying existing characteristics and heritage potential in North Surabaya's Old Town area (Nabilah, 2022). However, despite this potential, the management of the Old Town area continues to face various challenges. These include poor promotional quality, weak branding strategies, and the underutilization of tourism opportunities such as photography tourism that remain unsupported by adequate promotional activities and infrastructure.

The minimal use of digital media and the lack of strong cultural narratives contribute to the area's failure to stand out as a distinctive tourism destination (Rahmawati et al., 2024). In contrast, studies in Surabaya have shown that dedicated Instagram accounts for heritage purposes are effective in preserving and constructing public cultural narratives through concise and persuasive content. Furthermore, digital communication strategies, such as the use of local animations incorporating the



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Surabayan dialect, have proven effective in strengthening cultural identity as a creative tourism product. However, the synergy between key stakeholders including the government, businesses, local communities, and media remains suboptimal in several tourist areas across East Java. Issues of coordination, communication, and active community participation remain significant challenges to achieving sustainable development. Policies that tend to be top-down and fail to involve communities in planning and implementation result in tourism development initiatives that are ceremonial and unsustainable. Moreover, available funds are not yet optimally directed toward community capacity building or the maintenance of public facilities (Marcella et al., 2022).

Given these conditions, several key questions underlie this study: To what extent are the Surabaya City Government's policies able to empower communities in managing heritage tourism in the Old Town? Previous studies on community empowerment in Surabaya highlight challenges in human resource quality and tourism training, which still need to be improved to enhance local participation in heritage site management (Nurany et al., 2025). What forms of collaboration exist among stakeholders in developing this area? Research on the Surabaya Heritage Track has found that the sustainability and competitiveness of urban tourism heavily rely on informal collaborations between government, private sectors, and communities, although the role of the government remains limited. Finally, have promotion strategies and technology utilization been effective in strengthening the identity of the heritage area? A study of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in the Peneleh area emphasizes the importance of digital strategies and stakeholder collaboration in reinforcing cultural narratives and heritage appeal, though the quality of implementation varies widely (Nurany et al., 2023).

To address these challenges, a collaborative approach based on the Pentahelix model is considered highly relevant (Kuswandi et al., 2025). This model involves five key elements: government, academia, business actors, communities, and media within a synergistic framework. It is also reinforced by the principles of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), which place communities at the center of destination management. The use of digital technology, local human resource training, and city branding are strategic components that must be encouraged to create inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable tourism governance (Luna & Martinez, 2022).

Although many studies have examined heritage tourism development, community empowerment, and the role of local governments, there remains a theoretical gap that has yet to be comprehensively explored. Previous research has tended to focus on individual aspects such as MSME-based village tourism, cultural site preservation, or the role of government in general tourism management. However, studies that integrate all three aspects: government policy, active community participation, and stakeholder synergy through a collaborative approach are still limited, particularly in the context of urban heritage areas like Surabaya's Old Town. Moreover, the simultaneous application of the Pentahelix model and CBT in analyzing the effectiveness of tourism development policies grounded in local wisdom remains rare (Armitawati, 2024). Literature addressing city branding strategies and the use of digital technology in strengthening heritage identity also rarely touches on the role of communities as key actors rather than mere promotional objects (Rahman & Wardana, 2025). Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by integrating the frameworks of CBT, the Pentahelix model, and principles of good governance to evaluate the effectiveness of Surabaya's heritage tourism empowerment policies in a more participatory, inclusive, and sustainable manner (Setiawati, 2020).

## 2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach aimed at exploring in depth the perceptions, experiences, and interaction dynamics among stakeholders regarding heritage tourism policies in Surabaya's Old Town. A case study design was employed, as it enables a holistic understanding of the local context and policy implementation structures. The research was developed inductively from field data with the expectation of producing a contextually relevant policy model. Strategic locations within the Old Town area were selected as research sites, including Jembatan Merah, Kepanjen Church, and several heritage museums (Nuruddin, 2023). To obtain rich and comprehensive data, several techniques of data

collection were utilized, namely semi-structured interviews with key actors such as officials from the Tourism Office, heritage site managers, MSME actors, local heritage communities, and tourists; participatory observation to capture on-site dynamics including cultural events, the condition of heritage facilities, and community participation; and document analysis of official records such as regional regulations (Perda), the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), and tourism program evaluation reports (Prathama & Idajati, 2024). The main research instruments consisted of interview guides, observation sheets, and document analysis formats, all of which were designed based on the focus of the study. The research population encompassed both active and passive stakeholders in heritage tourism management, with informants selected using purposive sampling. Data analysis followed the procedures of Grounded Theory, beginning with interview transcription, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Thematic analysis was conducted with the assistance of NVivo software to map relationships among key themes such as community participation, heritage branding, and multi-actor collaboration. Data triangulation was applied to ensure the validity of findings by comparing results from interviews, observations, and official documents. This process ultimately led to the development of a participatory policy model grounded in the Pentahelix and CBT frameworks (Nurany & Fitriawardhani, 2024).

### 3. Result

#### Governance of Surabaya's Old Town Area

To gather information on community involvement in managing heritage tourism in Surabaya's Old Town, the researchers asked informants questions about how the community conveys aspirations to the government, their assessment of current policies in addressing community needs, and the existence of training or assistance programs for residents. Additionally, questions were asked to determine the sense of ownership residents feel toward the Old Town area.

**Table 1.** Governance of Surabaya's Old Town Area

No Question	Response from Informant 1
1 To what extent are you involved in the management of heritage tourism mostly managed by local residents. The government only in the Old Town?	I am not involved directly by the government. The area is mostly managed by local residents. The government only provides support such as fencing and tents for MSMEs.
2 Does the community have the space to convey their aspirations or suggestions to the government?	We only submit suggestions through the subdistrict office (kelurahan), but the kelurahan doesn't follow up. For example, we have repeatedly reported potholes, but after a year, no action was taken.
3 Do you think the policies implemented so far meet community needs?	From an economic standpoint, yes they help us.

No Question	Response from Informant 1
4 Are there any training or mentoring programs for residents in the Old None. Town area?	5 Do you think the community has a No, we feel like ordinary residents trying to make a living. sense of ownership over the Old Town area? We are helped by the presence of tourism, but we are not part of it.
5	

The findings indicate that community involvement in managing Surabaya's Old Town remains limited and largely symbolic. While residents acknowledge some economic benefits, their roles in decision-making and planning are minimal. Most informants described themselves as passive beneficiaries rather than active stakeholders in heritage tourism governance. This suggests that the existing policy framework fails to create participatory channels that enable residents to contribute meaningfully to heritage management. In turn, the lack of structured involvement diminishes the potential for fostering collective responsibility and long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, the absence of structured training or mentorship programs has resulted in a weak sense of ownership among community members. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that they did not feel empowered to influence policy outcomes, with many noting that their input through official channels often went unanswered. The absence of structured feedback loops highlights a governance gap that undermines citizen trust in local institutions. Previous studies on community-based tourism (Murphy, 1985; Novy Setia Yunas et al., 2023) emphasize that participation beyond economic activities is crucial for nurturing ownership. Thus, in the context of Surabaya's Old Town, governance structures require significant reform to move from tokenistic consultation toward genuine community empowerment.

### **The Impact of Old Town Tourism on Local MSMEs**

To assess the economic impact of heritage tourism on local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the researchers interviewed one local business owner. Questions focused on training, access to funding or marketing support from relevant government agencies, involvement in local events, and future expectations.

**Table 2.** The Impact of Old Town Tourism on Local MSME

No Question	Response from Informant 2
1 Have you received support from the government for your business development?	Yes, I received a tent and fence from the government.
2 Have you received any training, capital support, or marketing assistance from the tourism office?	
3 How has tourism affected your business revenue?	It has increased significantly. Previously, the Old Town was inactive, but now it attracts many tourists.
4 Have you participated in any cultural events or festivals in the Old Town?	No.
5 What are your hopes for future heritage tourism development?	I hope there will be more events to attract visitors and boost our income. That way, Old Town tourism will gain more recognition.

The responses from MSME actors show that tourism growth in Surabaya's Old Town has provided tangible economic benefits, particularly in terms of increased revenue. However, support mechanisms from the government remain superficial and limited to physical facilities. While infrastructure such as tents and fences is useful, it does not address long-term sustainability, especially in preparing MSMEs to compete in an increasingly digitalized tourism economy. The lack of access to capital, entrepreneurial training, and marketing strategies represents a significant gap that risks undermining the resilience of local businesses.

Moreover, MSMEs reported being excluded from cultural festivals and events that could potentially boost their visibility and strengthen their integration within the tourism ecosystem. This exclusion reflects a missed opportunity for synergy between heritage promotion and local economic empowerment. In comparison, studies on heritage tourism in Melaka and Penang have shown that structured MSME involvement in cultural events significantly enhances both local business resilience and the overall attractiveness of heritage sites (Khoo & Salim, 2021). Thus, without systematic empowerment strategies, MSMEs in Surabaya's Old Town may remain peripheral actors rather than central agents of economic and cultural vitality.

### Preservation and Development of the Old Town Area

To understand efforts in preserving and developing Surabaya's Old Town as a heritage tourism destination, the researchers interviewed the Head of the Cultural Office. Topics included cultural preservation strategies, community involvement policies, inter-agency collaboration, digital promotion efforts, and major challenges faced.

**Table 3.** Preservation and Development of the Old Town Area

No	Question	Response from Informant 3
1	What are the Cultural Office's We have several revitalization programs, such as restoring strategies for preserving the heritage buildings, organizing cultural events, and curating historical and cultural identity of historical narratives. We are also drafting a heritage destination?	We have several revitalization programs, such as restoring strategies for preserving the heritage buildings, organizing cultural events, and curating historical and cultural identity of historical narratives. We are also drafting a heritage destination? We have several revitalization programs, such as restoring strategies for preserving the heritage buildings, organizing cultural events, and curating historical and cultural identity of historical narratives. We are also drafting a heritage destination? We have several revitalization programs, such as restoring strategies for preserving the heritage buildings, organizing cultural events, and curating historical and cultural identity of historical narratives. We are also drafting a heritage destination? We have several revitalization programs, such as restoring strategies for preserving the heritage buildings, organizing cultural events, and curating historical and cultural identity of historical narratives. We are also drafting a heritage destination?
2	Are there any policies involving local communities in preservation and management efforts? We have heritage awareness outreach programs and have formed a local tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis). But citizen participation remains low. We plan to form a collaborative forum involving MSMEs, heritage communities, and youth.	Are there any policies involving local communities in preservation and management efforts? We have heritage awareness outreach programs and have formed a local tourism awareness group (Pokdarwis). But citizen participation remains low. We plan to form a collaborative forum involving MSMEs, heritage communities, and youth?
3	How is the Cultural Office collaborating with other agencies in drafting the master plan. However, inter-sectoral coordination or stakeholders to develop the Old Town? We collaborate with the Tourism Office and involve academics or stakeholders to develop the Old Town? Realizing the Pentahelix model remains a challenge.	How is the Cultural Office collaborating with other agencies in drafting the master plan. However, inter-sectoral coordination or stakeholders to develop the Old Town? We collaborate with the Tourism Office and involve academics or stakeholders to develop the Old Town? Realizing the Pentahelix model remains a challenge.
4	How effectively is digital technology being used to promote and brand the Old Town? We have started using social media but not optimally. We only use it for cultural event promotion. In the future, we plan to build a more interactive heritage platform to attract younger generations.	How effectively is digital technology being used to promote and brand the Old Town? We have started using social media but not optimally. We only use it for cultural event promotion. In the future, we plan to build a more interactive heritage platform to attract younger generations.
5	What are the biggest challenges and what strategies are in place to address them? The biggest challenges are low community ownership, limited funding, and poor inter-agency coordination. We plan to increase training so they become active stakeholders. We are also proposing a digital branding program to attract more tourists.	What are the biggest challenges and what strategies are in place to address them? The biggest challenges are low community ownership, limited funding, and poor inter-agency coordination. We plan to increase training so they become active stakeholders. We are also proposing a digital branding program to attract more tourists.

The Cultural Office has undertaken several noteworthy initiatives in heritage preservation, including building restoration, event organization, and drafting of long-term roadmaps. These efforts highlight an institutional recognition of the cultural and historical value of Surabaya's Old Town. Nonetheless, implementation challenges persist, particularly in mobilizing community participation and ensuring inter-agency collaboration. The informants themselves acknowledged that participation by residents remains low despite outreach programs, and that coordination across agencies often fails to move beyond ceremonial activities. Such limitations weaken the transformative potential of heritage tourism and risk reducing it to a superficial attraction rather than a sustainable development asset.

The underutilization of digital platforms further illustrates the need for strategic innovation. In the current global tourism landscape, digital branding has become a critical factor in destination competitiveness (Niccolucci et al., 2023). The Cultural Office's reliance on social media solely for event announcements fails to fully harness the potential of digital storytelling and interactive engagement. Comparative studies in other heritage cities such as George Town in Malaysia demonstrate that immersive digital campaigns can significantly expand reach and attract younger demographics (Khoo, 2021). Therefore, while Surabaya's policy framework is conceptually aligned with global best practices, the gap lies in operational execution, where structured collaboration, sustained funding, and technology-driven strategies are yet to be realized.

### **Integration of the Pentahelix Model in Sustainable Tourism Governance**

The integration of the pentahelix model into sustainable tourism governance in Mandalika is crucial given the complexity of interactions between government, business actors, academics, the community, and the media. Research shows that although various actors have been involved, the established coordination mechanism has not yet fully led to a solid pentahelix structure. Academics, through the Lombok Tourism Polytechnic, emphasize the importance of increasing the capacity of the Community Protection Unit (Satlinmas), particularly in the areas of hospitality and foreign language skills, so that they can act not only as security guards but also as the frontline in tourism services. This view aligns with tourism destination management theory, which emphasizes that the quality of direct interactions with tourists is a key indicator of a destination's success (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Indrayani et al., 2024).

Tourism businesses, on the other hand, emphasize technical aspects, namely the need for Satlinmas involvement in crowd management, social risk mitigation, and emergency services for tourists. This relates to Getz's (2012) study, which showed that destinations with event-based tourism agendas, such as the MotoGP in Mandalika, require a security system that adapts to crowd dynamics. Meanwhile, local communities tend to view Satlinmas' presence as a guardian of socio-cultural stability, crucial for protecting Lombok's cultural values. However, criticism has arisen due to the lack of ongoing training and the lack of transparency in defining Satlinmas' role. This perspective reveals a gap between community expectations and policy implementation, often referred to in governance literature as the "policy-practice gap" (Rhodes, 2012).

Media involvement is more focused on the visual image of tourism, such as the beauty of beaches, cultural villages, and MotoGP events, rather than on the institutional dimensions and functions of the Satlinmas (Community Protection Unit). This distorts public information by diminishing attention to the importance of security governance as part of destination sustainability. Hall's (2019) study emphasized that the media is a crucial actor in sustainable tourism governance because the construction of public information can influence the legitimacy and public trust in tourism management institutions.

Thus, conditions in Mandalika demonstrate suboptimal pentahelix integration, making the urgency of establishing a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism even more apparent.

The establishment of the Mandalika Tourism Security and Order Forum (FKKWM) can be positioned as a strategic step to more systematically integrate pentahelix actors. This forum serves as a deliberative space for developing joint standard operating procedures, mapping vulnerable points, and integrating the role of Satlinmas (Community Protection Unit) with formal authorities such as the National Police (Polri) and Satpol PP (Public Order Agency). This model aligns with the collaborative governance approach, which emphasizes cross-sector coordination based on trust, commitment, and shared goals (Ansell & Gash, 2008). The forum's existence will also encourage the development of public accountability mechanisms through transparent decision-making, allowing the public to monitor and support Satlinmas' role in maintaining tourist security.

The pentahelix approach operationalized through this forum has the potential to strengthen the position of Satlinmas not only as a technical entity managing security, but also as a bridge between the government, the business world, and local communities. This concept aligns with Dredge and Jamal's (2015) view of the importance of participatory tourism governance, which positions communities as an integral part of creating sustainable social value. Thus, destination security is no longer understood merely as a technical instrument, but as part of an ecosystem of social, cultural, and economic values that support the long-term sustainability of Mandalika tourism.

### **Challenges and Strategies for Strengthening Collaborative Governance-Based Collaboration**

This study found that Mandalika tourism management still faces various structural, institutional, and socio-cultural obstacles. Institutional fragmentation between the local government, ITDC, Satpol PP, traditional villages, and the community has resulted in partial coordination patterns and overlapping authority. This weakens governance integration and reduces the effectiveness of the Community Protection Unit (Satlinmas) in carrying out tourism security functions. Satlinmas' position is also often viewed as unequal to other formal institutions, thus limiting its functional legitimacy. Other obstacles relate to budget and facility limitations, resulting in suboptimal provision of patrol facilities, communication tools, and risk mitigation equipment (Riyanto et al., 2024). Lack of personnel trained in hospitality and international tourism security management further exacerbates these limitations. On the social side, community resistance has emerged related to land issues and the incompatibility between modern tourism models and local cultural values, which in turn creates tensions in the community's relationship with area management.

Efforts to strengthen collaboration can be implemented through regulatory reforms that emphasize the role of the Community Protection Unit (Satlinmas) in the tourism ecosystem. Regional policy instruments such as the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), the Tourism Action Plan, and village planning need to explicitly incorporate tourism security programs to ensure that Satlinmas has a strong legal basis for carrying out its duties. Capacity building is also crucial through ongoing training in hospitality, conflict management, and disaster mitigation focused on the tourism sector. The existence of a formalized cross-sectoral coordination forum through mechanisms such as the FKKWM (Family Planning Forum) or FOKOLIM (Family Planning Forum), supported by shared operational standards and a digital reporting system, has the potential to strengthen communication between actors and accelerate the flow of information in the field.

The active involvement of local communities in the recruitment of Satlinmas officers is a crucial strategy for building social legitimacy. Residents' participation serves not merely as a symbol of participation but also expands their role as community-based security agents. This strategy can reduce resistance and foster a sense of ownership in tourism management. The integration of digital technology through the Mandalika Smart Tourism app can also be utilized to support crowd control, real-time incident reporting, and security monitoring. This technology utilization makes the security system more responsive and efficient.

The implementation of these strategies leads to a shift in collaboration between the local government and the Community Protection Unit (Satlinmas), moving from a technical coordination model to collaborative governance that is inclusive, participatory, and sustainable. This model aligns with the principles of collaborative governance, which emphasize synergy between actors and a pentahelix approach involving the government, private sector, academia, communities, and the media. Thus, the Mandalika tourism ecosystem can develop not only as an internationally competitive destination but also as a collaborative space that maintains a balance between modernization, security, and the sustainability of local culture.

#### 4. Discussion

##### **Community Participation in Heritage Tourism Management**

The study reveals that community participation in Surabaya's Old Town is still limited and mostly symbolic, as local residents engage in heritage tourism primarily as vendors or passive beneficiaries rather than as active decision-makers. This finding highlights a significant gap between the theoretical ideals of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and the actual practices in Surabaya. According to Murphy (1985), CBT emphasizes active engagement of communities in the planning, management, and evaluation of tourism to foster ownership and ensure sustainability. However, in practice, the residents of Old Town remain excluded from these processes, indicating that participation is still tokenistic. This condition is exacerbated by the absence of formal training programs and feedback mechanisms that would otherwise empower residents to influence tourism governance.

Such findings resonate with previous studies conducted in Yogyakarta and Semarang, which also reported that local communities often serve as passive actors despite heritage tourism being located in their neighborhoods (Rachmawati, 2022). When community involvement is limited to economic exploitation without meaningful policy inclusion, a sense of alienation emerges, weakening social cohesion around heritage preservation. In Surabaya, this alienation is visible in the lack of ownership felt by residents toward the Old Town, despite acknowledging economic benefits from increased tourism flows. Thus, strengthening participatory channels such as forums for dialogue, capacity-building workshops, and co-management arrangements becomes a critical step toward aligning heritage tourism governance with the principles of CBT.

##### **MSME Empowerment in the Heritage Area**

The research findings further emphasize that while tourism growth in Surabaya's Old Town has boosted revenues for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), empowerment strategies have not yet been systematically implemented. Government support remains limited to providing physical facilities such as tents and fences, which, although beneficial in the short term, do not enhance the long-term competitiveness of MSMEs. According to Chambers' empowerment theory (1995), true empowerment requires strengthening individual capacities and collective agency through skills development, resource accessibility, and institutional integration. In Surabaya's case, the lack of training, digital literacy programs, and access to financial capital has created a vulnerability for MSMEs in adapting to dynamic market demands.

This situation mirrors findings from studies in Malacca and Penang, where MSMEs benefited from increased tourism but struggled with sustainability due to insufficient skills development and integration into digital platforms (Khoo & Salim, 2021). In today's digital economy, heritage tourists increasingly expect authenticity coupled with quality experiences, often mediated through online channels. Without adequate marketing support, MSMEs in Surabaya risk being overshadowed by larger enterprises or external actors. To mitigate this, empowerment strategies must shift toward long-term approaches, such as training in digital entrepreneurship, facilitating microfinance access, and integrating MSMEs into cultural festivals. These strategies would not only improve economic resilience

but also reinforce the link between heritage identity and local livelihoods, thereby sustaining both cultural and economic dimensions of tourism.

### **Stakeholder Collaboration under the Pentahelix Model**

Another critical dimension of the findings relates to stakeholder collaboration. The Pentahelix model, which involves government, academia, business, communities, and media, is designed to create synergy in tourism development. However, the study demonstrates that in Surabaya's Old Town, this model has not been fully realized, as collaboration remains fragmented and often ceremonial. The government's initiatives are not consistently integrated with academic insights or community needs, while business and media engagement remain minimal. This fragmented approach reflects a weak application of collaborative governance, which Ansell and Gash (2008) argue is essential for effective policy outcomes through trust-building, shared responsibility, and consensus-driven action.

Comparative cases in Bali provide a useful contrast, where the successful implementation of the Pentahelix model has contributed to more integrated and resilient tourism management (Suryawan, 2022). The Balinese experience demonstrates that establishing formalized platforms for dialogue and ensuring consistent participation from all stakeholders can transform ceremonial collaboration into substantive partnerships. For Surabaya, the implication is clear: institutional frameworks must be strengthened to facilitate regular stakeholder meetings, joint planning sessions, and shared monitoring processes. Without such systemic efforts, the risk is that heritage tourism initiatives remain fragmented, lacking the continuity and cross-sector synergy necessary for sustainability.

### **Digital Branding Strategy for the Heritage Area**

The study also highlights the inadequacy of digital branding strategies in Surabaya's Old Town, which remain underdeveloped compared to other heritage destinations. While social media is used to announce cultural events, it is not leveraged to build interactive engagement or compelling cultural narratives. This is a missed opportunity, as research has shown that digital branding is pivotal in differentiating destinations and shaping visitor perceptions (Niccolucci et al., 2023). The absence of immersive campaigns, storytelling initiatives, and participatory platforms means that Surabaya risks being overshadowed by cities such as Yogyakarta, Penang, and George Town, which actively use digital technologies to market their heritage assets to global audiences.

Digital branding not only serves promotional purposes but also strengthens cultural identity and intergenerational connections. For instance, Sri Yunianti et al. (2023) demonstrated that local animations, visual campaigns, and interactive platforms are highly effective in engaging younger demographics. In Surabaya's context, a digital branding strategy could involve developing virtual tours, interactive heritage apps, or collaborations with local creative communities to produce culturally resonant content. By integrating these innovations, Surabaya could enhance the visibility of Old Town, appeal to both domestic and international tourists, and reposition itself as a competitive heritage destination in the digital era.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study finds that the Surabaya City Government's policies on empowering heritage tourism in the Old Town area still face significant challenges. Local community participation in managing the heritage area remains low, making it difficult to achieve sustainability in tourism programs. Furthermore, the empowerment of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) as part of the tourism ecosystem is not yet optimal, with government support mostly limited to physical facilities rather than strategic assistance such as training, access to capital, or digital marketing. Stakeholder collaboration under the Pentahelix model also remains ineffective due to poor cross-sector synergy, and the digital branding strategies currently in use are considered uninspired and insufficient to strengthen the area's identity as a leading tourism destination. Therefore, a reformulation of more participatory, inclusive, and adaptive policies is urgently needed to promote sustainable tourism governance. Moving

forward, the Surabaya City Government must prioritize community involvement at every stage of heritage tourism management through the establishment of inclusive communication and collaboration forums. MSME empowerment should focus on capacity-building through structured training, business mentoring, access to financing, and digital marketing. At the same time, optimizing the Pentahelix model is crucial to enhance coordination among government, academics, business actors, communities, and the media. Tourism promotion strategies should shift toward innovative digital branding that effectively builds cultural narratives and attracts both domestic and international visitors. To ensure the effectiveness of these policies, regular evaluation and monitoring of tourism empowerment initiatives must be conducted with the involvement of all stakeholders. This will ensure that programs remain responsive to local needs and dynamic conditions.

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