

Contribution of the Digitisation of Cultural Tourism to the Resilience of Local Communities in the Face of Global Crises: An Integrative Review

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Abstract: The use of digital technologies offers communities opportunities to strengthen their economic and social resilience, preserve their cultural heritage, and sustain tourism activity in times of crisis. However, its adoption remains uneven, limiting the development of community-based tourism and influencing visitor behaviour. This paper critically analyses how the digitalisation of cultural tourism contributes to the resilience of local communities in the face of pandemics, natural disasters, and social conflicts. An integrative literature review was conducted through an exhaustive search of the Scopus databases; high-impact articles (Q1 and Q2) published in the last five years and available in English were prioritised. The information was organised into an analytical matrix and synthesised by theme to identify convergences, gaps and practical guidelines. The findings indicate that geographic information systems, digital platforms, and immersive content (augmented reality and 360-degree video) are driving the transformation of cultural destinations. These tools improve heritage management and protection, guide data-driven conservation and adaptation strategies, and support authentic narratives that reinforce local identity. They also democratise access to culture, strengthen community empowerment and diversify income through digital channels, raising visibility in the recovery. Digital communication influences the image of the destination and travel decisions, while spatial planning allows risks to be anticipated and interventions to be prioritised. Limitations remain: connectivity and capacity gaps, uncertain financial sustainability and low visitor awareness. Policies and training are needed that integrate digital inclusion, collaborative governance, and indicators of authenticity and accessibility. In conclusion, the digitalisation of cultural tourism acts as a catalyst for a more resilient, sustainable and participatory tourism model, in line with SDG 11. Its consolidation requires investment in a technological base that enables secure connection and data exchange between different systems using open standards, content co-created with communities, and rigorous evaluation of results, with special attention to rural destinations and the effectiveness of emerging technologies.

Keywords: Digital Heritage, Local Empowerment, Post-crisis Recovery, Digital Inclusion and Accessibility, Digital Cultural Content.

1. Introduction

Digitalisation has become a key instrument for strengthening the resilience of local communities in the face of public health emergencies, natural disasters, and economic crises. Beyond preserving social cohesion, this process enables the continuity of productive activities and supports community self-organisation, even under conditions of restricted mobility (Li et al., 2024). In this regard, the articulation between digitalisation and local self-organisation emerges as a crucial mechanism for facilitating adaptation to crisis situations, promoting income generation, and safeguarding cultural identity (Xiang et al., 2024; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2025). Within the tourism sector, this transformation is particularly strategic, as it allows small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop collaborative and adaptive capacities in an increasingly competitive environment (Hernández and Oskam, 2025).

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are redefining the ways in which rural and urban communities construct, articulate, and disseminate their cultural narratives (Agboola et al., 2023; Del Vecchio et al., 2025). These tools facilitate more autonomous and efficient management of local resources, while also enabling direct connections with potential visitors, thereby strengthening communities' adaptive capacity in the face of the challenges posed by a dynamic and uncertain global context (Shen et al., 2022). Moreover, digitalisation fosters collaborative governance among multiple actors, reinforcing the resilience of cultural tourism at the local level (Silva and Raposo, 2023).

In this study, the resilience of local communities is understood as the collective capacity to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from external shocks while maintaining social cohesion, cultural identity, and economic

functionality. Within the context of cultural tourism, community resilience goes beyond short-term economic recovery and involves the preservation of cultural practices, the strengthening of participatory governance, and the mobilisation of endogenous resources through collaborative processes (Beckley et al., 2008; Gabriel-Campos et al., 2021; Basyar et al., 2025). This perspective conceives resilience as a dynamic and multidimensional process rooted in social capital, local knowledge, and institutional coordination, particularly relevant for territories exposed to recurrent crises such as pandemics, climate-related events, or economic disruptions (Brown, 2017; Cartier and Taylor, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified pre-existing structural crises within the tourism sector, generating an unprecedented contraction in global supply and demand (Guardia et al., 2022). While the lack of community participation following disasters limits the effectiveness of recovery processes and preparedness for future crises (Nian, 2019), organised communities are better positioned to strengthen their resilience in adverse contexts such as pandemics and climate change (Gabriel-Campos et al., 2021). Consequently, the limited integration of digital solutions into cultural tourism and community resilience strategies represents a central challenge, as it constrains the potential of community-based tourism and shapes visitor behaviour. This situation highlights the need to rethink tourism models towards more resilient, inclusive, and adaptive approaches (Menezes et al., 2023; Brown, 2017).

From a practical perspective, this research is particularly valuable for cultural stakeholders and tourism entrepreneurs, as it provides evidence and analytical insights to support the design of digitalisation strategies that strengthen community resilience, promote sustainable tourism, and ensure economic and cultural continuity during periods of crisis. The transition towards a knowledge-based economy centred on heritage has demonstrated that the integration of digital tools can enhance adaptive capacity, facilitate access to tourism markets, and strengthen local heritage management (Shen et al., 2022). Furthermore, this study is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 11, insofar as the digitalisation of cultural tourism contributes to heritage preservation and reinforces community resilience by fostering innovation, diversifying tourism offerings, and encouraging local participation, thereby strengthening social cohesion and promoting the development of more sustainable communities (Organización Mundial del Turismo, 2021; Huang et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop, the general research problem guiding this study is as follows: How does the digitalisation of cultural tourism contribute to strengthening the resilience of local communities in the face of global crises? From this overarching question, four secondary research questions are derived: (i) What is meant by the digitalisation of cultural tourism within the framework of community strengthening? (ii) What types of digital cultural content are most effective in attracting tourist interest during periods of crisis? (iii) What empirical evidence demonstrates that the digitalisation of cultural tourism has strengthened economic, social, or cultural resilience in local communities facing global crises? and (iv) How are digital mechanisms being applied within cultural tourism, and what functions do they fulfil in responding to global crises?

The general objective of this study is to analyse the contribution of cultural tourism digitalisation to strengthening the resilience of local communities in the face of global crises. Based on this central aim, four specific objectives are proposed: (1) to define the concept of cultural tourism digitalisation in relation to community strengthening under global crisis conditions; (2) to identify the types of digital cultural content that are most effective in capturing tourist interest in crisis contexts; (3) to determine the economic, social, and cultural impacts of cultural tourism digitalisation on local communities during such crises; and (4) to establish the digital strategies that enhance community resilience through cultural tourism in contexts of uncertainty.

2. Methods

This study was conducted through an integrative literature review, with the aim of providing a comprehensive analysis of the role of cultural tourism digitalisation in strengthening community resilience in contexts of global crises (Snyder, 2019). This approach enabled the collection, comparison, and synthesis of findings from recent empirical and theoretical studies, ensuring a broad and up-to-date understanding of the phenomenon. The integrative review was particularly appropriate for this research, as it allowed for the simultaneous examination of multiple types of evidence, including case studies, qualitative research, quantitative approaches, and conceptual models related to technology, culture, and resilience.

The bibliographic search was carried out between March and June 2025 using a systematic strategy applied to the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Information retrieval was based on combinations of English-language

keywords related to digitalisation, cultural tourism, community resilience, digital technologies, and crisis management. A temporal range covering the period from 2020 to 2025 was established to ensure the relevance of the selected studies, as this timeframe encompasses major technological and social transformations associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and other recent crises that have significantly affected the tourism sector. The article selection followed a transparent sequential process: duplicate records were removed, titles and abstracts were screened for thematic relevance, and full texts were assessed for conceptual alignment and methodological soundness. While priority was given to high-impact journals (Q1 and Q2), studies from other quartiles were included when they provided relevant theoretical or contextual contributions, ensuring analytical coherence and transparency without imposing rigid exclusion criteria.

The selection of studies followed inclusion criteria focused on thematic relevance, full-text availability, methodological rigour, and alignment with the research objectives. Only indexed articles examining digitalisation processes applied to cultural tourism, community-based capacity-building strategies, or resilience mechanisms in response to crises were considered. Exclusion criteria comprised non-empirical studies without direct applicability to the research focus, institutional reports, non-indexed publications, and works that employed digital tools but were not explicitly connected to community resilience or cultural tourism.

As a result of the selection process, a total of 28 documents were included in the final analysis. The information was subsequently organised using an analytical matrix specifically designed for this study. This matrix enabled the classification of each article according to its analytical approach, research methodology, types of digital technologies employed, level of community participation, implications for cultural heritage management, and contributions to resilience. The use of this matrix facilitated the identification of common patterns, divergences across approaches, thematic gaps, and opportunities for the development of digital strategies oriented towards community strengthening.

Finally, the data were analysed comparatively in order to construct thematic categories that captured the complexity of the phenomenon under study. This process involved identifying emerging trends, assessing the impact of digital technologies across different contexts, and linking the findings to the stated research objectives. The integrative review thus supported the development of a critical synthesis that underpins the results presented in the following section, ensuring coherence between the research objectives and the scientific evidence reviewed.

From a methodological standpoint, the integrative review prioritised analytical relevance over mechanical exclusion criteria. Although high-impact journals (Q1 and Q2) were prioritised to ensure academic quality, the selection process remained flexible in order to include indexed studies from other quartiles when they provided substantial theoretical, empirical, or contextual contributions aligned with the objectives of this review. This decision is consistent with the interpretative nature of integrative literature reviews, which seek to synthesise diverse forms of evidence rather than apply rigid filtering procedures, thereby strengthening analytical depth, transparency, and coherence (Snyder, 2019).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Digitalisation of Cultural Tourism Within the Framework of Community Strengthening

The digitalisation of cultural tourism involves the use of technological tools to preserve and disseminate heritage, facilitate access to cultural resources, and reinforce local identity. At the same time, it promotes community participation and enhances the visitor experience through digital solutions that enable more sustainable and inclusive tourism management (Yan et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025; Huerta-Tantalean et al., 2024). In rural and traditional contexts, such as Chinese villages, digitalisation has been shown to stimulate cultural creativity and foster greater economic and social resilience following crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Chen and Li, 2022).

This digital transformation allows communities to improve resource management, increase income generation, and promote sustainable models adapted to local territorial characteristics through tools such as digital marketing, augmented reality, and data analytics. These mechanisms strengthen destination visibility and enrich visitor experiences (Zhang et al., 2025). In crisis situations, digital technologies also support heritage conservation and reinforce a sense of cultural continuity, as evidenced in the historic district of Yazd, Iran, where resilience frameworks supported by digital tools were successfully implemented (Salehi et al., 2025).

3.2 Digital Cultural Content Strategies to Attract Tourists During Times of Crisis

During periods of crisis, the most effective forms of digital cultural content for attracting tourist interest include virtual tours and 360-degree videos, as these tools allow users to explore destinations without physical presence, generating immersive experiences that sustain engagement under conditions of uncertainty (Shen et al., 2022; Fan et al., 2022). Short-form videos shared through social media platforms also play an important role in maintaining audience attention (Chen and Li, 2022), while the digitalisation of intangible heritage, such as dances, rituals, and oral narratives, reinforces the cultural identity of destinations (Yan et al., 2025).

The impact of this content is significantly enhanced when it conveys authenticity. Digital materials that portray everyday practices, traditions, and lived experiences tend to generate emotional connections with potential visitors and positively influence destination choice (Hussain et al., 2024; Ruiz-Palacios et al., 2024). In this context, digital platforms are essential for ensuring that such content reaches relevant audiences, as demonstrated in Javanrood, Iran, which has managed to maintain international visibility through the strategic use of social media, websites, and online booking systems (Komasi et al., 2025). Accordingly, digitalisation facilitates a sustainable integration of culture and tourism, acting as a key instrument for economic recovery following global crises (Zhao et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, while artificial intelligence enables the delivery of more personalised and efficient experiences, it may also exacerbate digital divides, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises with limited resources (Muhammad et al., 2025). Moreover, despite the perceived convenience of digitalisation, tourist awareness of its implications for sustainability remains limited. These tools can only achieve their full potential when combined with active participation from both communities and visitors (Pinto et al., 2025).

3.3 Impact of Cultural Tourism Digitalisation on Community Resilience in the Face of Global Crises

Community empowerment through digitalisation is reflected in initiatives such as Cultural Gems, a platform that employs Linked Open Data to map tangible and intangible cultural heritage across European cities (Consoli et al., 2023). This tool not only facilitates democratic access to culture, but also enables communities to actively participate in the identification, preservation, and dissemination of their cultural heritage (Sarabia et al., 2023). At the same time, it strengthens civic engagement and promotes social inclusion by making less-recognised cultural expressions visible, highlighting the potential of ICTs to enhance communities through their identities (Agboola et al., 2023; Olavarría-Benavides et al., 2021; Gocer et al., 2024).

In the post-pandemic context, many rural communities have found digital technologies to be an effective pathway towards strengthening development and stability (Consoli et al., 2023). In traditional villages in China, for example, the adoption of digital tools to promote and disseminate cultural heritage has contributed to tourism recovery and local economic revitalisation (Lee et al., 2024). This transformation has not only reinforced residents' connections to their cultural identity but has also created new opportunities to address future challenges through the diversification of productive activities and the adoption of more sustainable development pathways (Chen and Li, 2022).

Empirical evidence further demonstrates that involving local communities in the management and delivery of authentic tourism experiences enhances their capacity to recover from social and economic adversity (Beckley et al., 2008). This model supports cultural and environmental conservation while empowering communities and promoting more equitable and sustainable development outcomes (Cartier et al., 2020). The resilience of community-based tourism is thus expressed in its ability to adapt to changing conditions, leverage endogenous resources, and build strong relationships with visitors, ensuring sustainable growth and preservation under conditions of global uncertainty (Sarabia et al., 2023).

In parallel, the integration of crisis management and community response approaches is essential for strengthening sustainability, as recovery strategies must address social, environmental, and economic dimensions simultaneously (Cartier et al., 2020). Effective management supported by transparent communication and participatory leadership reinforces community resilience and facilitates recovery following disasters (Filimonau and De Coteau, 2019). Collectively, these actions contribute to ensuring tourism continuity and sustainable community recovery during crisis scenarios.

3.4 Application of Digital Mechanisms in Cultural Tourism and Their Role in Responding to Global Crises

The resilience of cultural tourism destinations in the face of crises such as climate change requires proactive spatial planning supported by digital tools (Papageorgiou, 2025). The integration of technologies such as geographic information systems, climate scenario simulations, and spatial analytics enables tourism managers to anticipate potential impacts and make data-driven decisions (Santos-Lacueva et al., 2024). These tools facilitate the identification of vulnerable areas and support the design of land-use strategies that protect cultural and natural resources (Scott and Gössling, 2022).

Digital communication also plays a critical role in shaping destination perceptions during crisis periods and is widely recognised for its influence on trust and destination image (Chemli et al., 2020). Analyses of resilience-oriented communication strategies indicate that effective information management can directly influence tourist decisions and behaviour (Avraham, 2020). Consequently, well-planned digital communication is essential for maintaining destination reputation and supporting recovery in critical moments (Martínez et al., 2024). Digital platforms further enable the construction of authentic narratives that reinforce cultural identity and promote more responsible, conscious, and participatory tourism practices (Vecco et al., 2022). In this context, the digitalisation of cultural tourism contributes not only to heritage conservation, but also to the economic and social recovery of communities (Milano et al., 2024).

In post-crisis contexts, such as those experienced following the pandemic, the resilience of cultural tourism depends on collaboration among local actors and the use of digital mechanisms to facilitate communication, planning, and cultural promotion (Martínez et al., 2024). Technologies such as participatory online mapping, mobile applications for cultural storytelling, and virtual engagement platforms support the development of collaborative and resilient cultural tourism models that respond to community needs and strengthen local capacities to cope with global disruptions (Mandić et al., 2024; Komasi et al., 2025).

Table 1 summarises the cultural, technological, community-based, socio-economic, and crisis-management dimensions identified in the reviewed studies, providing a comparative overview of how cultural tourism digitalisation contributes to strengthening community resilience under conditions of uncertainty.

Table 1: Dimensions of digitalisation and community resilience identified in the integrative review

Category	Aspect 1	Aspect 2
Cultural-pedagogical	Preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage.	Strengthening of local identity and cultural continuity.
Technological	Use of immersive tools (virtual reality, 360-degree video, augmented reality).	Application of digital platforms for promotion, booking, and content co-creation.
Community participation	Empowerment through collaborative narratives and digital inclusion.	Strengthening governance through participatory digital platforms.
Socio-economic impact	Income diversification through digital tourism channels.	Reinforcement of local economies and visibility in post-crisis recovery processes.
Crisis management	Data-driven resilience strategies (GIS, artificial intelligence, planning).	Rapid adaptation of communication and tourism services during emergencies.

4. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to analyse how the digitalisation of cultural tourism contributes to strengthening the resilience of local communities in the face of global crises. The findings indicate that the integration of digital technologies not only enables the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage, the continuity of economic activities under conditions of uncertainty, and the reinforcement of community cohesion through participatory processes, but also incorporates tools that are particularly effective when they combine

authenticity, immersion, and accessibility. Virtual tours, 360-degree videos, collaborative platforms, and digital narratives help sustain visitor interest even under mobility restrictions, strengthen emotional connections with destinations, diversify income sources, and promote participatory governance. At the same time, these mechanisms consolidate cultural identity and enhance territorial management through emerging technologies, thereby supporting the development of more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive tourism models.

The theoretical implications of this review highlight the interaction between technology, sustainability, collaborative governance, and community resilience, expanding current understanding of how territories can respond to crises through digital solutions. From a practical standpoint, the results provide concrete guidance for cultural managers, local authorities, and tourism entrepreneurs by informing the design of digital strategies that foster community participation, economic recovery, and heritage preservation through innovative and adaptive approaches.

Finally, this study acknowledges certain limitations, particularly the methodological heterogeneity of the reviewed studies and the limited availability of empirical evidence from rural areas with constrained digital infrastructure. Future research could further examine the digital divide, assess the effectiveness of emerging technologies in community-based contexts, and identify digital resilience indicators applicable across different territories. Taken together, the findings support the projection of a more resilient and equitable cultural tourism model, in which digitalisation functions as a key driver of community transformation and development in response to global challenges.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas (UPC) and the Research Department for their institutional and financial support in enabling them to participate in the conference and publish this scientific article.

Ethics Declaration

This study is based on secondary data from published academic literature and did not require ethical approval.

AI Declaration

Artificial intelligence tools were used only to support language editing. The authors are fully responsible for the content of this paper.

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