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The Topat War Tradition at the Crossroads of Tourism: Digital Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the meaning of the Topat War tradition and the dynamics of its preservation in the context of tourism development and the digital era. A qualitative descriptive approach with a digital ethnography perspective was employed. Data were collected through observation, documentation, and interviews with cultural actors and community stakeholders, and analysed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The study is theoretically supported by cultural mediation theory and the concept of ritual integrity versus performative adaptation in tourism contexts. The findings show that the Topat War tradition embodies symbolic meanings related to spiritual expression, prosperity, and interfaith coexistence within a shared sacred space. In the context of tourism, the tradition is managed through a controlled cultural model in which customary institutions regulate ritual procedures and limit commercialisation to maintain sacred values, while tourism contributes as a complementary driver of local economic activity. In the digital era, the tradition experiences a dual dynamic: digital technologies expand cultural dissemination and educational reach, but also shift participation toward visual and performative engagement, creating risks of cultural commodification and reduced ritual depth. These challenges are addressed through adaptive customary governance, including ethical documentation rules, restrictions on recording in sacred moments, and cultural education for younger generations. The study highlights that the sustainability of the Topat War tradition depends on the synergy between customary institutions, sustainable tourism management, and the ethical use of digital technology in preserving its sacred and cultural integrity.

Keywords: *Topat War; cultural tourism; digital ethnography; cultural preservation; tourism dynamics.*

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Introduction

The Topat War tradition is one of the most important cultural heritages in West Lombok, reflecting social harmony, multiculturalism, and religious relations between the Sasak Muslim community and Wetu Telu adherents in the Lingsar area. This tradition is carried out as a ritual of gratitude for fertility, safety, and harmony in life, which has been passed down from generation to generation and continues to this day (Jayadi et al., 2018). The Topat War



procession is held through a series of ceremonies that include deliberations, entertainment, the main ritual of throwing ketupat at each other as a symbol of prayer and a request for prosperity, and the closing of the event through the Lalang and Beteteh stages (Sarpin, 2017). The cultural values contained in this tradition are not only limited to ritual aspects but also reflect the philosophical principles of the Lombok community regarding the balance between humans, nature, and social life. The inter-ethnic harmony in this ritual strengthens an inclusive cultural identity and encourages social solidarity in a diverse community (Krisna et al., 2021).

The development of tourism in Lombok, particularly among the Sasak indigenous community in Lingsar, has brought about new dynamics that influence cultural identity, social interaction patterns, and the sustainability of local traditions (zaenal abidin m, 2021). Tourism has created opportunities for the local community through cultural promotion activities such as the Topat War tradition and interfaith harmony, which have contributed to the growth of employment opportunities and increased community participation in the tourism sector (Rahmah et al., 2023). However, tourism development also carries significant risks, including the commercialization of sacred symbols, the potential distortion of ritual meanings, and shifts in traditional values that were previously strongly preserved across generations (Bayu Aulia et al., 2024). his situation reflects a tension between cultural preservation and tourism commodification, where sacred traditions may gradually shift from ritual practice to touristic performance.

Digitalisation has significantly transformed the ways in which local traditions are accessed, documented, represented, and interpreted by the public. One major challenge is the simplification of cultural meanings when traditional practices are circulated through social media in fragmented and entertainment-oriented forms (Aslan, 2021) the actual number of HF hospitalizations remains >1 million annually. More than 80% of patients who are hospitalized are initially seen in the emergency department (ED. Such digital representations may influence public perception, particularly among younger generations, where sacred rituals risk being reframed as visual content for entertainment rather than cultural practice. At the same time, digital platforms provide important opportunities for cultural preservation through wider dissemination, systematic documentation, and enhanced public education regarding local heritage (Murtono & Wahyudi, 2025). These developments indicate that digitalisation functions as both a medium of cultural preservation and a potential driver of meaning transformation in traditional practices. Therefore, the interaction between technology and culture requires a balanced approach to ensure that digital engagement strengthens rather than diminishes cultural identity in contemporary society (Fahma et al., 2024; Nisa & Fitriani, 2024).

Previous studies on the Topat War tradition have primarily focused on its social functions, religious values, ritual practices, and contributions to interfaith harmony in local communities (Widodo, 2020; erlan muliadi et al., 2021 the actual number of HF hospitalizations remains >1 million annually. More than 80% of patients who are hospitalized are initially seen in the emergency department (ED; Jayadi 2018; Handayani, 2024; D. P. Ningsih et al., 2023; Ika Nurmiyati Ningsih & Indriyati, 2020; Anggarista & Jaeka, 2024; Spastyono et al., 2023; Zaki, 2021). Anastasya & Evita (2024) further emphasize ritual communication as a key mechanism in fostering tolerance and social cohesion among communities in Lombok. However, these studies remain limited in addressing how the Topat War tradition is reshaped under the pressures of digital modernisation, particularly in relation to how digital media influences public interpretation of its sacred meanings. Existing research has also not sufficiently explored the intersection between cultural heritage, tourism development, and digital technology in shaping contemporary representations of this ritual. This gap

highlights the need for a more integrative analysis of how digital environments contribute to the transformation of meaning and preservation of the Topat War tradition.

Fazira (2020) highlights the complexity of the relationship between social, cultural, and religious forces in contemporary practices of the Topat War, but does not discuss in detail the impact of digital transformation. Marjan & Hariati (2018) note that most studies are still descriptive and do not explain the mechanisms of community adaptation in the face of increasing cultural commercialisation. argues that digital technology offers important opportunities to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the interaction between customary practices, economic dimensions, and technological innovation, thereby providing deeper insight into the preservation of the Topat War tradition amid modernisation and digitalisation.

Sarpin (2017) asserts that existing literature is still dominated by studies on conventional tourism, thereby overlooking how the Topat War tradition has transformed in the era of digitalisation. Other studies emphasize the importance of an integrative approach to cultural preservation that connects cultural, economic, and technological dimensions. Amaludin & Aris (2025) argue that preserving local traditions in the digital era requires strategies that go beyond documentation, including contextual reinterpretation while maintaining sacred values. This integrative perspective highlights how ritual preservation can be achieved through adaptive practices that remain grounded in local wisdom while responding to contemporary challenges.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyse the meaning of the Topat War tradition and the dynamics of its preservation in the context of tourism development and digitalization. The study focuses on how local communities maintain the sacred values of the tradition amid the growth of tourism and technological development. In addition, this research examines the opportunities and challenges faced by the Topat War tradition in preserving cultural identity, social solidarity, and sustainable cultural tourism in modern society. This study is grounded in symbolic anthropology theory (Geertz, 1973) to interpret cultural meaning, and tourism commodification theory (Cohen, 1988; Bruner, 2005) to analyse the transformation of ritual practices under tourism and digital influence, particularly regarding authenticity and cultural representation. This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the cultural meanings and values of the Topat War tradition. (2) How do tourism development and digitalization influence its preservation and transformation.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach combined with a digital ethnography perspective to analyse the meaning of the Topat War tradition and its preservation dynamics in the context of tourism development and digitalisation. The qualitative approach allows an in-depth exploration of cultural practices based on empirical field data without statistical analysis, enabling interpretation of ritual meanings, social values, and cultural transformation (Yuliani, 2018). This approach is strengthened by digital ethnography, which enables the researcher to examine how cultural meanings are constructed, represented, and circulated in both offline ritual contexts and online digital spaces. The analysis is supported by symbolic anthropology theory (Geertz, 1973) to interpret cultural meanings embedded in ritual symbols such as ketupat as representations of prayer and social harmony. In addition, tourism commodification theory (Cohen, 1988; Bruner, 2005) is used to examine how sacred rituals are transformed, represented, and potentially commodified under tourism and digital influences. With its exploratory characteristics, this method is highly relevant for examining complex cultural phenomena, especially when traditions interact with modernisation and digital technology. The Perang Topat tradition, which is rich in symbolic, religious, and social meanings, requires a research method that allows for in-depth interpretation through

direct interaction with cultural actors. Therefore, this study was designed as field research, in which the researcher was physically present in the Lingsar area, West Lombok, which is the centre of the Perang Topat ritual, to obtain authentic data and understand the social situation surrounding the tradition. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and visual and written documentation as suggested by (Gagah Daruhadi, 2024). Interview techniques were used to explore the perspectives of ritual participants, traditional leaders, village officials, and religious leaders on the meaning, process, and changes in the Perang Topat tradition in the context of tourism and the digital era. The in-depth interview approach is essential because it allows researchers to understand how each informant interprets the sacred value of the ritual, the forms of social interaction in the Topat War, and the community responses to tourism development and digitalisation in the preservation of the Topat War tradition. This study involved seven key informants selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and knowledge of the Topat War tradition. The informants consisted of one traditional leader (TL), one religious leader (RL), one village official (VO), one Tourism practitioner (TP), one local community member (LCM), one representative of the younger generation (YG), and one Small-scale trader (ST). These participants were selected because they actively participated in the implementation, preservation, promotion, and economic activities related to the Topat War tradition in Lingsar, West Lombok.

The purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that the collected data represented various perspectives regarding the meaning of the tradition, tourism development, digitalisation, and cultural preservation. The criteria for selecting informants included direct involvement in ritual activities, understanding of cultural values, and experience related to tourism or community participation in the Topat War tradition.

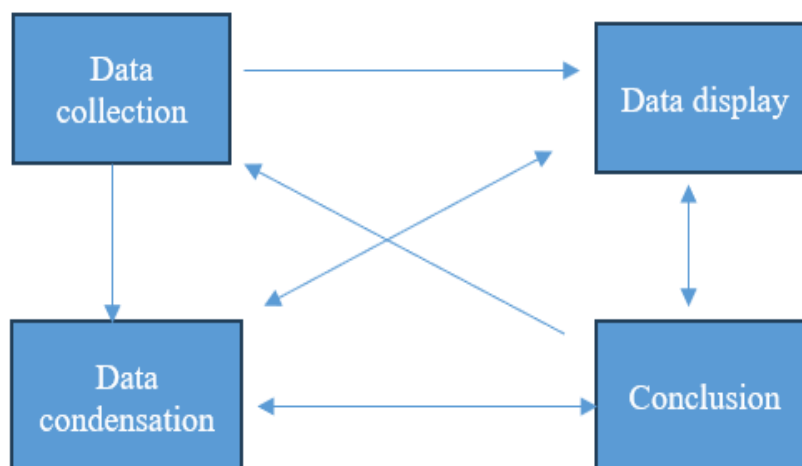


Figure 1. Data Analysis Components (Miles & Huberman) Top of Form

This study utilises Miles and Huberman's data analysis framework, which includes the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Alben ambarita, 2020) implementation, ability to overcome obstacles, and follow up to follow the hybrid learning activities of Elementary School Teacher Professional Education in Occupation in the formation of pedagogical and teacher professional competencies in Elementary School. The research method that used is qualitative phenomenology, with a case study design that is describing and analyzing hybrid learning activities in Professional

Teacher Education in the Position of Elementary School Teachers in 2019. Data analysis refers to the theory of Miles and Huberman (1994). This framework was chosen for its ability to accommodate a cyclical and interactive analysis process, allowing interpretations to be continuously updated as field findings develop. The data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data was organised based on major themes, such as cultural values in the Topat War, the interaction between tradition and tourism, and the influence of digitalisation on perceptions and cultural preservation. The fourth stage was drawing conclusions and verification. Conclusions were drawn based on a synthesis of the analysed field findings, emphasising the relationship between the cultural values of the Topat War and the challenges faced in the era of digital tourism.

In this stage, researchers evaluate whether the traditions of the Topat War have undergone a transformation in meaning, whether digitalisation strengthens or shifts the sacred values of tradition, and how local communities respond to these changes. The conclusion-drawing stage also emphasises the need for an integrative approach that connects cultural, economic, and technological aspects. This forms the basis for the research to formulate adaptive preservation strategies based on local wisdom in response to technological developments. This methodological framework ensures a systematic and iterative analysis of cultural meanings and transformation processes, enabling the study to capture how the Topat War tradition is preserved, adapted, and re-represented within the intersection of tourism and digital culture.

Result and Discussion

The meaning and value of the Topat War tradition

The Topat War tradition in Lingsar, West Lombok, has strong historical roots formed through harmonious interactions between the Sasak and Balinese communities since the 18th century (Anastasya & Evita, 2024). This ritual is not merely ceremonial, but also carries symbolic and philosophical meanings that reflect the local worldview regarding harmony between humans, nature, and the divine. The ketupat used in the ritual functions as a symbolic medium of prayer and hope for prosperity, agricultural fertility, and collective well-being. As expressed by one ritual participant (TL):

“Ketupat is a symbol of prosperity. Its main ingredients, rice and coconut leaves, grow from the soil and thrive with water, which is the source of life. Therefore, the Perang Topat tradition is not just an ordinary activity, but contains the prayers and hopes of the community to always be blessed with prosperity and welfare. This meaning is realised through the procession of throwing ketupat at each other as a symbol of conveying prayers together.”

This explanation shows that ketupat operates as a cultural symbol that mediates collective spiritual expression within the community. The ritual structure begins with prayer sequences at Pura Lingsar for Hindu participants, followed by prayers at Kemaliq by Wetu Telu adherents, before entering the main procession of ketupat throwing. This sequence reflects the coexistence of two belief systems within a shared sacred space.

Community participation from preparation to implementation demonstrates strong values of solidarity, mutual cooperation, and interfaith coexistence. A local community member (LCM) stated:

“All residents, including young people, the elderly, men and women, were present to help prepare for the event, and on the day of the event, the entire community gathered to participate in a series of ceremonies, starting with an opening prayer, followed by entertainment performances such as Gendang Beleg, and continuing with the main activity, namely the Topat War, and finally the closing ceremony, Beteteh.”

This statement indicates that the tradition functions not only as a sacred ritual but also as a collective social practice that strengthens communal cohesion.



Figure 2. Gendang Beleg as the opening event.

Figure 2 shows the Gendang Beleg performance as the opening act before the Perang Topat tradition. It is a traditional Sasak performance that serves as cultural entertainment while preparing the emotional and social atmosphere before the main ritual begins. The dynamic rhythm of Gendang Beleg builds collective excitement among participants and spectators.



Figure 3. Topat War as the main event.

Figure 3 shows the main procession of the Perang Topat tradition. Participants throw ketupat at each other as a symbolic expression of gratitude and prayer for prosperity and safety. The ritual ends with Beteteh, a communal prayer led by religious and traditional leaders as a spiritual closure. The ritual sequence is also supported by cultural performances such as Gendang Beleg, which serves as an opening ceremony to build a festive atmosphere before the main procession. The dynamic rhythm of this traditional performance prepares both participants and spectators emotionally and socially for the ritual engagement. The main procession of the Topat War involves the symbolic throwing of ketupat as an expression of

gratitude for harvest blessings and prayers for safety and prosperity. The ritual concludes with *Beteteh*, a communal prayer led by religious and traditional leaders as a form of spiritual closure, expressing gratitude and hope for continued harmony.

Overall, the Topat War tradition represents a cultural system that integrates historical continuity, symbolic meaning, and social cohesion. The involvement of traditional leaders, religious leaders, and the broader community reinforces its role as both a sacred heritage and a shared cultural identity. Although increasingly visited by tourists, the community continues to position spiritual values as the core foundation of the ritual, ensuring that its meaning remains preserved across generations.

Integration with Local Tourism

The Topat War tradition functions as a cultural attraction while maintaining its sacred integrity within the framework of cultural tourism development in Lingsar, West Lombok. From the perspective of cultural mediation, tourism development often generates a tension between ritual authenticity and performative adaptation, where sacred practices risk being reshaped into consumable cultural performances for visitors (Cohen, 1988; Bruner, 2005). In this context, the tradition is not simply “displayed,” but carefully negotiated to maintain its ritual essence while still being accessible to tourists.

The integration of the Topat War tradition into local tourism is managed through several controlled mechanisms. First, regulation of ritual activities based on customary law to preserve sacred procedures. Second, supervision by traditional leaders and religious authorities to maintain ritual legitimacy. Third, restriction of commercialisation to prevent the reduction of symbolic and spiritual meaning

Informant KD emphasized:

“This tradition has been promoted several times as a cultural attraction and one of the draws for tourists, but it is still emphasised that Prang Topat is a sacred ritual that must be preserved and not merely an art performance. Tourism can develop, but customs must not be displaced; therefore, cultural tourism packages, cultural education, and supporting activities are developed without changing the essence of Prang Topat.”

This statement reflects a controlled cultural tourism model, where tourism is positioned as a supporting instrument rather than the main driver of the ritual transformation. In other words, tourism operates within cultural boundaries established by customary institutions, not outside of them.



Figure 4 illustrates tourist involvement in the ritual procession, which demonstrates, first, cultural openness to external participation. Second, the function of the tradition as cultural education for visitors. Third, the existence of supervised interaction spaces between

locals and tourists to protect ritual sanctity

This statement affirms the commitment to preserving traditional values in the process of tourism development. Efforts to develop tourism based on local wisdom are carried out through the packaging of educational tour packages and supporting activities without changing the substance of the ritual. This strategy demonstrates an orientation towards cultural preservation as the main basis for regional tourism management. Cooperation between the government, traditional leaders, and local communities is an important element in maintaining a balance between preserving tradition and tourism needs (Sahrani Maulinda et al., 2024). The government acts as a facilitator, while control of traditions remains in the hands of the community. Despite challenges, such as tourists who do not understand the meaning of the rituals and thus have the potential to disrupt the sacredness of the procession, the community continues to view the Topat War as a source of cultural pride and economic opportunity. This is reflected in the informant's hope that (TP):

“this tradition remains authentic and sacred, and is also a source of cultural pride for the people of Lingsar, Lombok, because it is rare and unique, which can attract tourists; tourism may advance and develop, but customs and ancestral traditions must remain an equally important priority.”

This statement emphasises that the community continues to uphold the sacredness and noble values of the Topat War tradition. On the other hand, the community is also open to tourists who wish to participate in or witness this tradition. The integration of the Topat War tradition into local tourism also generates an economic dimension that contributes to community livelihoods. The increasing number of visitors during the ritual creates opportunities for micro-entrepreneurs and local traders to sell food, beverages, and cultural products around the ritual site. This indicates that cultural tourism not only functions as a medium of cultural preservation but also as a driver of local economic activity.

However, this economic benefit is carefully regulated to ensure that commercial activities do not interfere with the sacred procession. Local stakeholders, including customary leaders and village authorities, implement informal controls to maintain a balance between economic activity and ritual sanctity. In this sense, the economic aspect is embedded within the tourism system as a complementary effect rather than the primary objective of the tradition.

Digital Challenges and Opportunities

The digital era introduces a dual dynamic in the preservation of the Topat War tradition, where technological development simultaneously strengthens cultural dissemination while also generating risks of meaning distortion. From the perspective of cultural dynamics, digital technology functions as an accelerative force that reshapes how traditions are experienced, represented, and interpreted by society, particularly the younger generation. This dual condition can be identified through two interconnected dimensions:

Challenges of Digitalisation in Ritual Preservation

Digital platforms tend to shift attention from ritual meaning to visual documentation, where participants are increasingly oriented toward content production rather than spiritual engagement. This phenomenon indicates a transformation in participation patterns, from symbolic involvement to performative and media-driven involvement. As highlighted by a traditional leader (TA)

“Digital technology is like a knife; it can be used for good, but it can also hurt. Technology can help introduce the Perang Topat tradition, but it must still be used with caution. Many come only to create content; participation is still high, but the orientation is beginning to shift, and this poses its own challenges. The key is traditional discipline; there are restrictions on when recording is allowed, when it is not, and how to dress ethically in sacred places. If this is maintained, modernisation will not destroy tradition.”

This reflects a growing concern that uncontrolled digital exposure may reduce the depth of cultural understanding, particularly among youth who engage more with recording practices than with the philosophical meaning of the ritual.

Opportunities for Cultural Preservation and Dissemination

At the same time, digitalisation also opens wider access for cultural education and promotion. Social media, video platforms, and digital storytelling provide new channels for introducing the Topat War tradition beyond its geographical boundaries. Informant MS stated:

“If digital technology is utilised, the tradition of Perang Topat can be introduced to the wider community through videos, websites, and social media, so that people who have never visited can learn about this tradition. Social media can be used, but it must be done in a respectful manner so as not to create content that detracts from the meaning of the ritual. The younger generation can promote traditions through social media or create educational content, but they still need to be given an understanding of the sacred values so that they do not simply chase virality.”

This indicates that digital media can function as a strategic tool for cultural transmission, provided that its use remains guided by ethical and cultural boundaries established by the community. The dynamics of the Topat War tradition in the digital era can be identified through several indicators. First, transformation of participation from ritual-based engagement to media-oriented participation. Second, expansion of cultural dissemination through digital platforms. Third, shifting perception among younger generations, and forth, emergence of negotiated cultural governance between tradition and technology.

The dynamics between challenge and opportunity are managed through adaptive customary governance, including, First, enforcement of documentation ethics in sacred areas. Second, restrictions on recording in specific ritual moments. Third, continuous cultural education for the younger generation. Forth, involvement of cultural guides in interpreting ritual meanings. From a theoretical standpoint, this condition aligns with the concept of negotiated cultural transformation, where tradition is not eroded by modernity but continuously reinterpreted within new technological contexts.

Conclusion

The findings show that the Topat War tradition embodies a culturally embedded system that integrates symbolic meaning, interfaith social cohesion, and controlled cultural tourism. Its meaning is rooted in collective spiritual expression through the symbolic use of ketupat as a medium of prayer, prosperity, and harmony, while its social structure reinforces interfaith coexistence and community solidarity. In tourism development, the tradition operates under a controlled cultural model in which customary institutions, religious leaders, and local authorities regulate ritual procedures and limit commercialisation, allowing economic benefits from visitor-driven micro-enterprises to emerge as a complementary rather than dominant outcome. In the digital context, the tradition is shaped by a dual dynamic in which

digital technologies expand cultural dissemination and educational reach, yet simultaneously shift participation toward visual and performative engagement that risks reducing ritual depth. These tensions are managed through adaptive customary governance, including documentation ethics, restrictions on recording in sacred moments, and continuous cultural education for younger generations. Overall, the sustainability of the Topat War tradition depends on the synergy between customary authority, ethical tourism management, and responsible digital use, ensuring that cultural preservation, economic benefit, and technological adaptation remain aligned with its sacred values.

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