

# Local Wisdom-Based Human Resource Competence and Employee Performance: Service Quality Mediation and Digital Literacy Moderation in Alor Tourism

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The author(s) declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study examines whether local wisdom-based human resource (HR) competence enhances employee performance in tourism services in Alor Regency, while investigating the mediating role of service quality and the moderating role of digital literacy.

**Research Method:** Data were collected through a structured survey of 129 employees working in tourism service businesses in Alor Regency. The hypothesized relationships were tested using path analysis with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4.0.

**Results and Discussion:** The findings indicate that local wisdom-based HR competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. Service quality significantly mediates this relationship, suggesting that culturally grounded competencies translate into superior employee performance partly through enhanced service delivery. Digital literacy significantly moderates both the relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee performance and the relationship between competence and service quality, indicating that digital capabilities amplify the value of culturally embedded competencies.

**Implications:** Tourism organizations should integrate local cultural values with digital capability development to strengthen employee performance and service quality.

**Originality:** This study integrates indigenous/local wisdom, service quality, and digital literacy into a unified HR-performance framework, providing empirical evidence from the under-researched tourism context of Alor, Indonesia.

**Keywords:** local wisdom; employee performance; service quality; digital literacy; tourism services.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is increasingly recognized not merely as a destination-based industry but as a service-intensive sector in which human capital plays a central role in creating visitor value, sustaining service quality, and strengthening destination competitiveness. Although natural and cultural attractions constitute important destination assets, their economic and experiential value ultimately depends on employees' ability to translate these assets into meaningful service encounters. Human resource (HR) competence is therefore a critical organizational capability because tourism employees simultaneously function as service providers, relationship builders, and interpreters of destination identity. This strategic role of human capital is particularly pronounced in small and medium-sized tourism enterprises, where



employees frequently perform multiple functions and interact directly with visitors. Consequently, understanding how locally embedded competencies can be transformed into superior service delivery and employee performance is increasingly important for destinations seeking sustainable competitiveness.

This issue is particularly salient in Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, a culturally distinctive and geographically peripheral destination endowed with substantial natural, marine, and cultural tourism resources. The local tourism ecosystem has expanded to include restaurants, cafés, travel agencies, diving operators, creative-economy businesses, and event organizers, many of which are small and medium-sized enterprises that rely heavily on local employees. This structure creates both an opportunity and a challenge. Local employees possess culturally embedded knowledge, values, interpersonal norms, and community-based practices that can enrich authentic tourism experiences. However, the presence of such cultural resources does not necessarily translate into effective service quality and employee performance. The central challenge is therefore not simply the expansion of tourism businesses, but their ability to develop human capabilities that combine cultural embeddedness with contemporary service and digital competencies.

Prior research has established a general association between HR competence and employee performance, but the evidence remains theoretically and empirically incomplete. Studies of small and medium-sized enterprises have reported that competence contributes positively to organizational outcomes (Wahyudiati & Isroah, 2018), whereas other evidence suggests that the competence–performance relationship may depend on contextual and organizational conditions (Habibi *et al.*, 2022). Tourism studies similarly document positive effects of employee competence on performance (Sundari *et al.*, 2022; Kune *et al.*, 2025), although the strength and consistency of these relationships vary across settings (Prasetyaningrum *et al.*, 2024). These inconsistencies suggest that the critical question is not simply whether competence matters, but how and under what conditions competence is converted into employee performance.

One potentially important but insufficiently examined dimension concerns the cultural embeddedness of competence. Conventional HRM research generally conceptualizes competence in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities, and task-related capabilities, often treating these attributes as relatively transferable across organizational and geographical contexts. Such an approach may overlook the distinctive capabilities that employees derive from local cultural knowledge and values. In tourism, local wisdom can shape hospitality practices, interpersonal behavior, community responsibility, respect for visitors, and culturally appropriate service delivery. Existing research has linked local wisdom to tourism attractiveness and destination development (Lustiono, 2020; Wijaya, 2025), while Wardani *et al.*, (2024) suggest that incorporating local values into tourism HR development can enhance service quality and destination competitiveness. Nevertheless, limited research has conceptualized local wisdom as an integral component of employee competence and examined whether culturally embedded competence can generate superior employee performance.

This omission is particularly relevant from a Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective. RBV suggests that competitive advantage can emerge from resources and capabilities that are valuable, inimitable, and embedded in organizational or social contexts. Local wisdom potentially possesses these characteristics because culturally grounded knowledge and behavioral norms are historically developed, socially embedded, and difficult for competing destinations to replicate. However, local wisdom should not be assumed to automatically generate performance. Its strategic value depends on employees' ability to mobilize culturally embedded resources in actual service encounters. This raises an important mechanism-oriented question: through what process does local wisdom-based competence influence employee performance?

Service quality provides a theoretically plausible mechanism. Tourism is characterized by intensive employee–customer interaction, making service delivery an important pathway through which employee capabilities become observable outcomes. Competent employees are more likely to understand customer expectations, respond appropriately to service situations, communicate effectively, and deliver consistent experiences. In turn, high-quality service can facilitate employee effectiveness and performance. Although prior studies have identified service quality as a mechanism linking employee competence and performance (Susanto *et al.*, 2025), other evidence reports inconsistent relationships (Gunadi *et al.*, 2015). These inconsistencies indicate that service quality warrants further examination, particularly when the antecedent is not generic competence but competence grounded in local cultural resources.

Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) provides an additional theoretical explanation for this mechanism. From an SDL perspective, value is co-created through interactions among employees, customers, communities, and other actors rather than being embedded solely in a tourism product. Local wisdom-based competence may therefore become strategically valuable because it enables employees to incorporate culturally meaningful knowledge and practices into service encounters. Service quality is an important manifestation of this capability, as culturally informed interactions can shape visitors' perceptions of authenticity, responsiveness, interpersonal care, and overall service experiences. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes service quality not merely as an outcome of HR competence but as a mediating mechanism by which culturally embedded employee capabilities translate into performance.

At the same time, the increasing digitalization of tourism introduces an important boundary condition. Digital technologies have transformed how tourism businesses communicate with visitors, promote destinations, manage customer relationships, process transactions, and deliver services. Employees therefore increasingly require digital literacy alongside interpersonal and cultural capabilities. Previous research has documented positive relationships between digital literacy and employee or organizational performance (Elvira & Yusuf, 2023; Ojobo & Anthony, 2023). However, relatively little is known about whether digital literacy changes the extent to which culturally embedded competence translates into service quality and employee performance. This distinction is important because digital literacy may not simply represent another employee skill; it may determine whether locally embedded knowledge can be effectively mobilized and extended through contemporary tourism platforms.

Digital literacy may amplify the value of local wisdom-based competence by enabling employees to communicate culturally distinctive experiences through digital channels, personalize interactions with visitors, facilitate service delivery, and expand the reach of local tourism knowledge. Thus, digital literacy can potentially complement rather than substitute for cultural competence. Nevertheless, its effects may depend on contextual conditions, including technological infrastructure, organizational support, and the extent of digital integration within tourism businesses. Evidence from technologically constrained settings suggests that digital capabilities may not always produce meaningful performance benefits (Sari *et al.*, 2024; Pratama *et al.*, 2023; Rahmawati, 2025; Hidayat *et al.*, 2024). This tension makes Alor a theoretically informative setting for examining whether digital literacy strengthens the conversion of culturally embedded competence into service quality and employee performance.

Despite increasing scholarly interest in HR competence, local wisdom, service quality, and digitalization, important gaps remain. First, existing research predominantly examines generic HR competence, leaving the role of competence embedded in local wisdom insufficiently understood, particularly in tourism contexts where cultural authenticity is central to value creation. Second, although service quality has been examined as an outcome of employee competence, its role as a mechanism through which local wisdom-based competence generates employee performance remains

underdeveloped and empirically inconclusive. Third, digital literacy has largely been examined as a direct predictor of performance rather than as a boundary condition that determines when culturally embedded competence becomes more valuable. Consequently, the interaction between culturally embedded human capabilities, service mechanisms, and digital capabilities remains insufficiently theorized and empirically tested.

This study addresses these gaps by developing and testing an integrated framework in which local wisdom-based HR competence is the focal capability, service quality is the mediating mechanism, and digital literacy is a boundary condition that influences the competence–performance relationship. The study focuses on tourism service enterprises in Alor Regency, thereby providing evidence from a culturally rich and geographically peripheral destination that remains relatively underrepresented in the international tourism and HRM literature. The setting is theoretically relevant because it enables an examination of how traditional cultural resources interact with contemporary digital capabilities to shape employee outcomes. Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (1) Does local wisdom-based HR competence enhance employee performance? (2) Does service quality mediate the relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee performance? and (3) Does digital literacy strengthen the relationships between local wisdom-based HR competence, service quality, and employee performance?.

The study makes three contributions to the literature. First, it extends the RBV by conceptualizing local wisdom not simply as a destination characteristic but as a culturally embedded human capability that can function as a distinctive strategic resource. This perspective shifts attention from viewing local culture as an external tourism attraction toward understanding how cultural resources become embedded in employee capabilities. Second, drawing on SDL, the study explains how such culturally embedded competence translates into employee performance via service quality, thereby identifying a mechanism by which intangible cultural resources can generate service value. Third, the study introduces digital literacy as a boundary condition, suggesting that the performance value of local wisdom-based competence depends partly on employees' ability to leverage digital technologies. By connecting indigenous cultural resources with digital transformation, the study offers a more context-sensitive explanation of employee performance in tourism and responds to calls for greater attention to underrepresented and peripheral tourism destinations.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review. Section 3 presents the research method. Section 4 provides research findings and discussions. Section 5 wraps up the paper.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

This study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives, namely the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), to explain how local wisdom-based human resource (HR) competence contributes to employee performance through service quality and under what conditions this relationship becomes stronger. The integration of these perspectives is important because RBV explains why culturally embedded human capabilities can constitute strategic resources, whereas SDL explains how these capabilities are deployed through service interactions to create value.

The RBV conceptualizes firms as bundles of heterogeneous resources and capabilities and argues that resources can generate sustained competitive advantage when they are valuable, rare, inimitable, and not easily substituted (Barney, 1991). From this perspective, human resources constitute an

important source of organizational advantage because employees' knowledge, skills, experience, and behavioral capabilities are difficult for competitors to replicate. However, conventional applications of RBV frequently emphasize generic managerial, technical, or organizational capabilities while paying less attention to resources embedded in local cultural contexts. This study extends this perspective by conceptualizing local wisdom as a culturally embedded dimension of HR competence.

Local wisdom encompasses knowledge, values, norms, behavioral principles, and practices that develop through the historical and social experiences of a particular community. When incorporated into employee competence, these culturally embedded resources can influence how employees communicate, interact with customers, respond to social situations, and deliver culturally appropriate services. Such capabilities may possess strategic value precisely because they are socially embedded and geographically specific, making them difficult for competing destinations to reproduce. In the tourism context, therefore, local wisdom can move beyond being a destination attribute and become an employee-level capability that contributes to service differentiation and performance.

Nevertheless, RBV alone does not fully explain how a culturally embedded resource is converted into performance. Possessing a valuable capability does not automatically generate superior outcomes; the capability must be effectively deployed in organizational processes. This study therefore incorporates SDL to explain the service-based mechanism by which competence grounded in local wisdom creates value. SDL views service as the fundamental basis of exchange and emphasizes that value is co-created through interactions among service providers, customers, and other actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Employees are, consequently, important operational resources because their knowledge and skills are activated through interactions with customers.

This perspective is particularly relevant to tourism because service value is created largely through interpersonal encounters rather than through physical products alone. Employees translate their knowledge and capabilities into customer experiences through communication, responsiveness, empathy, problem solving, and personalized interactions. Local wisdom-based competence can therefore become consequential when employees mobilize culturally grounded knowledge and values during service encounters. Service quality is an important manifestation of this value-creation process, as it captures how customers experience reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and other dimensions of service delivery (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988).

The integration of RBV and SDL thus provides a coherent theoretical logic for the proposed model. RBV explains why local wisdom-based HR competence can constitute a distinctive strategic resource, while SDL explains how that resource is activated through service interactions and translated into service value. Service quality, consequently, represents the mechanism through which a culturally embedded capability becomes observable in employee performance. The framework is further extended by incorporating digital literacy as a boundary condition. Digital literacy enables employees to access, evaluate, communicate, and utilize digital information and technologies effectively (van Laar *et al.*, 2020). In an increasingly digital tourism environment, digital literacy may determine the extent to which employees can leverage culturally embedded knowledge through digital communication, marketing, customer relationship management, and technology-enabled service delivery.

Accordingly, digital literacy is conceptualized not simply as another employee capability but as a complementary capability that can amplify the value of local wisdom-based competence. Local wisdom provides culturally distinctive knowledge and behavioral resources, whereas digital literacy provides the technological capacity to deploy these resources across contemporary service channels. Their combination may therefore produce greater value than either capability operating independently. This theoretical integration establishes the foundation for examining both the direct and mediated effects of local wisdom-based HR competence, as well as the moderating role of digital literacy.

## 2.2 Hypothesis Development

The RBV perspective suggests that local wisdom-based HR competence can constitute a valuable and distinctive human capability that contributes to employee performance. Employees who possess culturally embedded knowledge and values may demonstrate greater social sensitivity, adaptability, interpersonal effectiveness, and understanding of community-specific expectations. These capabilities are particularly relevant in tourism, where employees frequently act as representatives of the destination and interact directly with visitors. Rather than relying solely on standardized service scripts, employees can use local knowledge and cultural values to respond appropriately to diverse service situations and create more authentic visitor experiences.

In culturally distinctive destinations such as Alor, local wisdom may therefore provide employees with resources that cannot be easily replicated by employees from outside the community. Values associated with hospitality, communal cooperation, respect, and cultural traditions can shape employees' attitudes and behaviors toward customers and colleagues. When these values become embedded in employees' competencies, they can enhance their ability to perform tasks effectively and contribute to organizational objectives. Prior research similarly suggests that integrating local values into HR development can improve individual and organizational outcomes (Putra & Riana, 2022; Suryani *et al.*, 2023), while local wisdom can strengthen service differentiation and destination identity (Sukmadi *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, employees with stronger local wisdom-based competence are expected to demonstrate superior performance.

**H1:** *Local wisdom-based HR competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.*

The relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and service quality can be explained through the lens of SDL and the service encounter perspective. Tourism services are highly dependent on employee–customer interactions, meaning the quality of service is strongly influenced by employees' ability to understand customer expectations and adapt their behavior to specific social and cultural contexts. Employees with culturally embedded competence possess knowledge and behavioral resources that can facilitate more appropriate, empathetic, and personalized interactions.

Local wisdom can contribute particularly to the relational dimensions of service quality. Cultural knowledge may strengthen empathy by enabling employees to understand customers and respond sensitively to their needs. It may enhance assurance by providing employees with culturally grounded knowledge that enables them to communicate confidently and authentically. Communal values may also promote responsiveness because norms of mutual assistance and hospitality encourage employees to respond proactively to customer needs. Existing evidence indicates that incorporating local cultural values into tourism services can improve service quality (Lagarense *et al.*, 2024; Drihartati, 2023; Siagian *et al.*, 2023). Thus, local wisdom-based HR competence should facilitate superior service delivery.

**H2:** *Local wisdom-based HR competence has a positive and significant effect on service quality.*

Service quality is also expected to contribute directly to employee performance. In service-intensive industries, employee performance is reflected not only in task completion but also in the ability to deliver reliable, responsive, and customer-oriented services. High-quality service indicates that employees can effectively apply their knowledge, skills, communication abilities, and interpersonal skills in real customer interactions. Consequently, employees who consistently deliver superior service are more likely to execute tasks effectively and contribute positively to organizational objectives.

This relationship is particularly important in tourism because employees and customers often interact directly throughout the service process. The SERVQUAL framework identifies reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles as important dimensions of service quality

(Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Employees who perform effectively across these dimensions demonstrate their ability to fulfill service responsibilities. Empirical research also reports positive relationships between service quality and employee performance in service-oriented settings (Ladhari, 2020; Nguyen *et al.*, 2022; Sudana & Diantini, 2025; Olorunniwo *et al.*, 2022; Karatepe, 2021). Therefore, higher service quality should be associated with stronger employee performance.

**H3:** *Service quality has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.*

Beyond these direct relationships, service quality is expected to mediate the relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee performance. The mediation logic follows from the combined insights of RBV and SDL. RBV suggests that resources generate value when they are effectively deployed, while SDL explains that employee capabilities become valuable through their application in service interactions. Local wisdom-based competence therefore represents a potential strategic resource, but its performance implications depend on whether employees can translate culturally embedded knowledge and values into effective service behaviors.

Service quality provides this translation mechanism. Employees who possess local wisdom-based competence can incorporate culturally appropriate hospitality, communication styles, interpersonal sensitivity, and community-oriented values into their service delivery. These behaviors can improve customers' perceptions of service quality, which in turn reflects employees' effectiveness and contributes to their performance. Thus, the effect of local wisdom-based competence on performance is expected to operate partly through the quality of service employees provide. Previous studies provide empirical support for service quality as a mediating mechanism between employee competence and performance (Adawiah, 2024; Juni & Hutasuht, 2023; Sudana & Diantini, 2025).

**H4:** *Service quality mediates the positive relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee performance.*

The strength of the preceding relationships may depend on employees' digital literacy. Digital transformation has altered tourism service processes by expanding the use of digital platforms for communication, marketing, reservations, transactions, customer relationship management, and information provision. Digital literacy enables employees to access, evaluate, and use digital technologies effectively (van Laar *et al.*, 2020), thereby allowing them to integrate technological resources with existing knowledge and capabilities.

Digital literacy can complement local wisdom-based competence by providing employees with additional means to communicate and deploy culturally embedded knowledge. Employees with strong digital literacy can communicate local cultural experiences through digital channels, respond more efficiently to customer inquiries, personalize service interactions, and use digital information to support service decisions. Consequently, the same level of local wisdom-based competence may generate different performance outcomes depending on employees' digital capabilities. When digital literacy is high, employees may be better able to convert culturally embedded knowledge into effective work practices, thereby strengthening the competence–performance relationship. Evidence from digital transformation and tourism research supports the importance of digital capabilities in conditioning employee and service outcomes (Scherer *et al.*, 2021; Falloon, 2020; Choe & Baek, 2024; Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023).

**H5:** *Digital literacy positively moderates the relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee performance, such that the relationship is stronger when digital literacy is high.*

Digital literacy may similarly strengthen the relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and service quality. Although local wisdom provides employees with culturally distinctive knowledge

and interpersonal capabilities, digital literacy enables them to apply these resources more efficiently across increasingly technology-mediated service encounters. Employees with strong digital literacy can combine culturally appropriate service with digital communication, information systems, online customer engagement, and technology-enabled service processes. Such complementarity may improve responsiveness, reliability, personalization, and accessibility, thereby increasing the extent to which local wisdom-based competence is reflected in service quality.

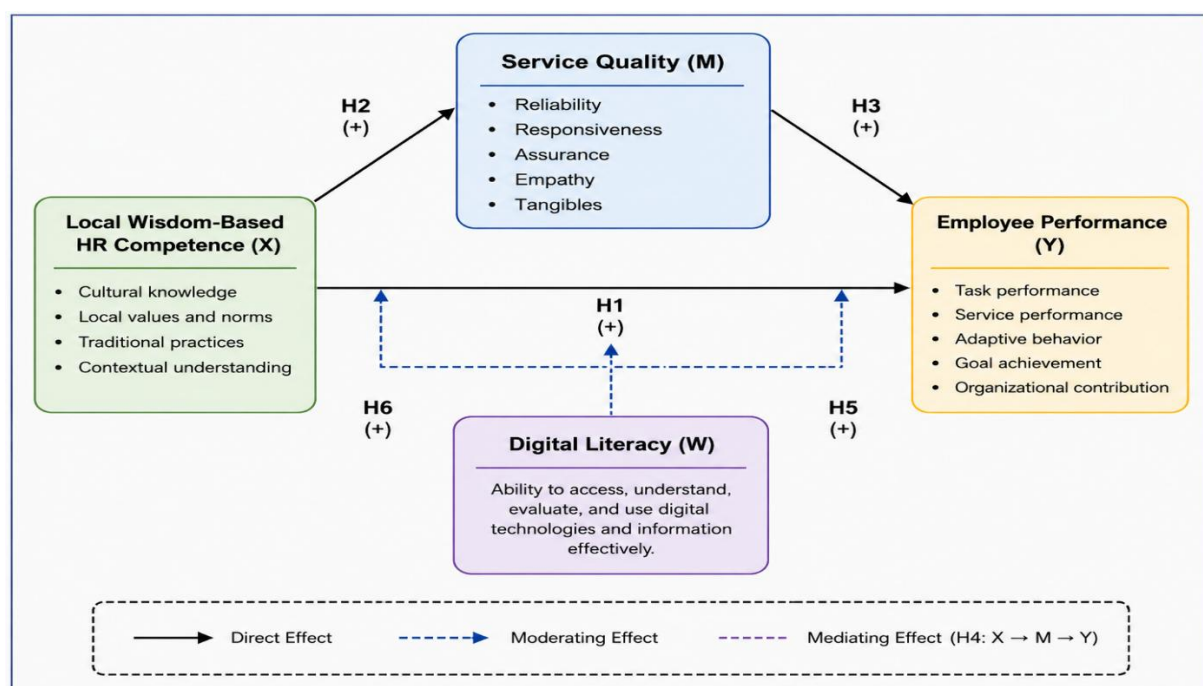
This moderating effect is consistent with the argument that digital literacy represents a complementary capability rather than a substitute for culturally embedded competence. Local wisdom provides the substantive cultural content of the service, while digital literacy expands the channels and efficiency through which that content can be delivered. Prior studies indicate that digital capabilities can strengthen relationships between technological transformation and service or performance outcomes (Choe & Baek, 2024; Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023; Suardana *et al.*, 2021; Togatorop *et al.*, 2025). Therefore, the positive relationship between local wisdom-based competence and service quality should be stronger among employees with higher levels of digital literacy.

**H6:** *Digital literacy positively moderates the relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and service quality, such that the relationship is stronger when digital literacy is high.*

Taken together, H1–H6 establish an integrated framework in which local wisdom-based HR competence functions as a culturally embedded strategic capability, service quality serves as the mechanism through which this capability translates into employee performance, and digital literacy operates as a boundary condition that amplifies the value of culturally embedded competence. The model therefore explains not only whether local wisdom-based competence contributes to employee performance, but also how this contribution occurs and when it is likely to be stronger. This integrated perspective is particularly relevant to tourism destinations such as Alor, where the preservation and mobilization of cultural resources increasingly intersect with the digital transformation of tourism services.

## 2.3 Research Conceptual Framework

**Figure 1.** Research Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1** illustrates the conceptual framework developed to examine how local wisdom-based human resource (HR) competence contributes to employee performance in tourism services. The framework positions local wisdom-based HR competence as the focal exogenous variable, service quality as the mediating variable, employee performance as the endogenous outcome, and digital literacy as a moderating variable.

The framework proposes that local wisdom-based HR competence directly enhances employee performance (H1). Employees who possess culturally embedded knowledge, local values, traditional practices, and contextual understanding are expected to be more effective at performing their tasks and contributing to organizational objectives. The framework further proposes that local wisdom-based HR competence improves service quality (H2), as culturally grounded competencies can enhance employees' ability to provide reliable, responsive, assuring, empathetic, and contextually appropriate services. Service quality is subsequently expected to enhance employee performance (H3), reflecting the importance of effective service delivery in tourism-oriented work environments. Building on these relationships, service quality is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee performance (H4).

This mediation implies that culturally embedded competence can translate into superior employee outcomes, in part by improving the quality of service delivered to customers. Finally, digital literacy is incorporated as a boundary condition. The framework proposes that digital literacy strengthens the positive relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee performance (H5), as well as between local wisdom-based HR competence and service quality (H6). Employees with stronger digital capabilities are expected to be better able to leverage culturally embedded knowledge through digital communication, access to information, customer engagement, and technology-enabled service delivery. Overall, the framework integrates cultural resources and digital capabilities to explain how and under what conditions local wisdom-based HR competence contributes to service quality and employee performance in tourism services.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the hypothesized relationships among local wisdom-based human resource (HR) competence, service quality, digital literacy, and employee performance in tourism service businesses. An explanatory design was appropriate because the study sought to test theoretically derived relationships and identify both the direct and indirect pathways through which local wisdom-based HR competence is associated with employee performance. Specifically, the research examined whether service quality mediates the relationship between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee performance and whether digital literacy moderates the relationships between local wisdom-based HR competence and both employee performance and service quality.

A quantitative approach was adopted because the study involved standardized measurement of latent constructs and statistical testing of theoretically specified hypotheses. The research used a cross-sectional survey design, with data collected from employees at a single point in time. Accordingly, the empirical analysis is interpreted in terms of hypothesized relationships and explanatory associations rather than definitive temporal causality.

### 3.2 Population and Sampling

The study population comprised employees working in tourism service businesses in Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The tourism businesses covered by the study included restaurants, cafés, travel agencies, diving operators, creative-economy enterprises, and event organizers. A total of 129 employees were identified as the accessible population.

Given the relatively small and accessible population, the study employed a census or saturated sampling approach, whereby all members of the identified population were invited to participate. This approach was considered appropriate because the population was sufficiently limited to allow for complete coverage rather than selecting a subset of respondents. Accordingly, all 129 questionnaires were distributed and returned, resulting in a 100% response rate. The census approach also eliminated sampling selection within the defined population and ensured that the empirical analysis represented the accessible population targeted by the study.

**Table 1.** Respondent Characteristics

| Demographic Variable | Category           | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender               | Male               | 87        | 67%        |
|                      | Female             | 42        | 33%        |
| Education            | Senior High School | 61        | 47%        |
|                      | Diploma            | 49        | 38%        |
|                      | Bachelor's Degree  | 19        | 15%        |
| Workplace Type       | Restaurant         | 41        | 24%        |
|                      | Café               | 39        | 22%        |
|                      | Travel Agency      | 32        | 17%        |
|                      | Diving Operator    | 27        | 13%        |
|                      | Creative Economy   | 28        | 15%        |
|                      | Event Organizer    | 21        | 9%         |
| Age                  | <25 years          | 27        | 21%        |
|                      | 25-35 years        | 29        | 22%        |
|                      | 36-45 years        | 53        | 41%        |
|                      | >45 years          | 20        | 16%        |
| Tenure               | <5 years           | 91        | 71%        |
|                      | >5 years           | 38        | 29%        |

### 3.3 Data Collection and Instrument Development

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure four latent constructs: local wisdom-based HR competence, service quality, employee performance, and digital literacy. The questionnaire items were adapted from established measures in the relevant literature and contextualized to reflect the characteristics of tourism service businesses in Alor Regency. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Local wisdom-based HR competence was measured using items adapted from previous research on the integration of local wisdom into HR development.

The measurement captured culturally embedded aspects of employee competence, including cultural knowledge, locally grounded service values, traditional practices, and community-oriented work ethics. Service quality was measured using items derived from the SERVQUAL framework of Parasuraman *et al.*, (1988), encompassing reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Employee performance was assessed through items capturing task performance, service effectiveness, and contribution to organizational objectives. Digital literacy was measured using items adapted from established digital literacy frameworks, focusing on employees' ability to access, understand, create, communicate, and effectively use digital technologies and information.

To establish content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts with expertise in tourism management and HR development. The review focused on the relevance, clarity, and contextual appropriateness of the measurement items for tourism businesses in Alor Regency. Prior to the main survey, a pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to assess item clarity and preliminary instrument reliability. The pilot results indicated that the questionnaire items were clearly understood by respondents and that all constructs demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the 0.70 threshold.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. PLS-SEM was selected because the study emphasizes prediction and theory development while examining a model that simultaneously incorporates direct, mediating, and moderating relationships. The approach is also suitable for estimating complex structural models with latent constructs and relatively modest sample sizes. Furthermore, PLS-SEM does not require multivariate normality as a prerequisite for estimation, while bootstrapping provides a non-parametric procedure for assessing the significance of estimated relationships.

The analysis followed a two-stage procedure recommended in the PLS-SEM literature (Hair *et al.*, 2019). First, the measurement model was evaluated to establish the reliability and validity of the constructs. Convergent validity was assessed using indicator outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with recommended thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with values above 0.70 considered acceptable.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading assessment. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships. The analysis considered the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) to assess the explanatory power of the endogenous constructs, predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) to evaluate predictive capability, and effect size ( $f^2$ ) to assess the substantive contribution of individual exogenous constructs. Path coefficients were evaluated using bootstrapping to determine the statistical significance of the hypothesized relationships. The mediating effect of service quality was assessed through the significance of the indirect effect of local wisdom-based HR competence on employee performance through service quality.

The moderating effects of digital literacy were examined by estimating interaction terms between local wisdom-based HR competence and digital literacy. Specifically, the interaction effects were evaluated for the relationships between local wisdom-based HR competence and employee

performance and between local wisdom-based HR competence and service quality. This analytical procedure enabled the study to assess both the underlying mechanism and the boundary condition proposed in the conceptual framework.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Result Analysis

#### 4.1.1 Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model was evaluated for convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. Table 2 presents the results of the convergent validity assessment. All outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, while all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity across all constructs. Specifically, the LW-HRC construct exhibited outer loadings ranging from 0.834 to 0.948, with an AVE of 0.809; the SQ construct showed loadings ranging from 0.843 to 0.948, with an AVE of 0.811; the EP construct demonstrated loadings ranging from 0.790 to 0.963, with an AVE of 0.825; and the DL construct exhibited loadings ranging from 0.754 to 0.928, with an AVE of 0.739. These findings indicate that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its respective indicators, thereby satisfying the established criteria for convergent validity.

**Table 2.** Validity Convergency Test

| Variable          | Item    | Outer Loading | AVE   | Notes |
|-------------------|---------|---------------|-------|-------|
| KL-BSDM           | KL1-KL5 | 0.834-0.948   | 0.809 | Valid |
| Service Quality   | KL1-KL5 | 0.843-0.948   | 0.811 | Valid |
| Staff Performance | KK1-KK5 | 0.790-0.963   | 0.825 | Valid |
| Digital Literacy  | LD1-LD5 | 0.754-0.928   | 0.739 | Valid |

**Source:** Created by Authors, 2026

Construct reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. Table 3 presents the results of the reliability assessment. All constructs demonstrated CR values above the recommended threshold of 0.70 and Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70, confirming adequate internal consistency reliability. Specifically, the LW-HRC construct yielded a CR of 0.950 and Cronbach's Alpha of 0.940; the SQ construct recorded a CR of 0.946 and Cronbach's Alpha of 0.941; the EP construct demonstrated a CR of 0.954 and Cronbach's Alpha of 0.946; and the DL construct showed a CR of 0.920 and Cronbach's Alpha of 0.910. These results indicate that all constructs possess excellent reliability, suggesting that the measurement items consistently capture their respective underlying constructs.

**Table 3.** Reliability Test

| Variable          | Composite Reliability | Cronbach's Alpha | Notes    |
|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------|
| KL-BSDM           | 0.950                 | 0.940            | Reliable |
| Service Quality   | 0.946                 | 0.941            | Reliable |
| Staff Performance | 0.954                 | 0.946            | Reliable |
| Digital Literacy  | 0.920                 | 0.910            | Reliable |

**Source:** Created by Authors, 2026

#### 4.1.2 Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and hypothesis testing through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. Table 4 presents the  $R^2$  values for the endogenous variables. Employee Performance yielded an  $R^2$  value of 0.642, indicating that the model explains 64.2% of the variance in employee performance. Service Quality yielded an  $R^2$  value of 0.753, indicating that 75.3% of the variance in service quality is explained by its predictors. The  $R^2$  value for Service Quality can be considered substantial, whereas the  $R^2$  value for Employee Performance indicates moderate-to-substantial explanatory power based on the commonly used criteria reported by Hair *et al.*, (2019), which classify  $R^2$  values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively.

**Table 4.** R-Square Value

| Variable          | R-Square |
|-------------------|----------|
| Staff Performance | 0.642    |
| Service Quality   | 0.753    |

**Source:** Created by Authors, 2026

The predictive relevance of the structural model was assessed using the  $Q^2$  statistic. The  $Q^2$  value was calculated as  $Q^2 = 1 - (1 - R_1^2)(1 - R_2^2) = 1 - (1 - 0.642)(1 - 0.753) = 1 - (0.358)(0.247) = 0.912$ . A  $Q^2$  value greater than zero indicates that the model possesses predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. The obtained  $Q^2$  value of 0.912 demonstrates strong predictive relevance, indicating that the structural model has substantial predictive capability for the endogenous variables. This high  $Q^2$  value provides further evidence that the proposed structural relationships adequately capture systematic patterns in the data and that the model demonstrates strong predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs.

#### 4.1.3 Hypothesis Testing

Table 5 presents the results of hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping procedure. All six hypotheses were supported by the empirical data, as the t-statistics for all structural paths exceeded the critical value of 1.96, while all p-values were below the 0.05 significance threshold. These findings indicate that all hypothesized relationships are statistically significant, providing empirical support for the proposed structural model.

**Table 5.** Hypothesis Testing Result

| Hypothesis | Path                                | T-statistic | P-Value | Result    |
|------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| H1         | KL-BSDM → Staff Performance         | 4.754       | 0.000   | Supported |
| H2         | KL-BSDM → Service Quality           | 12.716      | 0.000   | Supported |
| H3         | Service Quality → Staff Performance | 3.212       | 0.001   | Supported |
| H4         | KL-BSDM → KL → KK (Mediating)       | 3.138       | 0.001   | Supported |
| H5         | LD × KL-BSDM → KK (Moderating)      | 5.938       | 0.000   | Supported |
| H6         | LD × KL-BSDM → KL (Moderating)      | 5.739       | 0.000   | Supported |

**Source:** Created by Authors, 2026

## 4.2 Discussion

### 4.2.1 The Effect of Local Wisdom-Based Human Resource Competence on Employee Performance (H1)

The findings indicate that local wisdom-based human resource competence has a positive and significant direct effect on employee performance ( $t = 4.754$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This finding suggests that employees whose competencies are embedded in local wisdom values, such as cultural knowledge, traditional hospitality norms, and community-oriented work ethics, tend to demonstrate higher levels of performance in tourism service delivery. The mechanism underlying this relationship can be explained by the alignment between employees' cultural values and the nature of tourism work, which inherently involves interpersonal interaction and cultural exchange. When employees possess a deep understanding of their local culture, they are better positioned to provide tourists with more authentic and meaningful experiences, ultimately leading to better service outcomes and higher performance evaluations. This finding is consistent with Kune *et al.*, (2025), who identified a significant effect of competence on the performance of tourism employees, and Sundari *et al.*, (2022), who confirmed the positive impact of human resource competence in the public tourism sector. However, the finding contrasts with Habibi *et al.*, (2022), who reported no significant effect, potentially due to contextual differences in the organizational settings examined.

### 4.2.2 The Effect of Local Wisdom-Based Human Resource Competence on Service Quality (H2)

Local wisdom-based human resource competence was found to have a positive and significant effect on service quality ( $t = 12.716$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The exceptionally high t-statistic indicates that this represents the strongest direct relationship in the model. This finding confirms that integrating local cultural values into employee competencies directly enhances the quality of services delivered by tourism businesses. Theoretically, this relationship can be explained through the Service-Dominant Logic perspective, which posits that value is co-created through interactions between service providers and customers. Employees who embody local wisdom naturally demonstrate greater empathy, warmth, and contextual understanding in service interactions, all of which are critical components of perceived service quality. This result is consistent with Lagarese *et al.*, (2024), Drihartati (2023), and Siagian *et al.*, (2023), who demonstrated that integrating local cultural values enhances service quality in tourism and hospitality contexts.

### 4.2.3 The Effect of Service Quality on Employee Performance (H3)

Service quality had a positive and significant effect on employee performance ( $t = 3.212$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). This result indicates that higher service quality contributes to improved employee performance, as employees who consistently deliver high-quality service demonstrate effective application of their competencies, better communication, and stronger customer orientation, all of which are important dimensions of employee performance. The SERVQUAL framework provides a theoretical foundation for this finding, as its dimensions—reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles—reflect core competencies expected of employees in tourism service settings. This finding corroborates the work of Sudana and Diantini (2025), Olorunniwo *et al.*, (2022), and Karatepe (2021), all of whom confirmed a positive relationship between service quality and employee performance in the hospitality and tourism industries.

### 4.2.4 The Mediating Role of Service Quality (H4)

The results confirm that service quality significantly mediates the effect of local wisdom-based human resource competence on employee performance ( $t = 3.138$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). This mediation effect indicates that local wisdom-based human resource competence enhances employee performance not only directly but also indirectly through improvements in service quality. The significant direct effect of local wisdom-based human resource competence on employee performance (H1), together with the

significant indirect effect through service quality (H4), indicates partial mediation. This finding suggests that although service quality represents an important transmission mechanism, local wisdom-based competence may also influence employee performance through other pathways not captured in the present model, such as enhanced motivation, stronger organizational commitment, or improved interpersonal relationships. This finding is consistent with Adawiah (2024) and Juni and Hutasuht (2023), who identified a mediating role of service quality, but contrasts with Gunadi *et al.*, (2015), who found no significant mediation, potentially due to differences in variable operationalization or organizational context.

#### **4.2.5 The Moderating Role of Digital Literacy in the Competence–Performance Relationship (H5)**

Digital literacy was found to significantly moderate the effect of local wisdom-based human resource competence on employee performance ( $t = 5.938$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This finding indicates that the positive effect of local wisdom-based competence on employee performance becomes stronger among employees with higher levels of digital literacy. Theoretically, this moderating effect can be explained by the synergistic relationship between cultural competence and digital capabilities. Digitally literate employees can extend the reach and impact of their local wisdom-based competencies by leveraging digital platforms for marketing, customer communication, and service delivery. For example, employees who understand the appeal of local culture and can use social media or digital booking systems to promote and deliver cultural tourism experiences to broader audiences are better able to enhance their performance outcomes. This finding is consistent with Choe and Baek (2024) and Chatterjee *et al.*, (2023), who confirmed the moderating role of digital capabilities in technology-enabled service environments.

#### **4.2.6 The Moderating Role of Digital Literacy in the Competence–Service Quality Relationship (H6)**

Digital literacy was also found to significantly moderate the effect of local wisdom-based human resource competence on service quality ( $t = 5.739$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This result indicates that the positive effect of local wisdom-based competence on service quality is strengthened when employees possess higher levels of digital literacy. The underlying mechanism involves the ability of digitally literate employees to complement their traditional service competencies with digital tools that enhance service efficiency, personalization, and responsiveness. For instance, employees who combine their knowledge of local cultural practices with proficiency in digital customer relationship management tools can provide more personalized and timely services, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the tourism experience. This finding supports the work of Choe and Baek (2024), Gunawan *et al.*, (2023), and Togatorop *et al.*, (2025), who demonstrated that digital capabilities strengthen the relationships between employee competencies and service-related outcomes.

## **5. Concluding Remarks and Recommendation**

This study provides empirical evidence that local wisdom-based human resource competence (LW-HRC) is positively associated with employee performance in tourism service businesses in Alor Regency, both directly and indirectly through service quality. The findings indicate that employees whose competencies are embedded in local cultural values, including traditional hospitality, communal cooperation, and context-sensitive service practices, tend to demonstrate stronger performance outcomes. The significant indirect effect through service quality further indicates that service quality represents an important mechanism through which culturally embedded competencies are translated into employee performance. The coexistence of a significant direct effect and a significant indirect effect

suggest partial mediation, implying that LW-HRC contributes to employee performance through service quality while also operating through other mechanisms not captured in the present model.

The findings further demonstrate that digital literacy constitutes an important boundary condition in the relationships between local wisdom-based competence, service quality, and employee performance. Specifically, digital literacy significantly strengthens the positive association between LW-HRC and both service quality and employee performance. This finding highlights a potential complementarity between culturally embedded knowledge and contemporary digital capabilities. Rather than positioning digitalization and local wisdom as competing resources, the findings suggest that digital capabilities can enable employees to extend, communicate, and operationalize locally embedded knowledge through contemporary service platforms, customer communication channels, digital marketing, and technology-enabled service processes. The integration of traditional cultural competencies with digital capabilities may therefore represent an important pathway for tourism businesses seeking to enhance service outcomes while maintaining cultural authenticity.

The study makes three principal theoretical contributions. First, it extends the Resource-Based View by conceptualizing local wisdom as a contextually embedded human resource that can generate valuable organizational outcomes when translated into employee competencies and service practices. The findings suggest that the strategic value of local wisdom does not merely reside in its cultural uniqueness but also in employees' ability to transform culturally grounded knowledge and values into effective service behaviors. Second, the study extends Service-Dominant Logic by demonstrating the relevance of culturally embedded employee competencies in the co-creation of service value. Service quality emerges as a significant transmission mechanism, suggesting that local cultural knowledge becomes organizationally consequential when it is enacted through interactions between employees and tourists. Third, the study contributes to the literature on digital transformation by identifying digital literacy as a boundary condition that strengthens the effectiveness of culturally embedded competencies. This perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of digitalization in tourism by emphasizing complementarity between technological capabilities and locally grounded human resources rather than treating digital transformation as a substitute for traditional service knowledge.

The findings also generate several practical implications. Tourism policymakers and business owners in Alor should consider integrating local cultural knowledge, traditional hospitality practices, communal values, and context-sensitive service principles into human resource recruitment, training, and development programs. Such initiatives should be complemented by systematic digital capability development, including training in digital communication, social media, online booking systems, digital customer relationship management, and technology-enabled service delivery. The objective should not be to replace traditional cultural practices with digital technologies, but to equip employees with the capabilities required to communicate and deliver culturally authentic tourism experiences through contemporary channels. This integrated approach may strengthen service quality, employee performance, destination competitiveness, and the longer-term sustainability of tourism in culturally distinctive and geographically remote destinations.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. First, the study was conducted exclusively in Alor Regency, limiting the extent to which the findings can be generalized to tourism destinations with different cultural, geographical, institutional, and



technological characteristics. Second, the use of a census approach involving 129 respondents reflects the characteristics of a relatively small and localized population, which may constrain statistical power and external validity. Third, reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may introduce common method bias and social desirability bias, as respondents may have overestimated their competencies, performance, or digital literacy. Fourth, the proposed model incorporates a relatively limited set of explanatory variables and does not account for other potentially important determinants, such as leadership style, organizational culture, employee motivation, innovation capability, and job satisfaction. Finally, the cross-sectional design captures the relationships among the constructs at a single point in time and therefore does not permit strong causal inferences or capture how these relationships evolve dynamically.

These limitations provide several directions for future research. First, comparative studies across different districts in East Nusa Tenggara and other culturally distinctive island destinations could establish whether the observed relationships remain consistent across different institutional and cultural settings. Second, future research could employ mixed-method designs combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews or focus groups to provide deeper insight into how local wisdom is internalized and translated into service behaviors. Third, future studies could incorporate additional organizational and individual-level variables, such as leadership, organizational culture, innovation capability, motivation, and job satisfaction, to develop a more comprehensive explanatory model. Fourth, longitudinal designs would enable researchers to examine changes in competence, service quality, digital literacy, and employee performance over time and provide stronger evidence regarding temporal relationships. Finally, further research should examine how digital technologies can complement rather than displace traditional cultural values and service practices. Such inquiry would be particularly valuable for understanding how tourism destinations can pursue digital transformation while preserving cultural authenticity and developing sustainable, locally grounded tourism models.

Overall, the study demonstrates that local wisdom and digital literacy should not be viewed as mutually exclusive resources in contemporary tourism. Rather, their integration may create a distinctive capability in which culturally embedded human competencies are amplified by digital technologies. By connecting local knowledge with modern service capabilities, tourism businesses may be better positioned to deliver authentic and high-quality experiences while strengthening employee performance and destination competitiveness. The findings therefore underscore the importance of pursuing a balanced approach to tourism development in which technological advancement supports, rather than erodes, the cultural foundations that constitute the distinctive value of local destinations.

## Statement of Use of Generative AI

During the preparation of this work, the author used generative artificial intelligence tools to support the scientific writing process. Grammarly was used to check grammar, refine writing style, and improve clarity in scientific writing. All interpretations, analyses, and conclusions presented in this study are the sole responsibility of the author.



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