

Media Framing of Inequality in Bali's Tourism Sector

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ABSTRACT: This study critically examines how media framing constructs and normalizes inequality within Bali's tourism sector. As a global destination, Bali attracts diverse visitors whose experiences are shaped by uneven power relations and economic hierarchies. Using a qualitative approach, this study applies Entman's framing model to online news coverage, focusing on problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. The findings reveal a dominant economic frame that prioritizes growth and legitimizes differential treatment of tourists, alongside a secondary frame that partially exposes disparities and tourist privilege. These competing frames obscure structural inequality while reinforcing market-driven logics, limiting more critical discourse on fairness, inclusion, and sustainability.

KEYWORDS: Media Framing, Tourism Inequality, Discourse, Power Relations, Bali.

I. INTRUCTION (BACKGROUND)

Bali has long been recognized as one of the most prominent tourism destinations in Indonesia and the Asia-Pacific region. The island is widely known for its natural landscapes, cultural heritage, religious traditions, and well-developed tourism infrastructure. Over the past decades, tourism has become the main driver of Bali's economic development and global recognition. According to data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Bali consistently records the highest number of international tourist arrivals among all provinces in Indonesia. In 2019, Bali welcomed approximately 6.27 million international tourists, reaffirming its position as a primary gateway for global tourism.

The scale of tourism in Bali becomes more evident when compared to its local population. The province has approximately 4.3 million residents, while international arrivals alone exceed this number annually (BPS, 2020). When combined with domestic tourism, total visits reached over 16 million per year prior to the pandemic. This imbalance highlights Bali as a high-intensity tourism destination, where temporary populations often surpass permanent residents.

Such conditions place significant pressure on infrastructure, natural resources, and social environments. At the same time, they intensify interactions between tourists and local communities, creating complex social dynamics. These interactions often reveal differences in expectations, behavior, and access to services across diverse groups of visitors.

Tourism also plays a crucial role in Bali's regional economy and employment. The sector contributes a substantial share of regional income, making the island highly dependent on tourism flows (Cole, 2012). However, despite these benefits, tourism development has generated structural challenges, including environmental pressure, overtourism, and unequal distribution of economic gains.

One critical issue is tourism leakage, where a portion of tourism revenue flows to external actors rather than remaining within the local economy (Sugiyarto, 2017; Suriani, 2020). This condition raises concerns about the equitable distribution of benefits and highlights the presence of underlying inequalities within the tourism system.

In addition to structural issues, public discussions increasingly raise concerns about fairness in tourism services. Media reports frequently highlight perceived differences in how tourists are treated, particularly in relation to service prioritization and pricing practices. These discussions are often associated with the concept of tourist privilege.

Media play a central role in shaping public understanding of these issues. Through processes of selection, emphasis, and interpretation, media construct narratives that influence how tourism dynamics are perceived (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This process, known as media framing, determines how problems are defined, how causes are attributed, and how solutions are proposed (Entman, 1993).

Despite extensive research on tourism development in Bali, limited attention has been given to how media frame inequality within tourism experiences. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how inequality in Bali's tourism sector is constructed in media coverage using Entman's framing model.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid expansion of tourism in Bali has intensified interactions among visitors with diverse cultural backgrounds, travel motivations, and economic capacities. These interactions create complex social dynamics within shared tourism spaces. Scholars argue that tourism experiences are not uniform but are shaped by differences in social class, cultural capital, and patterns of consumption (Cohen, 1972; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

In global destinations such as Bali, these differences often result in unequal access to services and differentiated treatment among tourists. Such variations highlight the importance of examining tourism not only as an economic activity but also as a social phenomenon embedded in broader structures of inequality.

From a sociological perspective, tourism destinations are socially constructed spaces where meanings, identities, and power relations are continuously negotiated (MacCannell, 1976). Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of distinction, differences in tourism experiences reflect broader social hierarchies, where economic and symbolic capital shape access and privilege (Bourdieu, 1984).

Previous research on Bali has highlighted environmental challenges, unequal resource distribution, and cultural commodification as consequences of tourism development (Picard, 1996; Cole, 2012). These findings underscore the need to explore how such issues are represented and interpreted in public discourse.

Media play a significant role in shaping public understanding of tourism-related issues. Rather than simply reflecting reality, media actively construct it through processes of selection, emphasis, and exclusion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In tourism contexts, media narratives influence destination image and public perception (Gartner, 1994; Hall, 2002).

This study draws on framing theory, particularly the model developed by Entman (1993), which explains how media select and highlight certain aspects of reality. Entman identifies four key functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation (Scheufele, 1999; Reese, 2007).

Recent studies show that framing influences how tourism issues such as overtourism and crises are understood (Avraham, 2015; Benítez-Márquez et al., 2021). Framing is also linked to broader power relations, where dominant narratives may reinforce existing structures while marginalizing alternative perspectives (Foucault, 1972).

Despite these contributions, limited research examines how media frame inequality in tourism contexts, particularly in non-Western settings. This study addresses this gap by analyzing media narratives in Bali using a framing perspective.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design using framing analysis to examine how media construct tourism-related issues in Bali. A qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring meaning-making processes and understanding how social realities are represented in media discourse (Creswell, 2013).

The data consist of selected online news articles discussing tourism practices, visitor behavior, and related issues in Bali. Online media are chosen due to their significant role in shaping public discourse in contemporary information environments.

The articles are selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives (Patton, 2002). The inclusion criteria focus on articles that discuss tourism dynamics, highlight challenges, and present narratives about interactions between tourists and local communities.

The analysis is based on Entman's framing model, which consists of four elements: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). Each article is systematically coded according to these elements.

The analytical process involves identifying patterns, comparing narratives across sources, and interpreting dominant frames. This process allows for the identification of both dominant and alternative representations within media discourse.

This study also considers broader contextual factors that influence media framing, including editorial practices and power relations (Scheufele, 1999). By incorporating these considerations, the analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of how tourism narratives are constructed.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that media coverage of tourism in Bali is predominantly structured through an economic frame. Tourism is consistently represented as a key driver of development, emphasizing its role in income generation, employment, and regional growth (Hall, 2002; Mowforth & Munt, 2016).

This dominant framing reinforces the perception of tourism as an essential component of Bali's economy. As a result, economic priorities often shape how tourism issues are defined and understood in media narratives.

At the same time, media narratives construct a hierarchy of tourists based on perceived economic value. International and high-spending visitors are often portrayed as more desirable, while other groups are associated with challenges such as overcrowding. This reflects broader social distinctions, where economic capital influences representation and access (Bourdieu, 1984).

A secondary frame highlights disparities in tourism experiences and service practices. Media narratives emphasize differences in treatment, access, and service quality among tourists, suggesting that tourism experiences are not evenly distributed (MacCannell, 1976).

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The coexistence of these frames reveals a tension between economic priorities and concerns about fairness. While economic narratives dominate, emerging discussions introduce critical perspectives on inequality and inclusivity.

Causal interpretations often attribute issues to rapid tourism growth and visitor behavior. Structural factors receive less attention, indicating a tendency to individualize the causes of inequality.

Moral evaluations reflect ambivalence, balancing economic benefits with concerns about fairness and service quality. From a critical perspective, this dynamic reflects how media framing both reproduces and challenges existing power relations (Foucault, 1972).

Treatment recommendations focus on governance and management improvements rather than structural change. Overall, media framing plays a crucial role in shaping how tourism inequality is understood and debated.

V. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the role of media framing in shaping public understanding of tourism inequality in Bali. Media narratives construct tourism as both an economic necessity and a socially contested domain.

The findings demonstrate that framing influences how tourism issues are defined, interpreted, and debated (Entman, 1993). While economic contributions are emphasized, emerging narratives reveal concerns about fairness and inclusivity.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends framing analysis to a non-Western tourism context and integrates it with discussions of discourse and power (Foucault, 1972). This contributes to a deeper understanding of media's role in constructing tourism realities.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest the need for more balanced media representations. Such representations may support more inclusive and sustainable tourism development.

Future research should explore additional media platforms and comparative contexts. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of tourism discourse and its implications.

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