

## Negotiating Empowerment: Women's Roles and Lived Experiences in Lombok's Tourism Development

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of artificial intelligence in driving service personalization and its subsequent effects on guest loyalty within the hospitality industry. Drawing on service quality and technology acceptance theories, the research examines how AI service quality and AI transparency influence perceived personalization, with privacy concern as a moderating factor. A survey of 412 hotel guests who interacted with AI-enabled services was analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that both AI service quality and AI transparency significantly enhance perceived personalization, which in turn strongly predicts guest loyalty intentions. Mediation analysis confirms that perceived personalization serves as the key mechanism linking AI attributes to loyalty outcomes. Moreover, moderation tests indicate that privacy concern weakens the positive effects of AI service quality and transparency on personalization, underscoring the boundary conditions of AI adoption in hospitality. The study contributes to hospitality and tourism literature by providing empirical evidence that AI-driven personalization is a double-edged innovation, capable of strengthening loyalty while constrained by privacy concerns. Practical implications highlight the importance of investing in transparent, high-quality AI systems and balancing personalization with ethical data practices to foster long-term guest relationships.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has long been promoted as a catalyst for local economic growth, cultural preservation, and community development. Within this discourse, women's participation in tourism has been increasingly recognized as a means of advancing gender equality and empowerment, particularly in developing regions where women often face structural barriers to labor market access (Ali, 2023; El Badriati et al., 2022). In Southeast Asia, women frequently occupy visible roles as artisans, vendors, homestay operators, and cultural mediators, making them central actors in the tourism economy. Yet, the extent to which such participation translates into genuine empowerment remains contested, as women's work in tourism is often undervalued, informal, or constrained by traditional gender norms (Kumari et al., 2025; Utama Dewayani, 2024).

In Indonesia, and particularly on the island of Lombok, tourism has undergone rapid expansion following the government's designation of the region as a priority destination under the "10 New Balis" program (Cantika Yuli et al., 2025). Lombok's distinctive positioning as both an Islamic tourism hub and a cultural destination creates a complex environment for women's involvement. On the one hand, tourism provides new income opportunities and platforms for women to showcase local crafts, cuisine, and traditions. On the other, religious and cultural expectations regarding women's roles in the household and community may limit their autonomy in fully benefiting from tourism development (Yasin et al., 2025). While previous studies have examined community-based tourism and destination development in Lombok (Gani et al., 2023; Habibi et al., 2021), few have foregrounded women's lived experiences and subjective narratives within this evolving industry.

This gap highlights the need to explore how women in Lombok negotiate their participation in tourism against the backdrop of economic opportunity, cultural expectations, and gendered power relations. A qualitative approach is especially valuable in this regard, as it can capture women's voices, agency, and constraints in their own terms rather than reducing their experiences to statistical indicators.

The objective of this study is to investigate women's roles and lived experiences in Lombok's tourism development. Specifically, the research aims to understand how women perceive the opportunities and challenges of tourism participation, how they navigate empowerment within socio-cultural and religious frameworks, and how their narratives reflect broader changes in gender relations within the community.

This study contributes to tourism scholarship in three key ways. Theoretically, it extends the literature on gender and tourism by situating women's agency within a Muslim-majority island context that has received less scholarly attention compared to Bali. Methodologically, it employs a qualitative, narrative-driven approach that prioritizes women's voices, thereby addressing the dominance of quantitative assessments of empowerment in tourism research. Practically, the study offers insights for policymakers and tourism planners in Lombok by identifying the enabling and constraining factors that shape women's engagement, ultimately informing strategies that promote more inclusive and equitable tourism development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Women and Tourism: Global Perspectives

The role of women in tourism has been a subject of increasing scholarly interest, particularly as the industry is often positioned as a potential driver of gender equity and community development. Globally, women represent a significant proportion of the tourism workforce, frequently concentrated in frontline service roles such as housekeeping, food preparation, handicraft production, and informal vending (Seyfi et al., 2025). These roles contribute directly to household income and local economies, making women essential participants in the tourism value chain. However, their contributions are often undervalued, characterized by low pay, seasonal employment, and limited opportunities for advancement (Hussain et al., 2024).

Tourism has been framed as a pathway to empowerment, as it provides women with access to economic resources, social networks, and opportunities for entrepreneurship (Scheyvens & Cheer, 2022). Empirical studies show that women who engage in tourism can gain increased decision-making power in households, improved self-esteem, and expanded social participation (Sharma, 2017). Yet, critical scholarship cautions against overly celebratory narratives. Tourism may also reproduce or even exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly when women are relegated to precarious or highly gendered forms of labor (Vujko et al., 2024). Structural barriers such as patriarchal norms, limited education, and restricted mobility often constrain the extent to which women can benefit from tourism development.

These tensions illustrate the dual nature of women's involvement in tourism: while offering potential routes to empowerment, it also risks reinforcing dependency and exploitation. This debate has shaped much of the global literature, which increasingly calls for context-sensitive approaches that examine how tourism intersects with gender, culture, and local power structures (Kumari et al., 2025). Such global insights provide an important foundation for understanding women's participation in tourism in specific localities, such as Lombok, where cultural and religious contexts play an especially significant role in shaping women's opportunities and challenges.

### Empowerment and Gender in Tourism Studies

The concept of empowerment has become central to debates on women's participation in tourism, though it remains contested and multidimensional. Scholars have defined empowerment across several interrelated dimensions: economic, social, political, and psychological. Economic empowerment is typically measured through income generation and access to resources, while social empowerment relates to improvements in status, networks, and recognition within communities. Political empowerment involves greater influence over decision-making processes, and psychological empowerment refers to enhanced confidence, self-esteem, and sense of agency (Scheyvens & Cheer, 2022). These dimensions underscore that empowerment is not merely about financial gain but also about shifts in power relations and identity.

Tourism has been identified as a potential vehicle for empowerment because it creates new opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and cross-cultural exchange (Utama Dewayani, 2024). Women involved in tourism enterprises often report greater control over household finances, increased mobility, and more active participation in community organizations (Vujko et al., 2024). Yet, empowerment is not automatic. Studies show that tourism can also perpetuate gender inequalities when women's roles are limited to low-paying, low-status

positions or when cultural norms restrict their decision-making autonomy (Aminullah & Wusko, 2025). As a result, empowerment must be seen as a process of negotiation, where women navigate both opportunities and constraints.

Theoretical debates further highlight the importance of critical feminist perspectives in tourism research. Feminist political economy approaches emphasize that empowerment is shaped by broader structures of capitalism, patriarchy, and globalization, which determine access to resources and labor markets (Altinay et al., 2026). Postcolonial feminist critiques argue that empowerment initiatives often impose Western ideals of gender equality, overlooking the cultural and religious contexts in which women live and work (Altinay et al., 2026). These perspectives call for greater attention to local voices, practices, and subjectivities in assessing empowerment outcomes.

Within this framework, empowerment in tourism should not be reduced to quantifiable indicators such as income or employment rates. Instead, it must be understood as an ongoing, context-specific process in which women actively negotiate their roles and identities. For regions such as Lombok, where gender norms are deeply intertwined with religious values and community structures, a nuanced, qualitative exploration of women's empowerment is necessary. This approach foregrounds the lived experiences of women as they navigate the promises and contradictions of tourism development.

### Women, Culture, and Religion in Southeast Asian Tourism

The participation of women in tourism across Southeast Asia is shaped not only by economic opportunities but also by cultural traditions and religious values that influence gender roles. Studies in the region highlight that women frequently engage in tourism as artisans, street vendors, homestay operators, or cultural performers, thereby contributing directly to the preservation and commodification of local heritage (El Badriati et al., 2022). However, these roles are often structured by social expectations about women's responsibilities in the household and community, resulting in their work being undervalued or regarded as an extension of domestic duties rather than professional labor (Hussain et al., 2024).

In Muslim-majority contexts such as Malaysia and Indonesia, religion plays a particularly significant role in shaping women's experiences in tourism. Islamic norms regarding modesty, family obligations, and gender segregation may restrict women's mobility and limit the types of work deemed socially acceptable (Aisyah, 2023). Yet, tourism can also provide women with new forms of agency, as it opens avenues for entrepreneurship in sectors aligned with cultural and religious expectations, such as halal hospitality, handicrafts, and food production (Rifqi, 2025). This suggests that religion functions as both a constraint and an enabling framework, depending on how women negotiate their participation within its boundaries.

Research also highlights the importance of community dynamics in shaping gendered participation. In many Southeast Asian villages, tourism is organized through community-based initiatives where women are expected to play supportive roles rather than assume leadership positions (Nguyen, 2023). Even in such contexts, however, women sometimes exercise subtle forms of power by influencing household decision-making or by building social capital through participation in tourism-related associations (Altinay et al., 2026). These findings suggest that empowerment must be understood relationally, as women balance cultural obligations with the opportunities afforded by tourism.

For Lombok, where Islamic identity is central to destination branding and community life, the intersection of gender, culture, and religion is particularly salient. Women's involvement in tourism cannot be understood without considering the socio-religious frameworks that define their roles in family and society. Examining how women navigate these cultural and religious expectations is therefore crucial to understanding the complexity of empowerment in Lombok's tourism sector.

### Women and Tourism in Indonesia

In Indonesia, women have long been central to the tourism economy, yet their roles remain marked by informality and structural inequality. Across the archipelago, women often engage in small-scale entrepreneurship such as running homestays, preparing food for tourists, weaving textiles, or selling handicrafts in local markets (El Badriati et al., 2022). These activities provide supplementary household income and preserve cultural practices, but they are frequently undervalued and excluded from formal tourism planning. Women's

contributions are thus rendered “invisible labor” that sustains the industry but rarely affords them equal recognition or power (Aduwo et al., 2019).

In destinations such as Bali, women’s participation has been shaped by relatively more liberal cultural norms, where involvement in tourism is considered socially acceptable and sometimes encouraged (Picard, 1996). This contrasts with other regions, including Lombok, where Islamic values play a stronger role in defining women’s responsibilities within households and communities. Studies indicate that while tourism generates opportunities for women in Lombok, these are mediated by gendered expectations of modesty, family care, and community obligations (Azizurrohman et al., 2021). As a result, women’s entrepreneurial activities are often confined to sectors perceived as culturally appropriate, such as weaving, cooking, and religiously aligned tourism services.

Indonesian tourism policies have increasingly emphasized women’s empowerment as part of sustainable development agendas. The Ministry of Tourism has highlighted gender equality as a priority, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet implementation often remains rhetorical, with limited translation into practical strategies that address structural barriers such as unequal access to education, capital, and decision-making processes (Tantawi et al., 2023). Research has also noted that development programs tend to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, overlooking local cultural contexts that shape how women experience empowerment (Aregaw et al., 2023).

These dynamics point to a national pattern in which women’s contributions to tourism are celebrated discursively but undervalued in practice. The Indonesian case demonstrates that empowerment in tourism is highly uneven, dependent on cultural, religious, and policy contexts. For Lombok, this means that women’s tourism participation must be understood not only in relation to local community norms but also in the broader national framework of tourism development and gender policy.

### **Tourism Development in Lombok and Gendered Implications**

Lombok has emerged as one of Indonesia’s priority destinations under the government’s “10 New Balis” initiative, receiving substantial investment in infrastructure, international marketing, and destination branding. Positioned as both a cultural and Islamic tourism hub, Lombok is promoted for its pristine beaches, traditional weaving villages, and religious heritage sites. This dual positioning creates unique opportunities and challenges for women’s participation in the tourism sector. On one hand, the expansion of tourism has generated new economic activities in handicrafts, hospitality, food preparation, and small-scale entrepreneurship, areas where women play a visible role (El Badriati et al., 2022). On the other, the industry is embedded in a social environment where Islamic norms and community expectations shape the types of work considered acceptable for women (Murtayadi et al., 2022).

Research on Lombok has highlighted the growth of community-based tourism initiatives in villages such as Sade and Ende, where women contribute as artisans and cultural mediators (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). However, their participation is often framed as supportive rather than leading, reinforcing gendered hierarchies within tourism development. While women may earn income through weaving or culinary tourism, decision-making positions in cooperatives, associations, and policy forums tend to remain dominated by men. This reflects a broader pattern in which women’s labor sustains Lombok’s tourism image while their voices remain marginalized in governance and planning.

Furthermore, Lombok’s branding as an Islamic destination adds complexity to women’s experiences. Religious expectations regarding modesty and family roles can restrict women’s autonomy and limit their mobility in tourism-related activities. Yet, paradoxically, Islamic tourism also creates niches for women, such as halal culinary ventures and the production of modest fashion for tourists, which align with cultural norms while providing new avenues for entrepreneurship (Alkhalifah et al., 2025). Thus, women’s engagement in tourism in Lombok is characterized by negotiation balancing empowerment through income and recognition with the constraints imposed by cultural and religious frameworks.

Despite the growing importance of tourism in Lombok, scholarly attention to women’s lived experiences remains limited. Much of the literature has focused on destination development, infrastructure, and market positioning (Ilyas et al., 2023), with relatively little exploration of how women themselves perceive and navigate tourism participation. This creates a gap in understanding the subjective dimensions of empowerment, identity, and agency within Lombok’s rapidly transforming tourism landscape. Addressing this gap requires a qualitative

approach that prioritizes women's narratives, exploring how they make sense of their roles, challenges, and opportunities within the broader processes of tourism development.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to capture the lived experiences of women participating in Lombok's tourism development. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research aims to explore subjective meanings, narratives, and negotiations that cannot be reduced to numerical measures. By foregrounding women's voices, this study seeks to uncover how they interpret empowerment and navigate the cultural, religious, and economic dynamics of tourism participation.

Purposive sampling was used to identify women who actively participate in the tourism sector in Lombok. Selection criteria included women engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship (such as weaving, culinary production, or homestays), hospitality employees (in hotels, guesthouses, or travel agencies), and women involved in community-based tourism initiatives. Snowball sampling was also employed, where initial informants referred other women with relevant experiences. This approach allowed the inclusion of diverse perspectives across different tourism roles while maintaining depth in narrative accounts.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted between March and May 2025 across Central and West Lombok. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia or Sasak language, depending on the participant's preference. Questions focused on women's motivations for entering tourism, the opportunities and constraints they encountered, their perceptions of empowerment, and the influence of cultural and religious expectations on their participation. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were also maintained to capture contextual observations and non-verbal expressions.

A total of 12 women participated in the study, representing different roles within the tourism industry. Table 1 presents an overview of the informants, including their assigned codes, primary roles, and interview dates. These codes are used throughout the results section to attribute direct quotations while ensuring confidentiality.

**Table 1.** Informant Profiles

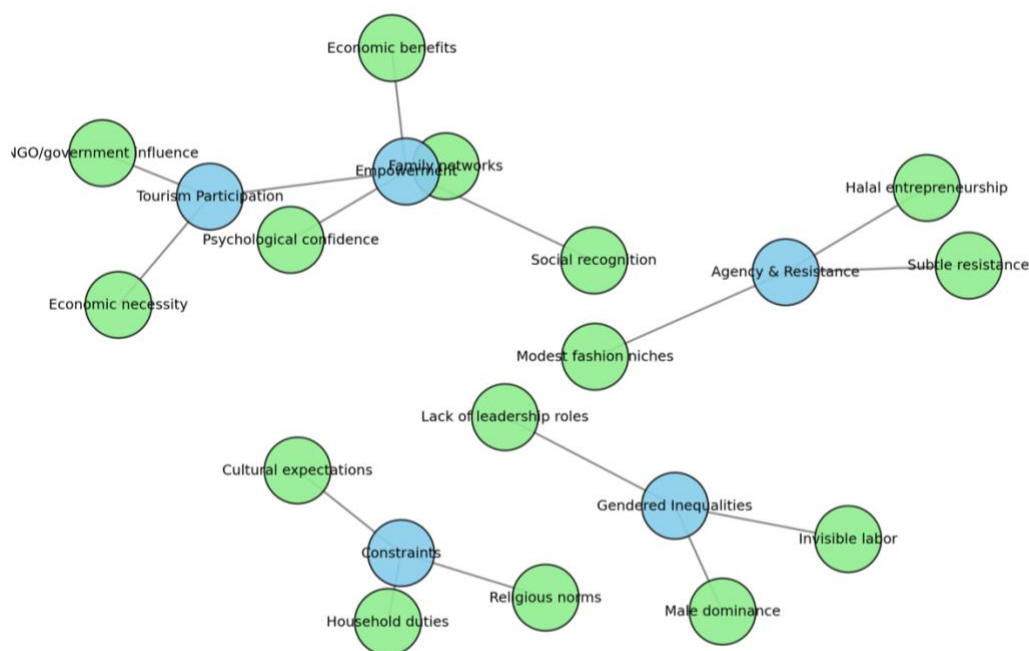
Informant Code	Role / Occupation	Interview Date
W1	Weaver and souvenir seller (traditional village, Central Lombok)	12 March 2024
W2	Homestay owner (West Lombok)	14 March 2024
W3	Culinary entrepreneur (local food stall, Central Lombok)	16 March 2024
W4	Tour guide (eco-tourism site, North Lombok)	19 March 2024
W5	Hotel receptionist (Mataram city)	22 March 2024
W6	Restaurant worker (Senggigi tourist area)	25 March 2024
W7	Cooperative member (women's weaving group)	28 March 2024
W8	Spa and wellness provider (West Lombok)	2 April 2024
W9	Local market seller catering to tourists	6 April 2024
W10	Village tourism committee member (South Lombok)	10 April 2024
W11	Halal culinary producer (Central Lombok)	18 April 2024
W12	Modest fashion entrepreneur (West Lombok)	25 April 2024

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes across the interview transcripts. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, the researcher first familiarized herself with the data through repeated reading and note-taking. Codes were then generated inductively to capture meaningful units of text, such as references to "family obligations," "religious restrictions," or "entrepreneurial independence." These codes were grouped into broader themes reflecting the research questions, such as opportunities for empowerment, cultural constraints, negotiations of identity, and experiences of tourism-driven change. NVivo software was employed to facilitate systematic coding and retrieval of data. Direct quotations from informants, identified by their codes (e.g., W3, W8), are used in the results section to illustrate themes and ensure that women's voices are central to the analysis.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram Institutional Review Board. All participants were informed of the study's objectives and assured that their identities would remain confidential. Written consent was obtained before each interview, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point. Pseudonymous informant codes were used in transcripts, analysis, and reporting to protect privacy.

## RESULTS

The analysis of twelve in-depth interviews with women engaged in Lombok's tourism sector revealed a complex interplay between empowerment, constraint, and negotiation. Using thematic analysis, five overarching themes were identified: pathways into tourism participation, opportunities for empowerment, constraints and cultural negotiations, gendered inequalities, and agency and resistance. Each of these themes is composed of multiple subthemes that reflect the diverse lived experiences of the participants.



**Figure 1.** Network Analysis

The thematic network presented in Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the overarching themes and their associated subthemes. This visualization, generated through qualitative coding and mapping, demonstrates how women's narratives intersect across economic, social, cultural, and religious dimensions. For instance, empowerment is closely linked to economic benefits, social recognition, and psychological confidence, while constraints arise from household duties, religious norms, and cultural expectations. Gendered inequalities manifest in limited leadership opportunities and the invisibility of women's labor, yet women also exhibit agency through entrepreneurial niches such as halal culinary ventures and modest fashion enterprises.

Together, the thematic map shows that women's participation in Lombok's tourism is neither wholly empowering nor wholly constraining. Instead, it represents an ongoing process of negotiation, where women balance opportunity and limitation within the broader context of Islamic cultural values and tourism development.

### Pathways into Tourism Participation

The interviews revealed that women's involvement in Lombok's tourism sector followed diverse pathways shaped by family traditions, economic necessity, and external interventions from government or NGOs. Many participants described how their entry into tourism was not a deliberate career choice but rather an extension



of inherited cultural practices. For example, weaving and craft-making, long regarded as women's domestic responsibilities, became commodified as tourism demand for souvenirs increased. As W1 explained,

*"I learned weaving from my mother since I was a child. Before, it was only for family use, but now tourists buy my cloth. It has become our main income"* (W1, 12 March 2024).

Similarly, W3 recounted how her culinary skills, originally honed for household purposes, transformed into an income-generating business once local food stalls began attracting tourists.

For others, entry into tourism was driven by economic necessity. Women emphasized the need to supplement household income due to seasonal farming or the irregular earnings of male family members. W11 noted,

*"My husband's income from fishing is uncertain. Selling halal snacks to visitors is how I can help my children's schooling"* (W11, 18 April 2024).

This demonstrates how tourism is not only perceived as an opportunity but also as a survival strategy, particularly in times of economic vulnerability.

Family networks and community initiatives also played a pivotal role in facilitating women's participation. Informants often highlighted the importance of cooperative groups and village-based tourism associations in providing market access and legitimacy. W7 described how joining a weaving cooperative enabled her to showcase products to larger groups of tourists brought in by tour operators, while W10 emphasized the support provided by community tourism committees that organized events and training sessions. These findings suggest that women's engagement is embedded in social structures that mediate their access to tourism opportunities.

Clear differences also emerged between women who pursued tourism through entrepreneurship and those who entered through wage employment. Entrepreneurs such as W1, W3, and W11 framed their participation as an extension of traditional skills reoriented for tourism markets. Their narratives emphasized autonomy, creativity, and pride in transforming local knowledge into viable enterprises. By contrast, wage employees such as W5, a hotel receptionist, and W6, a restaurant worker, recounted experiences of limited agency. W5 reflected,

*"I enjoy working in the hotel because I meet many people, but the salary is fixed and decisions are not mine"* (W5, 22 March 2024).

W6 similarly expressed that her tourism job was valuable for income but required balancing long hours with domestic responsibilities.

Overall, this theme illustrates that women's entry into tourism in Lombok is shaped by both cultural continuity and structural necessity. While some women leverage inherited traditions and family networks to establish entrepreneurial ventures, others engage in wage labor that provides financial support but less autonomy. These diverse pathways highlight the complexity of women's roles in tourism and set the stage for examining how empowerment and constraint are negotiated within their lived experiences.

### Opportunities for Empowerment

Tourism in Lombok has created meaningful opportunities for women to experience empowerment in multiple dimensions, including economic independence, social recognition, and psychological confidence. Across the interviews, participants consistently emphasized how tourism participation enabled them to contribute directly to household income and gain a stronger sense of agency within family and community structures.

Economic empowerment was the most frequently discussed outcome. Several women explained how income earned through weaving, culinary sales, or small businesses became essential to household survival and children's education. W2, who operates a homestay, explained:

*"With the money from guests, I can pay my children's school fees without waiting for my husband's salary. It gives me peace because I know I am helping"* (W2, 14 March 2024).

Similarly, W12, a modest fashion entrepreneur, highlighted that tourism markets allowed her to expand sales and reinvest profits into her household:

*“Tourists like clothes that show local identity but are modest. From this business I can support my parents and children”* (W12, 25 April 2024).

These narratives reflect how women translate tourism opportunities into tangible household contributions, shifting their roles from dependents to active providers.

Tourism also facilitated social empowerment by increasing women’s visibility and recognition in their communities. For instance, W4, who works as a tour guide in an eco-tourism site, shared:

*“Before, women here were not speaking with strangers. Now I talk to international tourists every day, and my neighbors respect me because I can use English”* (W4, 19 March 2024).

W7, a member of a weaving cooperative, emphasized how collective efforts enhanced women’s bargaining power with buyers:

*“When we sell together as a group, we get better prices. The cooperative makes us stronger, not only as individuals but also as women in the village”* (W7, 28 March 2024).

Such experiences illustrate how women gain social capital and recognition by engaging in tourism-related activities, often extending their influence beyond household boundaries.

Psychological empowerment was another theme that emerged strongly from the interviews. Women described how tourism enhanced their confidence and self-esteem by validating their skills and cultural heritage. W8, who runs a spa service catering to tourists, explained:

*“I never thought my massage skills could be something valuable. When tourists thank me and say they feel better, I feel proud and more confident in myself”* (W8, 2 April 2024).

Similarly, W9, a market vendor, reflected that her ability to interact with tourists and manage her own stall gave her a sense of independence:

*“Before I only stayed at home, but now I can sell, negotiate, and talk to foreigners. It makes me feel capable”* (W9, 6 April 2024).

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate that women in Lombok derive empowerment from tourism not only economically but also socially and psychologically. While their opportunities remain embedded within cultural and religious norms, the ability to earn income, gain recognition, and feel pride in their contributions represents a significant shift in gender relations. These findings highlight tourism as a space where women exercise agency and reshape their identities in ways that challenge traditional notions of dependence and invisibility.

### Constraints and Cultural Negotiations

Although tourism offers opportunities for empowerment, women in Lombok also face persistent constraints that shape and limit their participation. These constraints often emerge from the tension between the demands of tourism work and deeply rooted cultural and religious expectations regarding women’s roles in the household and community.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the difficulty of balancing tourism work with domestic responsibilities. Many participants explained that, despite earning income, they remained primarily responsible for childcare, cooking, and household management. W3, who runs a food stall, explained:



*"I wake up at 4 a.m. to cook for my family before preparing food for tourists. Sometimes I feel tired because even if I earn money, the housework is still mine" (W3, 16 March 2024).*

W6, employed in a tourist restaurant, similarly noted the dual burden:

*"After working late hours, I still have to take care of the children. My husband helps a little, but people still think it is the woman's job" (W6, 25 March 2024).*

These narratives show how women's empowerment is tempered by persistent domestic expectations.

Cultural and religious norms also constrain the types of tourism activities deemed acceptable for women. Several informants reported that engaging in jobs involving direct contact with foreign male tourists could expose them to gossip or criticism. W10, a member of a village tourism committee, reflected:

*"Some men in the village say women should not guide tourists, especially men from abroad. They think it is not appropriate. That is why mostly men are tour guides" (W10, 10 April 2024).*

Similarly, W11, who produces halal snacks, emphasized that her business was chosen deliberately to align with cultural values:

*"I prefer cooking because it is safe. People will not talk badly. If I worked directly with male tourists, maybe they would say I am not modest" (W11, 18 April 2024).*

These accounts highlight how cultural expectations surrounding modesty and reputation restrict women's choices in tourism work.

At times, women described having to negotiate or adapt to these constraints rather than directly resist them. For example, W2, who manages a homestay, explained how she adjusted practices to avoid criticism:

*"When male tourists come, I ask my brother to greet them first. Then later I serve food and talk with them. It makes people more comfortable" (W2, 14 March 2024).*

Such strategies demonstrate how women navigate cultural and religious expectations while still participating in tourism, balancing their aspirations for empowerment with the need to maintain social acceptance.

Overall, this theme illustrates that empowerment in Lombok's tourism sector is not absolute but mediated by ongoing negotiations with cultural and religious norms. Women simultaneously seek opportunities while ensuring that their actions remain within the boundaries of what is socially acceptable in their communities. These findings reveal the complexity of empowerment in Muslim-majority contexts, where cultural expectations shape not only what women can do but also how they must frame their participation to preserve respectability.

### **Gendered Inequalities in Tourism Structures**

Beyond household-level constraints, women's participation in Lombok's tourism is also shaped by structural inequalities that limit their influence in formal decision-making spaces. While women are visible as producers, sellers, and service providers, they are often absent from leadership positions in cooperatives, associations, and tourism committees. This imbalance reflects a broader gendered division of labor in which women's work is essential yet systematically undervalued.

Several participants highlighted the lack of female representation in village-level tourism governance. W7, a member of a weaving cooperative, explained:

*"We women are the ones who make the cloth and sell it, but in meetings about prices or promotion, usually men are the leaders. Our voices are not heard strongly" (W7, 28 March 2025).*

W10, who sits on a tourism committee, similarly noted:

*"I am the only woman in the committee. Often decisions are made before I speak, and I just follow. Men think women's ideas are not important in planning"* (W10, 10 April 2024).

These accounts reveal how women's perspectives are marginalized in decision-making, even though they play a central role in sustaining the local tourism economy.

Another dimension of inequality is the framing of women's labor as supplementary rather than primary. W9, who sells produce in a local market frequented by tourists, reflected:

*"People say my work is just to help my husband. But actually, my stall gives more income than his farming in the dry season"* (W9, 6 April 2024).

This statement underscores how women's contributions are systematically downplayed despite their economic significance. Such framing reinforces patriarchal assumptions that men are the primary breadwinners while women merely provide secondary support.

The invisibility of women's labor also extends to tourism marketing and representation. W1, a weaver, described how her products were sold under male traders' names:

*"Tourists often buy from men in the shop, but it is us women who make the textiles. Sometimes our names are not mentioned at all"* (W1, 12 March 2024).

This reflects a pattern where women's creative and productive labor is commodified for tourism while credit and recognition accrue to male intermediaries.

Collectively, these findings show that gendered inequalities in Lombok's tourism are not only cultural but also structural. Women's contributions are visible in practice yet invisible in governance and recognition. This duality constrains their ability to influence how tourism evolves in their communities, reinforcing male dominance in decision-making and resource distribution. While women gain empowerment through participation, their capacity to shape tourism systems remains limited by entrenched gender hierarchies.

### Agency, Adaptation, and Resistance

Despite facing cultural constraints and structural inequalities, women in Lombok's tourism sector demonstrate considerable agency in shaping their roles and asserting influence. Their strategies often involve adapting to prevailing norms while simultaneously expanding their opportunities. In some cases, these adaptations reflect subtle forms of resistance against gendered expectations.

A prominent example of agency is the creation of entrepreneurial niches that align with religious and cultural values. W11, who produces halal culinary products, explained:

*"Cooking traditional food for tourists is accepted by everyone. People see it as women's work, but for me, it is also business. I can earn my own money while keeping respect in the community"* (W11, 18 April 2024).

Similarly, W12, a modest fashion entrepreneur, framed her business as both culturally appropriate and commercially innovative:

*"Tourists look for clothes that are stylish but modest. By designing them, I show that women here can be creative and modern without breaking traditions"* (W12, 25 April 2024).

These examples demonstrate how women carve out spaces within tourism that allow empowerment while maintaining cultural legitimacy.

Some participants also described how they adapted their practices to manage community perceptions. W2, who manages a homestay, explained:

*"I always involve my family in serving guests, so people see it as a family business, not just me as a woman dealing with strangers. This way, I can continue my work without criticism"* (W2, 14 March 2024).

Such strategies illustrate how women balance their aspirations with the social need to preserve modesty and family honor.

Beyond adaptation, women also expressed subtle forms of resistance. W8, a spa provider, shared how she challenged local skepticism about her work:

*"At first people said massage was not appropriate. But I kept doing it and proved that it can be respectful. Now they come to me for treatment too"* (W8, 2 April 2025).

W4, working as a tour guide, described breaking gender stereotypes:

*"Many said women cannot guide tourists, but I learned English and now tourists prefer me because I can explain culture better. Slowly, people in the village started to accept it"* (W4, 19 March 2024).

These accounts reveal how women's persistence gradually shifts community attitudes, enabling greater acceptance of non-traditional roles.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that women are not passive recipients of tourism's opportunities or constraints. Instead, they actively negotiate their positions, adapting to cultural and religious expectations while finding ways to expand their agency. In some cases, these adaptations reinforce traditional roles, but in others, they serve as subtle yet significant forms of resistance that challenge gender norms. This theme highlights the dynamic interplay of compliance and contestation in women's tourism participation, underscoring that empowerment in Lombok is a process of ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed outcome.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined women's participation in Lombok's tourism industry, exploring how they experience empowerment, constraint, and negotiation within a socio-cultural and religiously informed context. The findings confirm and extend existing debates in gender and tourism studies, highlighting both opportunities and limitations that characterize women's engagement in tourism in Southeast Asia.

The narratives revealed that women derive significant empowerment from their involvement in tourism, consistent with Scheyvens (2000) framework, which highlights economic, social, and psychological dimensions of empowerment. Economic empowerment was evident in women's ability to generate household income and support children's education, aligning with studies that link tourism participation to improved financial independence (Ferguson, 2011; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). Social empowerment was also visible as women gained recognition in their communities, often through cooperative groups or direct interaction with international tourists. These findings support earlier claims that tourism can create platforms for women to expand social networks and acquire new skills (El Badriati et al., 2022).

However, empowerment was not uniform or unqualified. Women's accounts illustrated that empowerment in Lombok is negotiated within cultural and religious boundaries. This echoes postcolonial feminist critiques that caution against universalizing empowerment narratives, instead emphasizing the importance of context and intersectionality (Scheyvens, 2000). While women experienced new forms of agency, these opportunities often had to be framed in ways that aligned with Islamic values and community expectations, particularly in relation to modesty and family honor.

The persistence of household responsibilities, cultural norms, and gendered expectations constrained women's ability to fully benefit from tourism. The findings resonate with Cole's (2008) research, which demonstrated that women's participation in tourism was often layered upon existing domestic obligations, creating a "double burden" of productive and reproductive labor. Similarly, the cultural policing of women's reputations in Lombok mirrors findings in other Muslim-majority contexts where women's mobility and visibility are tightly regulated (Yasin et al., 2025).

At a structural level, the study revealed how women's labor, though essential to Lombok's tourism economy, remains undervalued in governance and decision-making. The limited representation of women in village tourism committees and cooperatives reflects the persistence of patriarchal hierarchies in community tourism structures. This finding is consistent with Hampton & Jeyacheya (2015) analysis that women's contributions are often relegated to supplementary roles, even when their labor is central to tourism development. The invisibility of women's labor also challenges narratives of empowerment that focus narrowly on economic outcomes without addressing underlying power relations.

Despite these constraints, the findings also underscore women's agency in navigating and reshaping their roles in tourism. Many women created niches in halal culinary production, modest fashion, and wellness services that were both culturally acceptable and commercially valuable. Such strategies exemplify what feminist scholars describe as "negotiated agency," where women balance compliance with cultural norms and the pursuit of personal or economic goals (Mahmood, 2005). In this sense, women in Lombok illustrate that empowerment is not merely about breaking norms but about reinterpreting them to create space for participation.

Subtle forms of resistance also emerged in women's persistence in non-traditional roles, such as tour guiding and spa services, despite initial skepticism. These acts of gradual change reflect Tucker & Boonabaana (2012) findings in Uganda, where women's everyday practices of persistence reshaped community perceptions over time. The Lombok case thus demonstrates how women's agency operates incrementally, challenging patriarchal expectations through lived practice rather than overt confrontation.

The findings contribute to tourism and gender studies in three key ways. First, they extend Scheyvens' (2000) empowerment framework by showing that empowerment must be understood as relational and negotiated, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts. Second, they enrich feminist political economy perspectives by illustrating how global tourism markets intersect with local patriarchal and religious structures to shape women's participation (El Badriati et al., 2022). Third, the study responds to calls for postcolonial feminist approaches (Lewis & Mills, 2003), foregrounding the specificity of Lombok's cultural and religious context rather than imposing universal notions of empowerment.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that tourism policies in Lombok must address both opportunities and constraints. Programs that support women's entrepreneurship in culturally aligned sectors such as halal food production, modest fashion, and traditional crafts can enhance women's economic empowerment while maintaining community acceptance. At the same time, structural barriers to leadership must be addressed. Women's representation in cooperatives, associations, and tourism committees should be strengthened to ensure that their voices influence decision-making. Training programs should not only provide technical skills but also focus on leadership, negotiation, and advocacy. Importantly, community sensitization programs are needed to shift perceptions of women's roles in tourism, reducing stigma and expanding socially acceptable forms of participation.

In sum, this study demonstrates that tourism in Lombok is a double-edged space where empowerment and constraint coexist. Women's experiences reveal tourism as a site of both opportunity and negotiation, shaped by cultural expectations and structural inequalities. By foregrounding women's voices, this study contributes a nuanced understanding of empowerment that recognizes agency, adaptation, and resistance within the specific socio-religious context of Lombok.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored women's participation in Lombok's tourism sector, highlighting how empowerment, constraint, and negotiation intersect in their lived experiences. Findings showed that tourism creates avenues for economic independence, social recognition, and psychological confidence, consistent with empowerment frameworks in tourism literature. At the same time, women's opportunities were tempered by cultural expectations of modesty, domestic responsibilities, and structural inequalities in decision-making. Importantly, the narratives revealed that women are not passive participants but exercise agency by adapting to cultural norms, creating niches in halal-oriented entrepreneurship, and gradually resisting gendered stereotypes.

The study contributes theoretically by extending feminist and empowerment perspectives to a Muslim-majority context, demonstrating that empowerment is a negotiated process shaped by religious and cultural

frameworks. Practically, it highlights the need for tourism policies that both enable women's entrepreneurship in culturally appropriate sectors and address structural barriers that marginalize women's voices in governance.

This research is not without limitations. The sample, while diverse, was limited to twelve informants in selected communities, which may not capture the full diversity of women's experiences across Lombok. Future studies could adopt longitudinal approaches, include comparative analysis with other Indonesian islands, or integrate participatory action research to involve women directly in shaping tourism policy.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Data Availability

The data supporting this study consist of qualitative interview transcripts. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, the full transcripts cannot be made publicly available. De-identified excerpts relevant to the analysis may be shared upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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