

Building Tourism Competitiveness through a Customer-Focused Culture: Evidence from Manggarai Barat, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Manggarai Barat, designated as one of the country's ten priority destinations and home to the UNESCO World Heritage Komodo National Park, was among the regions most severely affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, experiencing sharp declines in tourist arrivals and revenue. This study explores the establishment of a customer-centric culture in local tourism enterprises in Manggarai Barat, with a focus on leadership, organizational structure, employee empowerment, communication, and strategic orientation. Using a qualitative approach, it examines case studies of Komodo Snorkel and Puri Sari Beach Hotel through in-depth interviews with senior management.

The findings highlight the unique challenges of small, community-based businesses operating with limited financial resources while competing in an increasingly globalized market. Unlike larger organizations, their ability to implement customer-centric practices is shaped by leadership expertise, global exposure, and regional networks. Leaders play direct roles in service delivery, adapt strategies to evolving tourist needs, and foster collaborative cultures. Customer feedback, personalized services, and employee motivation are essential in sustaining satisfaction and generating positive word-of-mouth. Overall, the study contributes to human resource and strategic management literature by demonstrating how locally rooted firms can adopt customer-centric practices to strengthen competitiveness and resilience in Indonesia's tourism sector.

Keywords: *Customer-Focused Culture (CFC); Tourism Enterprises; Leadership and Service Quality; Local Business Resilience; Manggarai Barat, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and the creative economy have been recognized as key industries in Indonesia's economic development strategy, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before to the epidemic, tourism was a significant source of foreign funds, generating USD 16.9 billion in 2018. The sector experienced significant decline during the crisis, with sales dropping to around USD 3.3 billion in 2020 as a result of border closures and restrictions on domestic travel. Manggarai Barat, located in East Nusa Tenggara and including Komodo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was one of the most seriously affected areas. Due to a significant decrease in visitor arrivals, local enterprises including hotels, tour operators, and restaurants faced extraordinary challenges in sustaining operations and service excellence.

**Table. 1 Foreign Tourist Visits
(2024-2025)**

Bulan	Total Kunjungan
Jan '24	927.746
Feb '24	1.062.149
Mar '24	1.066.958
Apr '24	1.145.499
Mei '24	1.197.941
Jun '24	1.310.756
Jul '24	1.339.946
Agt '24	1.279.258
Sep '24	1.193.867
Okt '24	1.092.067
Nov '24	1.244.372
Des '24	1.082.544
Jan '25	1.003.237
Feb '25	891.205
Mar '25	841.030

Resource: Badan Pusat Statistik Kementerian Pariwisata, 2025

**Table. 2 Tourist Visits by Country
(2024-2025)**

<u>Kebangsaan</u>	Feb 25*	Mar 24	Mar 25*	Jan– Mar 24	Jan– Mar 25*	Mar 25 vs Feb 25 (%)	Mar 25 vs Mar 24 (%)	Jan–Mar 25 vs Jan–Mar 24 (%)
Malaysia	150.071	77.193	84.882	304.495	386.260	-43,44%	9,96%	26,85%
Singapura	86.122	109.963	97.681	289.681	289.500	13,46%	-11,17%	-0,06%
India	48.242	53.575	53.426	139.292	149.977	11,30%	-0,28%	7,68%
Jepang	30.374	26.821	29.431	72.525	81.788	-3,10%	9,73%	12,77%
Korea Selatan	39.213	24.701	27.091	106.971	113.986	-30,91%	9,69%	6,56%
Tiongkok	87.501	90.283	83.563	279.040	270.347	-4,51%	-7,45%	-3,11%
Arab Saudi	3.982	896	2.355	1.183	15.918	-40,85%	162,83%	1245,56%
Uni Emirat Arab	484	152	389	532	1.113	-19,63%	155,92%	109,21%
Perancis	16.356	18.295	17.683	48.068	48.442	8,11%	-3,34%	0,78%
Jerman	17.473	23.201	21.463	50.678	58.524	22,85%	-7,48%	15,50%
Belanda	12.921	13.862	9.396	39.087	32.282	-27,27%	-32,21%	-17,41%
Inggris	24.937	25.212	21.950	64.099	66.546	-11,99%	-12,93%	3,81%
Rusia	21.578	15.173	13.753	50.283	50.283	-36,24%	-9,36%	0,00%
Amerika Serikat	27.369	35.555	34.008	79.894	90.932	24,29%	-4,35%	13,80%
Kanada	8.852	6.926	8.744	26.904	26.904	-1,22%	26,28%	0,00%
Australia	105.250	123.925	110.943	352.990	361.645	5,41%	-10,48%	2,45%

Resource: Badan Pusat Statistik Kementerian Pariwisata, 2025

The provisional number of foreign tourist visits in March 2025 was 841,030 visits, compared to the same month in 2024 with a total of 1,041,861 visits, which included 182,064 foreign tourists in border areas (MPD) (total without MPD 859,797). So the provisional number of foreign tourist visits excluding MPD in March 2025 decreased by -2.18%. The provisional number of foreign tourist visits in January-March 2025 was 2,735,472 visits, compared to the same period in 2024 with a total of 3,031,756 visits, which included 494,947 foreign tourists in border areas (MPD) (total without MPD 2,536,809). Therefore, the provisional number of foreign tourist visits excluding the MPD for January-March 2025 experienced a growth of 7.83%. By nationality, the provisional number of foreign tourist visits excluding the MPD for March 2025 recorded the highest number of visits across all entry points, Australia with 110,943 visits, Singapore with 97,681 visits, Malaysia with 84,882 visits, China with 82,361 visits, and India with 53,730 visits. The average length of stay of foreign tourists leaving Indonesia in March 2025 was

11.48 nights (provisional figure). The average length of stay for March 2025 was higher than that for March 2024, which was 7.37 nights.

The Indonesian government has prioritized tourism restoration by identifying ten key sites, including Labuan Bajo in Manggarai Barat, managed by specialized tourism authorities. Government policies are important, but the real key to a long-term recovery relies with local tourism businesses and their ability to adapt to new demands, especially by improving service quality and customer satisfaction. In this scenario, a customer-centric culture emerges as a crucial strategic approach. A customer-centric culture prioritizes customer needs and experiences as the fundamental guiding principle of business operations. This perspective requires proactive leadership involvement, human resource management strategies that prioritize training and motivation, organizational frameworks that promote collaboration, and service innovation that aligns with changing tourist expectations.

Prior research in the tourism and hospitality industry emphasizes the essential connection among employee performance, service quality, and consumer satisfaction. Effective recruitment, training, performance assessment, and compensation strategies directly impact service delivery. Johnson et al. (2018) argue that service orientation, reinforced through customer service training, significantly increases employee engagement, consequently improving organizational performance within Jamaica's hospitality sector. Ngacha & Onyango (2017) demonstrate the strong positive correlation between a customer-oriented service culture and customer retention within Kigali, Rwanda hotel industry, highlighting the importance of integrating customer values into organizational practices to foster loyalty and long-term sustainability.

In the Indonesian context, Wibowo & Hariadi (2024) believes that the resilience of sustainable tourism during the COVID-19 epidemic is significantly dependent on the ability of local firms to adapt through innovation and service excellence. Yulianto et al (2025) claimed that the business continuity management (BCM) strategies used by tour operators in Central Java are required for maintaining performance and resilience during crises. These strategies offer useful information about how to align customer-focused strategies with organizational resilience. Companies that integrate customer orientation into their vision, mission, and daily operations accomplish not just increased levels of customer satisfaction but also improved reputational value through positive word-of-mouth.

Labuan Bajo in Manggarai Barat is an important part of Indonesia's national tourist development strategy, classified as one of the country's "super-priority" tourism sites. The recognition highlights the necessity for local businesses to live up to global standards of

service quality, environmental sustainability, and cultural authenticity to meet the expectations of international tourists.

**Table. 3 Labuan Bajo Tourist Visits Table
Period 2022 – April 2025**

No.	Year	Numbers of Visitors	
		Wisman (people)	Wisnus (people)
1.	2022	60.770	109.307
2.	2023	239.149	184.698
3.	2024	229.763	181.586
4.	(Jan Apr) 2025	62.912	17.584

Source; Online Article, 2025

Based on the table above, the number of tourist visits in the last four years, from 2020 to 2025 (January to April), has increased annually, dominated by international and domestic tourists. One of these tourists' destinations is Komodo Island. Labuan Bajo, located in West Manggarai, is attractive to tourists due to its cool and green natural beauty, which can attract tourists to visit.

By integrating customer orientation into leadership practices, employee training, service design, and everyday operations, tourism enterprises in Labuan Bajo can improve visitor satisfaction, encourage return visits, and promote good word-of-mouth that strengthens the destination brand. Furthermore, customer-centric techniques allow enterprises to remain adaptable to changing tourist preferences, also supporting the government overarching objective of establishing Labuan Bajo as a premier tourism destination. Fostering a culture that prioritizes customer experiences is crucial for maintaining the resilience of local businesses and the long-term competitiveness of Indonesia's tourism sector.

Despite the significant increase in research on tourism development in Labuan Bajo in recent years, the majority of studies have focused on service quality, tourist satisfaction, and destination branding, rather than specifically examining the strategic implementation of a customer-centric culture. Wiarti et al (2017) investigated tourists perceptions of Labuan Bajo as a premier destination, highlighting the significance of human resource capability, infrastructure, and safety perception as essential determinants of satisfaction. Similarly Riswanto (2025), through a research of online reviews related to Komodo Island and the surrounding area, proved that value for money and service quality strongly influence tourist satisfaction, elements that are essential to consumer orientation.

Although these studies offer significant insights into elements that correspond with customer-centric principles, none have systematically examined how hospitality companies in Labuan Bajo strategically integrate a customer-centric culture into their daily operations. This gap highlights the necessity for empirical research that investigates the specific methods of leadership, organizational adaptation, and human resource management in integrating customer orientation inside local tourism firms. This study examines Komodo Snorkel and Puri Sari Beach Hotel to demonstrate the implementation of a customer-centric culture as a component of resilience strategies and competitive positioning in Manggarai Barat.

Ultimately, strengthening a customer-centric culture not only improves service quality and customer loyalty but also improves the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector in Manggarai Barat. By implementing customer orientation into strategic planning and daily operations, tourism firms may aid in establishing Indonesia as a globally competitive and resilient tourism destination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The recovery of tourism in Indonesia following the COVID-19 impact relies not just on economic policies but also on the ability of enterprises to adapt their service delivery to align with consumer needs. A customer-focused culture (CFC) prioritizes the customer interests within corporate values and practices to ensure sustained performance. Previous research associates CFC with improved market and financial performance, primarily by improved service quality and customer satisfaction, which later promote repurchase and positive word-of-mouth (Bartley et al., 2007). In service sectors like hospitality and tourism, this relationship is especially crucial as frontline actions directly influence consumer perceptions.

Foundational views emphasise that CFC is not just an attitude mindset, but also an organizational mindset. Culture web highlights reinforcing components, which are narratives, symbols, rituals/routines, and power and control mechanisms, that integrate customer needs into daily operations (Doherty & Stephens, 2020). Bartley et al. (2007) identify six capabilities, which are leadership, listening, analysis/understanding, integration/development, people, and review/improvement, exhibited by high-performing, customer-centric firms. These qualities reflect Colleoni et al. (2021) argument how organizational culture, leadership, and employee engagement influence customer centricity. Madhani (2018) "7C" model (customer insight, competition awareness, collaborative approach, criterion for decision making, compensation strategy, CEO leadership, customer value) complements these frameworks by implementing CFC as a cross-functional program that involves strategy, HR, and market sensing.

Human resource management (HRM) is so essential to CFC. Continuous training and competitive compensation significantly increase service-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors (SO-OCBs) among hotel employees, showing that these HR policies maintain service excellence (Nasurdin et al., 2015). Internal marketing, which views employees as internal customers, supports this alignment: firms must uphold open channels, feedback mechanisms, and value communication to enable employees to translate strategy into customer service interactions (De Bruin et al., 2021; Raeisi et al., 2020). Empirical research in hospitality demonstrate that organizational support increases labor engagement, which mediates the impact of positive resources on service quality, consequently strengthening the HRM–service quality–satisfaction relationship (To et al., 2015).

In Indonesian tourism, a significant amount of research focuses on destination policy, recovery measures, and stakeholder participation (Ferdian et al., 2024; Handayani et al., 2022; Suparjo et al., 2024). Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of studies investigating the organizational-level implementation of CFC in enterprises operating in priority destinations like Manggarai Barat (Labuan Bajo). Current hospitality research about organizational support (Riswanto et al., 2025; Wiarti et al., 2017), frequently remains conceptual and fails to explain the practical implementation of such practices (e.g., the utilization of feedback data to set standards, the intervention of leaders in service routines). This indicates an absence in qualitative, practice-focused research in emerging regions in which companies are locally established and limited in resources.

Addressing this gap, case evidence from Manggarai Barat illustrates several mechanisms: (1) **Leadership** talks about how top leaders should be directly involved in operations to maintain service standards and respond quickly to customer feedback; (2) **Organization** structures and informal cross-department collaboration that speed problem solving; (3) **Listening** systems, from personal greetings and open channels to simple surveys that personalize communication and surface actionable feedback; (4) **Communicating Value**, means how a company consistently transfers its customer-centered values, mission, and service orientation to employees and customers. It ensures that what the organization stands for and the quality it promises are clearly understood, internalized, and practiced.; (5) **People practices (human resources practices)** targeted training, periodic evaluation, team-based rewards that sustain motivation despite limited formalization; and (6) **Strategic** alignment of vision/mission and offerings with evolving traveler expectations (health/safety, environmental friendliness). Collectively, these mechanisms map closely onto the culture-web, 6-capability, and 7C frameworks, while contextualizing them for an Indonesian peripheral destination.

In summary, the literature indicates that CFC improves service quality and competitiveness when strategy, structure, leadership, human resource management, and listening systems are integrated. The situation in Manggarai Barat makes it a good place to build on theory by explaining how to put it into practice within limitation (capital limitation, knowledge limitation, etc).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study methodology to examine the adoption of a CFC among tourism enterprises in Manggarai Barat, Indonesia. Case studies were selected to enable a comprehensive analysis of organizational strategies in their real-world context, specifically highlighting Komodo Snorkel and Puri Sari Beach Hotel as two local companies that have effectively navigated the challenges of tourism recovery.

These two companies were chosen for two principal reasons. Initially, they represent local and independent businesses in Manggarai Barat which operate under significantly different situations compared to larger, capital-intensive corporations. In contrast to larger corporations with significant financial assets, established systems, and extensive industry expertise, Komodo Snorkel and Puri Sari exemplify how small local entities foster a customer-centric culture through adaptive leadership and flexible organizational practices. Their experiences offer useful insights into the development of customer-centric behaviors in resource-limited situations. Secondly, both firms are directed by individuals possessing substantial international expertise and experience, which influences their strategic direction and service ethos. **Servasius Irwan Budi Setiawan**, the founder of Komodo Snorkel, has acquired professional skills in tourism through training in the United States and Australia. **Intan Gemalaputri**, Managing Director of Puri Sari Beach Hotel, possesses worldwide tourism education experience from the Netherlands and Australia. Their international background influence how local organization adaptat global hospitality standards within the unique environment of Manggarai Barat.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with senior managers, facilitating an exploration of themes including leadership engagement, employee empowerment, and communication strategies. Additionally, secondary data were gathered from business reports, marketing materials, and online reviews to validate findings and improve reliability.

The data were thematically classified, employing categories derived deductively from the literature on customer-centric culture (e.g., leadership, training, evaluation, remuneration, internal marketing) and inductively from empirical evidence. This study integrates many

data sources and perspectives to offer a thorough knowledge of how local tourist firms cultivate customer-centric practices that improve competitiveness and resilience in a dynamic destination environment.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

West Manggarai Regency is a regency in the province of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. West Manggarai Regency is the result of the division of Manggarai Regency based on Law No. 8 of 2003. Its territory includes the mainland of the western part of Flores Island and several small islands around it, including Komodo Island, Rinca Island, Seraya Besar Island, Seraya Kecil Island, Bidadari Island and Longos Island. The area of West Manggarai Regency is 9,450 km² consisting of a land area of 2,947.50 km² and a sea area of 7,052.97 km². The administrative area of West Manggarai Regency consists of 12 sub-districts, namely Komodo, Boleng, Sano Nggoang, Mbeliling, Lembor, Welak, South Lembor, Kuwus, Ndosso, Macang Pacar, West Kuwus, and Pacar.

Komodo Snorkel is a travel operator located in West Manggarai, focusing on adventure activities in Komodo National Park, snorkeling adventures, and renowned photographic tours at Padar Island. The organization prioritizes direct interaction between management and clients to guarantee service excellence. The founder Servasius Irwan Budi Setiawan, possesses professional expertise in tourism from the United States and Australia, enhancing the firm's strategic orientation.

Puri Sari Beach Hotel is a seaside lodging in Labuan Bajo, situated near Pantai Pede. The hotel integrates natural landscapes with contemporary amenities, using traditional West Flores architectural features. The hotel has been awarded the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence due to its consistently favorable reviews and is ranked among the top hotels in Flores. The Managing Director Intan Gemalaputri, possesses international tourist education experience from the Netherlands and Australia.

The interviews with Puri Sari Beach Hotel, represented by Managing Director Intan Gemalaputri, and Komodo Snorkel, represented by founder Servasius Irwan Budi Setiawan, provide valuable insights into the implementation of customer-focused culture (CFC) within Manggarai Barat's tourism sector. Their experiences exemplify six fundamental dimensions: **leadership, organization, listening, value communication, personnel, and strategy.**

Leadership

Both managers strive for a practical approach that focuses their companies in customer satisfaction, establishing leadership as the foundation of a customer-centric culture. At Puri Sari Beach Hotel, Intan Gemalaputri not only supervises daily operations but also actively promotes customer orientation by creating specialized division, including Guest Relations. This attempt shows her acknowledgment that customized communication and specialized service channels are essential for addressing the growing diversity of foreign customers expectations. In addition to organizational innovation, she prioritizes ongoing professional growth, utilizing her foreign background in the Netherlands and Australia to integrate global hospitality standards into local practices. Her leadership exemplifies a synthesis of vision and pragmatism, integrating long-term strategic focus with immediate operational agility.

At Komodo Snorkel, Servasius Irwan Budi Setiawan demonstrates leadership visibility and accessibility by personally welcoming tourists at the airport, engaging in service delivery, and overseeing daily safety standard compliance. His active presence during tours facilitates direct connection with consumers, fostering an environment where feedback is quickly heard and service issues are addressed immediately. This personal engagement use as an informal quality control mechanism and develops trust among the leader, personnel, and clients. By assuming the dual role of manager and frontline service provider, he exemplifies the anticipated behaviors for staff, fostering a strong internal culture of accountability and empathy. In all instances, leadership is neither remote nor merely symbolic instead, but it functions as a tangible to make sure customer satisfaction as the primary goal.

Organization

Both companies demonstrate structures that emphasize responsiveness, innovation, and colaboration rather than established procedures. This strategy guarantees efficiency and alignment with customer expectations, although it exposes vulnerabilities which dependence on personal networks and informal processes may jeopardize long-term sustainability if leadership engagement diminishes. Making some processes official could make them more resilient and consistent.

The organizational design of both Puri Sari Beach Hotel and Komodo Snorkel prioritizes flexibility and adaptation over rigid hierarchical systems. Puri Sari's establishment of a dedicated Guest Relations division exemplifies the evolution of organizational structures in response to consumer demands and increasing market expectations. This unit functions as a communication channel with visitors and guarantees that input is accepted

and transformed into tangible improvements to the experience. Furthermore, the hotel provides multilingual personnel into its organizational structure, facilitating seamless communication with international guests and responding to global hospitality standards. These structural alterations illustrate that customer focus is integral to organizational design, rather than regarded as an external supplement.

On the contrary, Komodo Snorkel uses a more streamlined and interconnected organizational structure. The organization fosters strong collaborative relationships with other stakeholder like boat owners, guides, and transportation suppliers rather than depending on a strict hierarchy. These ties are sustained through trust and informal agreements, enabling the organization to stay adaptable in addressing client requests and changing environments. Daily coordination between the leader and external stakeholder serves as a replacement for formal agreement, guaranteeing consistent service quality despite the lack of large bureaucracy.

Listening

Active listening is a vital component in maintaining a customer-centric culture at both Puri Sari Beach Hotel and Komodo Snorkel. At Puri Sari, listening exceeds casual interactions and is formalized through many channels. The hotel use standardized instruments, including customer surveys, daily feedback gathering, and detailed follow-up discussions with personnel, to uncover persistent service issues. These methods enable management to predict issues instead of merely responding to complaints, thereby integrating listening as a proactive strategy for service improvement. Intan Gemalaputri emphasizes that guest feedback is not merely gathered but also converted into implementable solutions, including the creation of new service division and modifications to hospitality standards to align with global standards.

Komodo Snorkel exemplifies a deep listening culture, however in a more casual and individualized fashion. Servasius Irwan Budi Setiawan sustains transparent communication with clients throughout the customer journey, initiating with personal greets at the airport, extending during tours, and completing at departure. This continuous engagement facilitates real-time feedback and quick modifications to service delivery, guaranteeing that issues are addressed immediately. Listening is enhanced through narrative and casual conversations, building intimacy and trust between the external stakeholders and the clients.

In both companies, listening involves not only customer-employee interactions but also internal and external partner. Employees are urged to communicate their observations and experiences, enabling management to bring frontline insights into decision-making.

Puri Sari has formal feedback mechanisms, whereas Komodo Snorkel emphasizes leader presence and interpersonal communication. Both approaches underscore the importance of listening as an incentive for service quality and client loyalty. In both cases, there were no standard ways to handle complaints, which suggests that the organization relied on leadership initiative instead of set rules. This raises concerns regarding the organization's future if the leader's exposure decreases.

Communication Value

At both Puri Sari Beach Hotel and Komodo Snorkel, communicating value is fundamental to how firms integrate customer orientation into their daily operations. At Puri Sari, communication is formalized via established service standards and supported by a professional workforce competent in multiple languages. This guarantees that information on facilities, safety protocols, and sustainability initiatives is communicated properly and effectively to a wide variety of international guests. Intan Gemalaputri emphasizes the significance of transparency in customer interactions: any obstacles or service restrictions are disclosed in advance, so mitigating the danger of unmet expectations. Communication is more than just making purchases; it also involves building relationships that convey an image of dependability, efficiency, and care, which supports the hotel's brand identity.

At Komodo Snorkel, the language of value communication is more informal yet equally impactful. Servasius Irwan Budi Setiawan implements daily briefings, destination narratives, and safety protocols to establish expectations and communicate the company's dedication to client experience. He highlights the distinctive stories of Komodo National Park through human interactions, so presenting the service as a true cultural and environmental experience rather than merely a tour. By directly explaining weather conditions, tour modifications, or safety protocols, he builds trust and exhibits accountability.

In both businesses, communication rituals, whether formal or informal, facilitate the translation of strategy into service behavior. However, the need on interpersonal communication, especially through leader engagement, indicates that value communication remains leader-centric rather than systematically embedded. This shows that the current model has two sides: a strong personal approach builds trust with customers, but for it to last, these activities need to be built into formal organization frameworks.

People

Human resources are both a vital asset and an ongoing challenge in building a customer-centric culture. The staff's competency and communication skills at Puri Sari Beach Hotel are recognized as requiring ongoing improvement. To address this, Intan Gemalaputri allocates resources to consistent training sessions, mentorship, and exposure programs that enable workers to perceive hotel services from the customer's perspective. This empathy-building practice promotes service awareness and fosters a greater sense of responsibility among personnel. The hotel prioritizes staff integration through the inclusion of enjoyable events and informal meetings, which sustain morale and reinforce collective service principles.

At Komodo Snorkel, hiring and firing is influenced by the characteristics of tour operations, which depend significantly on guides, boat crews, and drivers. Pak Ervis emphasizes the significance of choosing guides with robust storytelling and communication skills, since these competencies directly affect the quality of client experiences. Crew members are incentivized with little yet significant rewards such as gifts, tobacco, or recreational activities during trips, demonstrating a realistic strategy for human resource engagement. Although informal, these methods boost loyalty and sustain motivation among temporary or external personnel who may not be limited by formal contracts.

Employees are seen as the primary manifestations of organizational ideals. Their engagements with customers are the key element that determines satisfaction and loyalty. However, the dependence on informal training and incentive systems exposes a weakness: in the absence of organized frameworks for recruiting, performance assessment, and career advancement, maintaining constant service excellence may become challenging over time. Integrating these approaches into structured human resource management frameworks could enhance organizations' capacity to sustain a resilient and engaged staff.

Strategy

Both Puri Sari Beach Hotel and Komodo Snorkel prioritize customer satisfaction as a core element of their competitive strategy, while also adapting to changing market conditions. Puri Sari's policy is expressly connected with international sustainability standards, such as Travelife, indicating the hotel's recognition of evolving tastes among European and other international tourists who prioritize ecologically responsible activities. This connection not only raises the hotel's global brand but also establishes market credibility in an age where sustainability has become increasingly related to service excellence.

furthermore, the hotel invests in the ongoing enhancement of service systems, such as the creation of specialized positions, the implementation of digital booking platforms, and the addition of multilingual staff, ensuring that operational innovations directly improve the customer experience.

Komodo Snorkel uses a plan based on being flexible and building relationships based on trust. The company relies so much on word-of-mouth advertising, it stresses how important it is to regularly go above and beyond what customers expect to build a good reputation. Strategic control is maintained by closely watching the quality of sources like boat owners, guides, and transportation companies.

This pragmatic strategy guarantees that external collaborators keep to the company's service values, even in the absence of formal agreements. Simultaneously, Komodo Snorkel utilizes narrative and customized service as unique value propositions that differentiate the company from its competitors in Labuan Bajo.

Both companies prioritize adaptability, continuous evaluation, and the integration of consumer focus into core business strategy. Nonetheless, their methodologies are significantly reliant on leadership, depending more on human supervision and informal processes than on standardized, institutionally integrated procedures. This leader-centric strategy paradigm guarantees short-term flexibility and responsiveness. Nevertheless, long-term resilience demands transforming of these activities into formalized frameworks capable of maintaining competitiveness independent of individual leadership.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings indicate that local and independent tourism organization in Manggarai Barat are trying to integrate a customer-centric culture as a fundamental aspect of their competitiveness, while operating with limited financial resources. In contrast to larger organizations that depend on structured procedures, technology, and significant capital investment, small firms largely utilize the leadership knowledge, professional expertise, and personal experiences of their founders. Leaders like Intan Gemalaputri and Servasius Irwan Budi Setiawan convert their direct customer interactions, informal staff collaborations, and flexible organizational techniques into alternatives for expensive institutional frameworks.

This method demonstrates that leadership presence and cumulative experience can be vital advantages in fostering service orientation. Customized communication, active oversight, and ongoing adjustment enable these enterprises to maintain service quality

and client satisfaction throughout financial limitations. This model highlights the vulnerabilities of leader-driven practices: the lack of standardized frameworks could limit scalability and expose organizations to dangers if leadership weakens.

The story of Puri Sari and Komodo Snorkel illustrates how small-scale, locally anchored firms pragmatically implement customer-centric concepts, transforming leadership insights into operational resilience. Their experiences highlight the advantages and drawbacks of prioritizing human capital over financial capital, indicating that future development should integrate leader-driven methods with incremental institutionalization to guarantee long-term sustainability.

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