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Why Business Model Replication Fails: Evidence from Greenhouse-Based Agritourism

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A B S T R A C T

Business model replication is widely recognized as an effective strategy for accelerating business growth. However, organizations adopting similar business models often achieve markedly different performance outcomes. This study aims to explain why business model replication fails to produce comparable competitive performance by examining the strategic role of the destination ecosystem in greenhouse-based agritourism. A comparative qualitative case study was conducted at two greenhouse-based fruit-picking destinations in East Java, Indonesia. Although both businesses adopted similar business concepts, cultivation practices, and managerial approaches under the guidance of the same mentor, they demonstrated substantially different business performance.

Data were collected through field observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, complemented by cross-case comparison. The findings reveal that business model replication alone is insufficient to achieve competitive success. Instead, differences in business performance are primarily explained by the destination ecosystem in which the businesses operate. Agritourism integrated with complementary attractions benefits from visitor spillover, broader tourism experiences, higher purchasing opportunities, and repeat visitation, whereas standalone agritourism relies almost entirely on intentionally planned visits.

These findings suggest that the destination ecosystem functions as a strategic context that determines how organizational capabilities are translated into competitive performance. This study contributes to strategic management by demonstrating that competitive advantage depends not only on internal business capabilities but also on the strategic embeddedness of firms within interconnected tourism ecosystems.

INTRODUCTION

Agritourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors within sustainable tourism by integrating agricultural production, tourism experiences, and rural economic development. Beyond generating additional income for farmers, agritourism contributes to environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community empowerment, making it an important strategy for achieving sustainable development. Recent bibliometric studies indicate a substantial increase in agritourism research over the past two decades, with sustainability becoming one of the dominant research themes [1]. Nevertheless, existing studies remain heavily concentrated on the economic contribution, tourist motivation, service quality, and environmental sustainability dimensions, while strategic factors determining long-term competitiveness receive comparatively less attention.

Beyond generating additional income for farmers, agritourism is increasingly recognized as a strategic approach to strengthening rural economies, creating employment opportunities, and promoting sustainable tourism. Recent bibliometric evidence

also indicates that research on agritourism has expanded considerably during the post-pandemic period. Indonesia is currently the second most frequently studied country in agritourism research after the United States, with publication trends increasing significantly between 2020 and 2025 [2]. Nevertheless, existing studies continue to identify persistent challenges, including limited stakeholder collaboration, inadequate destination management, weak promotional strategies, and insufficient integration among tourism actors.

The growing importance of agritourism is also reflected in its market performance. The global agritourism market was valued at approximately USD 9.18 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach USD 28.38 billion by 2034, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.36% [3]. This rapid expansion reinforces previous findings that agritourism has evolved beyond a recreational activity into a strategic instrument for rural development, agricultural diversification, and sustainable regional competitiveness [1], [4], [5].

The growing popularity of agritourism has encouraged researchers to investigate various determinants of destination performance. Previous studies have predominantly emphasized product quality, service quality, visitor satisfaction, destination image, marketing communication, and tourists' behavioral intentions as the primary drivers of agritourism competitiveness. These studies have generated valuable insights into how agritourism operators improve customer experiences and increase visitor loyalty. However, such perspectives largely examine competitiveness from the perspective of individual businesses rather than considering the broader strategic environment in which agritourism destinations operate. [6], [7], [8], [9].

From a strategic management perspective, business performance is rarely determined by internal resources alone. Competitive advantage is often influenced by the interaction between firms and the surrounding ecosystem, including complementary attractions, supporting industries, accessibility, and stakeholder networks. Tourism destinations function as interconnected systems in which visitors experience multiple attractions during a single trip. Consequently, the presence of complementary destinations may generate visitor spillover, extend tourists' length of stay, increase purchasing opportunities, and stimulate repeat visitation. Although destination competitiveness has been discussed extensively in tourism literature, empirical evidence explaining how the surrounding destination ecosystem shapes the performance of agritourism businesses remains limited, particularly in the context of greenhouse-based agritourism [10], [11], [12], [13].

This gap becomes more evident through observations conducted in two agritourism destinations with similar core products but contrasting business performance. The first destination, operating as a standalone fruit-picking attraction, attracted only approximately ten visitors over a two-day observation period, with most visitors purchasing only one or two melons. In contrast, another greenhouse-based fruit-picking destination located adjacent to established tourist attractions sold approximately 1,500 melons within the same period. These observations are consistent with previous studies suggesting that agritourism performance is influenced not only by the attractiveness of the core product but also by destination management, accessibility, supporting resources, and visitors' post-visit behavioral responses such as repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth [14]. Interestingly, a substantial proportion of visitors returned on the following day accompanied by family members or friends, indicating the emergence of repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth. These contrasting outcomes suggest that product similarity alone cannot adequately explain differences in business performance. Instead, the strategic configuration of the surrounding tourism environment appears to play a decisive role.

Despite increasing attention to agritourism competitiveness, previous studies have largely overlooked the concept of destination ecosystem as a strategic determinant of business performance. Existing research tends to evaluate destinations independently by emphasizing internal managerial capabilities, while giving limited attention to how spatial proximity to complementary attractions creates synergistic value that enhances visitor flows and market performance. Consequently, the strategic implications of co-location within tourism ecosystems remain insufficiently explored in agritourism literature [13], [15], [16], [17], [18].

This study addresses the above research gap by examining how destination ecosystem influences the competitiveness of greenhouse-based agritourism through a comparative qualitative case study. Rather than focusing solely on product attributes or service quality, this research positions destination ecosystem as a strategic asset capable of generating visitor spillover, repeat visitation, and sustainable competitive advantage. The study contributes to the strategic management literature by extending discussions on destination competitiveness from an ecosystem perspective and offers practical insights for policymakers and agritourism operators in designing sustainable rural tourism development strategies.

METHODS

This study adopted a comparative qualitative case study to examine how the destination ecosystem influences the performance of greenhouse-based agritourism businesses. The research was conducted at two fruit-picking destinations in Kediri East Java, Indonesia, which offer similar tourism products but operate under different destination settings. The first case is situated within an integrated tourism area surrounded by complementary attractions, whereas the second operates as a standalone agritourism destination. This design enabled an in-depth comparison of the strategic factors contributing to differences in business performance beyond product characteristics.

Data were collected through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Observations focused on visitor flow, purchasing behavior, accessibility, and the surrounding tourism environment, while interviews with destination managers explored business strategies, operational conditions, and perceived drivers of competitiveness. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of [19], comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. A cross-case analysis was then conducted to identify recurring patterns and strategic differences between the two destinations. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing evidence obtained from observations, interviews, and supporting documents.



Figure 1. Research Design and Analytical Procedure

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

To address the research objective, this study conducted a cross-case comparison between two greenhouse-based agritourism destinations that shared comparable business characteristics but exhibited substantially different business performance. The comparative design enabled the identification of contextual factors beyond internal organizational capabilities that may explain why similar business models produce contrasting competitive outcomes. The comparison focused on business characteristics, destination context, visitor behavior, and business performance based on observations and semi-structured interviews with the managers of both agritourism destinations.

As presented in Table 1, the two agritourism businesses demonstrated considerable similarities in their business models, including the greenhouse-based fruit-picking concept, melon cultivation, operational practices, and technical guidance received from the same agricultural mentor. These similarities establish that both cases are sufficiently comparable for cross-case analysis while highlighting several important differences in destination context and business performance. The empirical evidence presented in Tables 1 forms the basis for identifying the strategic factors that explain the contrasting competitive outcomes observed in this study.

Table 1. Empirical Evidence of Comparable Business Models but Contrasting Competitive Performance

No	Aspect	Integrated Agritourism (PINKA)	Standalone Agritourism	Interpretation
1	Business model	Comparable	Comparable	Similar internal business model
2	Mentor	Same mentor	Same mentor	Similar managerial knowledge
3	Product	Melon greenhouse	Melon greenhouse	Comparable product
4	Visitor flow	High	Low	Different tourism demand
5	Complementary attractions	Available	Limited	Different destination ecosystem
6	Visitor spillover	Evident	Not evident	Different visitor movement patterns
7	Repeat visitation	High	Low	Different visitor engagement
8	Sales performance	±1,500 melons/2 days	±10 visitors/2 days	Contrasting competitive performance
9	Destination ecosystem	Destination ecosystem	Integrated tourism area	Different Strategic Context

a. Similar Business Models

The comparative analysis revealed that both agritourism businesses shared remarkably similar business characteristics despite operating in different locations. Both destinations adopted a greenhouse-based fruit-picking concept, cultivated comparable melon varieties, and offered visitors the experience of harvesting melons directly from the greenhouse. Furthermore, interviews indicated that the managers of both destinations received technical guidance from the same agricultural mentor, resulting in similar cultivation practices, greenhouse management techniques, and business concepts. These similarities suggest that both businesses possessed relatively comparable operational knowledge and agricultural capabilities.

In addition to similarities in production systems, both destinations employed comparable marketing approaches by utilizing social media platforms to introduce their agritourism activities and promote greenhouse melon products. The interview data also showed that both businesses sought to provide educational and recreational experiences through fruit-picking activities rather than merely selling agricultural products. These findings indicate that the two agritourism businesses operated under relatively similar business models, allowing subsequent comparisons to focus on contextual factors beyond internal business characteristics.

b. Contrasting Business Performance

Despite adopting similar business models, the two agritourism destinations demonstrated substantially different business performance. Field observations showed that the integrated greenhouse agritourism sold approximately 1,500 melons within two days, whereas the standalone agritourism attracted only around ten visitors during the same observation period, with most visitors purchasing only one or two melons. The integrated destination also experienced repeat visitation, where several visitors returned on the following day accompanied by family members or friends. In contrast, repeat visits were rarely observed at the standalone destination.

The interviews further supported these observations. The manager of the standalone agritourism acknowledged that visitor numbers remained relatively limited despite adopting a business concept similar to that of the integrated destination. Conversely, the manager of the integrated agritourism explained that visitors originated from various regions and often combined fruit-picking activities with visits to nearby attractions before purchasing melons. These findings demonstrate that businesses operating under similar managerial practices and production systems may experience substantially different competitive outcomes.

c. Evidence of Destination Ecosystem

The comparative findings suggest that the surrounding tourism environment played a significant role in shaping visitor movement between destinations. Interviews with the manager of the integrated agritourism indicated that many visitors initially came to nearby tourist attractions before extending their trips to the greenhouse. The destination was located within an area offering multiple complementary attractions, including culinary facilities, riverside tourism, family recreation, and community-based activities, enabling visitors to experience several tourism products during a single journey.

In contrast, the standalone agritourism was situated in an agricultural area with limited supporting attractions. The manager explained that visitors generally came only with the specific intention of purchasing or harvesting melons, and the absence of nearby tourism activities reduced opportunities to attract additional visitors. The participant also recognized that the integrated destination benefited from its surrounding tourism environment, whereas the standalone greenhouse relied almost entirely on

independently generated visitor demand. These findings provide empirical evidence that differences in business performance were closely associated with differences in the surrounding destination ecosystem rather than with differences in products or production capabilities.

DISCUSSION

a. Why Business Model Replication Failed

The findings reveal that replicating a successful business model does not necessarily produce similar business performance. Although both agritourism destinations adopted comparable greenhouse concepts, cultivated similar melon varieties, implemented similar production systems, and received technical guidance from the same mentor, they achieved substantially different outcomes. This indicates that business model replication alone is insufficient to guarantee competitive success because organizational performance is influenced by contextual factors beyond operational similarity.

From the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV), firms achieve sustainable competitive advantage when they possess valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources [20]. However, the present findings suggest that possessing similar organizational resources and capabilities does not automatically generate comparable performance [21]. While both agritourism businesses shared similar tangible resources and managerial knowledge, they operated within different external environments that affected how those resources were transformed into competitive outcomes [15]. Therefore, the effectiveness of organizational resources appears to depend on the context in which they are deployed rather than on the resources themselves [21].

This finding also complements Porter's theory of competitive advantage, which emphasizes that firms do not compete in isolation but within broader competitive environments [22]. Porter argues that business performance is shaped by interactions among firms, supporting industries, customers, and surrounding institutions. The present study supports this argument by demonstrating that similar business models may generate contrasting outcomes when they are embedded in different strategic environments [23]. Consequently, successful business replication should not focus solely on copying products or operational practices but also on understanding the strategic characteristics of the environment in which the business operates.

b. Destination Ecosystem as Strategic Explanation

The contrasting business performance observed in this study can be better understood through the concept of the destination ecosystem. The findings indicate that the integrated agritourism destination benefited from the presence of complementary attractions that continuously generated visitor movement across the tourism area. Rather than visiting the greenhouse as a single-purpose destination, tourists incorporated fruit-picking into a broader travel experience that included culinary activities, recreation, and other leisure attractions. Consequently, the greenhouse became part of an interconnected tourism experience rather than an isolated business entity.

From the perspective of strategic management, this phenomenon illustrates that destination ecosystem functions as an external strategic resource capable of enhancing business competitiveness [18]. Porter explains that geographical concentration creates mutual benefits because interconnected businesses strengthen each other's competitive position through complementary activities [22]. In the present study, the surrounding tourism attractions generated visitor spillover that increased purchasing opportunities and encouraged repeat visitation [24]. Therefore, competitive advantage emerged not only from the agritourism enterprise itself but also from its strategic embeddedness within a supportive tourism environment.

Unlike conventional perspectives that explain agritourism performance primarily through internal organizational factors, this study suggests that the surrounding tourism ecosystem deserves greater attention as a determinant of business competitiveness [1]. The findings indicate that destination ecosystem facilitates visitor spillover, extends visitor engagement, and creates additional economic opportunities for individual businesses operating within the tourism area [25]. This perspective provides an alternative explanation for why businesses with comparable organizational capabilities may experience substantially different competitive outcomes when operating under different destination contexts.

c. Implications for Strategic Management

This study contributes to the strategic management literature by demonstrating that competitive advantage cannot be fully understood through firm-level resources alone. Although the Resource-Based View emphasizes the importance of internal capabilities, the present findings indicate that these capabilities become more valuable when firms operate within supportive

external environments. Accordingly, business performance should be viewed as the result of interactions between organizational capabilities and the surrounding strategic ecosystem.

The study also extends Porter's perspective on competitive advantage by highlighting the importance of destination ecosystems in agritourism. Rather than considering agritourism businesses as independent entities, this research suggests that they should be understood as components of interconnected tourism systems in which complementary attractions collectively generate value [25]. Such interactions create visitor spillover, strengthen market opportunities, and enhance business sustainability beyond what individual firms could achieve independently [26].

Based on these findings, this study proposes that the destination ecosystem may be conceptualized as a strategic asset within agritourism management [27]. Its strategic value lies not only in geographical proximity but also in its capacity to connect tourism activities, facilitate visitor circulation, stimulate repeat visitation, and strengthen sustainable competitive performance [27], [28], [29]. This proposition enriches the strategic management perspective by emphasizing that sustainable competitive advantage emerges from the alignment between firm-specific capabilities and the broader destination ecosystem in which those capabilities are embedded [30].

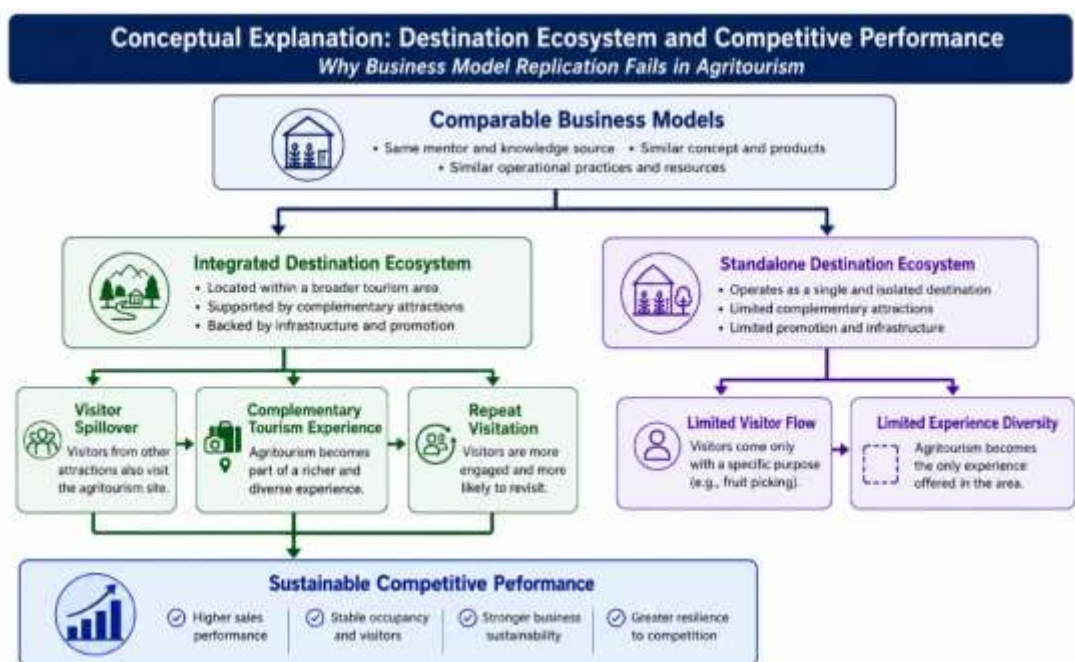


Figure 2. Proposed Conceptual Explanation of Why Comparable Business Models Produce Different Competitive Performance.

The conceptual explanation presented in Figure 1 summarizes the central implication of this study. Although the two agritourism businesses adopted comparable business models, their competitive performance differed because they operated within different destination ecosystems. The findings suggest that business model replication alone is insufficient to achieve sustainable competitive performance. Instead, destination ecosystems function as a strategic context that facilitates visitor spillover, enriches complementary tourism experiences, and encourages repeat visitation. Consequently, agritourism managers and policymakers should prioritize the development of integrated destination ecosystems rather than focusing solely on replicating successful business models, as sustainable competitiveness emerges from the interaction between organizational capabilities and the surrounding tourism environment. Accordingly, the proposed conceptual explanation extends the strategic management perspective by emphasizing that sustainable competitive performance is not merely a consequence of internal organizational capabilities but also of firms' strategic embeddedness within interconnected destination ecosystems.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the competitive performance of greenhouse-based agritourism cannot be explained solely by business model replication or firm-specific resources. Although the two agritourism businesses shared comparable products, operational practices, and managerial knowledge, they achieved markedly different business outcomes because they operated within different destination ecosystems. The findings indicate that destination ecosystems generate visitor spillover, create complementary tourism experiences, encourage repeat visitation, and expand market opportunities, thereby enhancing competitive performance. These results extend the strategic management perspective by suggesting that sustainable competitive advantage emerges not only from internal organizational capabilities but also from firms' strategic embeddedness within interconnected tourism ecosystems. Accordingly, this study proposes destination ecosystem as a strategic external asset that strengthens the effectiveness of organizational resources and contributes to long-term business competitiveness.

The findings also provide practical implications for agritourism managers and policymakers. Rather than focusing exclusively on replicating successful business models, agritourism development should emphasize the creation of integrated destination ecosystems through collaboration among tourism attractions, local communities, supporting businesses, and public institutions. Such integration may generate broader tourism experiences that increase visitor circulation and business sustainability. Nevertheless, this study is limited to two comparative cases within greenhouse-based agritourism, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should investigate the organizational values embedded in successful greenhouse-based agritourism management to better understand how these values foster collaboration among stakeholders, enhance destination ecosystems, and support sustainable competitive performance. Identifying these values will provide an empirical foundation for developing future value-based strategic management frameworks in agritourism.

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