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# EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF SARI LAUT BUSINESS ACTORS IN THE APPLICATION OF FINANCIAL TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCT INNOVATION TO SUPPORT FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore the experiences of seafood entrepreneurs in Wua-Wua and Mandonga Districts, Kendari City, in implementing financial technology (fintech) and product innovation to support financial performance. The study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to understand the experiences, meanings, and adaptation processes of business actors in utilizing technology and developing products. Informants were selected purposively from business actors who have used fintech and implemented product innovation, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data validity was checked through triangulation and member validation. checking, while the analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model through data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study indicate that fintech adoption is primarily related to transaction needs, financial recording, and access to financing. Adoption is influenced by user experience, perceived benefits, business needs, and the level of trust in the service. Barriers were found in literacy, security, infrastructure, and service conditions. Product innovation develops through learning from consumers, business experience, and changing market needs, but faces limitations in raw materials, production processes, and product durability. The impact on financial performance is perceived through changes in sales, cash flow, efficiency, and access to capital, although not uniformly felt. The study concludes that the benefits of fintech and product innovation are contextual and depend on the ability of business actors to integrate both with operational and market needs.

**Keywords:** financial technology, product innovation, financial performance, MSMEs, seafood business