

Framing Overtourism and Spatial Exploitation in Bali: Media Perspectives on Environmental Carrying Capacity

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ABSTRACT

Overtourism in Bali, particularly in the regions of Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud, has become a growing concern, as it significantly impacts the environment, infrastructure, and cultural integrity of the destination. This research aims to analyze how the media frames the issue of overtourism in these regions, emphasizing spatial exploitation and environmental carrying capacity. The objective is to examine how the media highlights the environmental, social, and cultural pressures of overtourism, and how different actors—such as the government, tourism industry, and local communities are portrayed in the discourse. A qualitative approach with framing analysis was employed, using news reports from credible international and national media sources between 2023 and 2025. The findings reveal that Badung is framed as the epicentre of overtourism, with issues of congestion and pollution, while Denpasar is viewed through the lens of urbanization challenges. Ubud's framing focuses on cultural commercialization and the loss of traditional identity. The media often offers solutions such as tourism taxes, better spatial regulations, and diversifying tourism destinations to reduce pressures on the most affected areas. The study concludes by providing recommendations for sustainable tourism policies, emphasizing the importance of carrying capacity management, better spatial planning, and tourism diversification to preserve Bali's environment and cultural heritage.

Keywords: overtourism; media framing; environmental carrying capacity; spatial exploitation; Bali tourism; sustainable tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of overtourism has become a global issue that challenges the paradigm of quantity-based tourism development. Overtourism describes a condition when the number of visitors exceeds the physical, social, and cultural carrying capacity of a destination, thereby reducing the quality of life of local residents as well as the tourist experience (Capocchi et al., 2019). Recent studies emphasize that overtourism is a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in tourism urbanization, inadequate infrastructure, and pressure on local ecosystems (Santos-Rojo et al., 2023). From a communication perspective, the way the media frames the issue of overtourism affects public perception and policy choices (Clark & Nyaupane, 2020). Explains that framing is the process of selecting and highlighting certain aspects of reality in order to define problems, determine causes, make moral judgments, and suggest solutions. Previous research has found that the media often emphasizes environmental and governance dimensions when talking about overtourism, so framing analysis can help uncover the dominant narrative and who the actors are positioned to be responsible (Phi, 2020).

The tourism literature shows various consequences of overtourism, ranging from the loss of public space, the increase in the cost of living, congestion, to the degradation of coastal ecosystems (Capocchi et al., 2019). The systematic review also emphasizes the need for a

carrying capacity-based destination management approach to sustain tourism development (Santos-Rojo et al., 2023). Thus, an analysis of how the media emphasizes these issues can provide a broader understanding of the public discourse on destination sustainability.

Bali is one of the destinations that often appears in the global discourse on overtourism. The increase in international tourist visits after the pandemic was followed by the emergence of serious problems, such as traffic congestion, waste crisis, and pressure on water resources (Sekar, 2025). International media coverage also highlighted government policies such as the discourse on hotel construction moratoriums and tourist taxes in response to overtourism (Peck, 2022). This phenomenon does not only occur in coastal areas such as Badung and Denpasar, but also in the cultural area of Ubud which used to be synonymous with slow tourism now faces similar pressures.

Bali's tourism growth is concentrated in certain areas, thus putting pressure on the environment and infrastructure. Academic studies warn that without adequate management of tourism flows, these pressures can result in irreversible degradation (Suyadnya et al., 2025).

Badung Regency and Denpasar City are the two areas with the highest density of tourism activities. Badung hosts most of the star-rated accommodations, restaurants, and entertainment facilities, while Denpasar serves as an administrative and cultural hub with an art market and urban transportation nodes. The concentration of facilities in Badung is even described in the term "over-concentrate" to emphasize the spatial imbalance of tourism (Alwardah, 2024). In addition, the Ubud area in Gianyar Regency, which is known as a cultural and wellness tourism destination, is also not spared from the problem of overtourism. The surge in tourists has caused traffic jams, excessive commercialization of local arts and culture, and the problem of garbage that pollutes the environment (Anggreni & Antari, 2025). The international media even described Ubud as a "victim of its own success" because its high popularity actually eroded the original identity of traditional villages.

The impact of overtourism in the three regions includes severe congestion, increased waste volume, land use change, and flash floods that often occur due to drainage systems that are unable to accommodate water discharge. The massive flooding event in Bali in September 2025 underscored the vulnerability of urban ecosystems to extreme weather, with the media highlighting land conversion and massive development as one of the causes (Tanoyo, 2025). Therefore, the focus of research on Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud is important. These three areas represent the full spectrum of the impact of overtourism in Bali: from coastal areas dominated by mass tourism, administrative cities affected by tourism urbanization, to cultural villages that are undergoing transformation due to tourism. The framing analysis of media reports is expected to reveal the construction of discourse on the exploitation of space and environmental carrying capacity, as well as provide valuable input for the development of sustainable tourism policies in Bali (Phi, 2020).

This study aims to analyze how the media frames the issue of overtourism in Bali with a focus on three main areas: Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud (Gianyar). Framing analysis is chosen to identify the issues highlighted, the actors positioned as the cause and the person responsible, and the solutions offered. Thus, the results of the research are expected to contribute to academic discussions on overtourism as well as offer practical recommendations for sustainable tourism policies (Phi, 2020).

The phenomenon of overtourism in Bali is increasingly receiving attention from both academics and the international media (Sukariyanto et al., 2025). Badung Regency, Denpasar City, and Ubud Gianyar Regency as tourism centers are experiencing serious pressure on environmental, social, and cultural aspects. Media reporting has an important role in framing these issues so that it influences public perception, policy direction, and tourism practices on the ground. However, until now there is still limited research that analyzes how national and international media frame the issue of overtourism in Bali, especially in the three main regions.

This study aims to analyze how national and international media frame the issue of overtourism in Bali with a focus on three main areas, namely Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud. In particular, this study aims to identify the dominant issues highlighted by the media related to space exploitation and pressure on the carrying capacity of the environment in the three regions (Alim, 2024). In addition, this research is also directed to examine how the media positions various actors, such as the government, tourism industry players, local communities, and tourists in the discourse of overtourism. This analysis is expected to reveal the narrative patterns that are developing, including the causes, impacts, and solutions offered by the media, so that it can contribute to the development of academic literature on sustainable tourism as well as provide practical input for tourism policy formulation in Bali.

The objective of this research is to analyze how the media frames the issue of overtourism in Bali, specifically focusing on three key regions: Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud. The study will investigate how the media highlights the problems related to spatial exploitation and environmental carrying capacity, how it positions different actors (such as the government, tourism industry stakeholders, local communities, and tourists) within the overtourism discourse, and the solutions proposed by the media. By utilizing a framing analysis approach, this research aims to uncover the dominant narratives and provide valuable insights that contribute to the academic literature on sustainable tourism. Furthermore, it will offer practical recommendations for the development of sustainable tourism policies in Bali to address the challenges posed by overtourism.

RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative approach was used with an exploratory-descriptive design. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding meaning, social construction, and media representation related to the issue of overtourism in Bali. Through a qualitative approach, the research delved deeper into how the media frames tourism problems in the Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud areas, each of which has different characteristics but both face pressure due to tourist concentration (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research data was obtained from two main sources, namely academic literature and secondary data. The academic literature includes articles from reputable international journals, books, and previous research relevant to the themes of overtourism, media framing, and sustainable tourism. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from official reports from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the Bali Tourism Office, as well as online news both national and international published between 2023 and 2025. News is selected from credible media such as The Jakarta Post, Tempo, Reuters, The Guardian, and TIME, so that it can provide broad coverage of the overtourism discourse in Bali (Eriyanto, 2012).

Data analysis was carried out using a combination of qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is used to identify representations of overtourism issues in news texts, such as dominant themes, constructed narratives, and recurring keywords (Krippendorff, 2019). Furthermore, thematic analysis was carried out to group the findings into broader categories, such as the issue of space exploitation, environmental carrying capacity pressures, socio-economic impacts, and policies raised in the news (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In addition to these two techniques, this study also uses the framing analysis method. The framework used refers to the model, which emphasizes four main elements in framing, namely problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Using a framing approach, this study can trace how the media highlights certain aspects of overtourism in Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud, who is positioned as the cause or the person in charge, and what solutions are offered in the public discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the framing analysis show that the Badung area has become the center of international and national media spotlight related to the issue of overtourism in Bali. Reports from The Guardian, Reuters, and TIME often highlight severe congestion, pollution, and garbage accumulation in the Kuta, Seminyak, and Legian areas as the main problems defining the face of Bali tourism today. These findings are in line with (Milano et al., 2019) which states that overtourism is characterized by excessive use of space and uncontrolled concentration of tourists, thus causing environmental degradation and social tensions.

“Locals and tourists complaining about the traffic, pollution and badly behaved foreigners that have come with the hotels and resorts that now swamp the island.” (The Guardian, 2025).

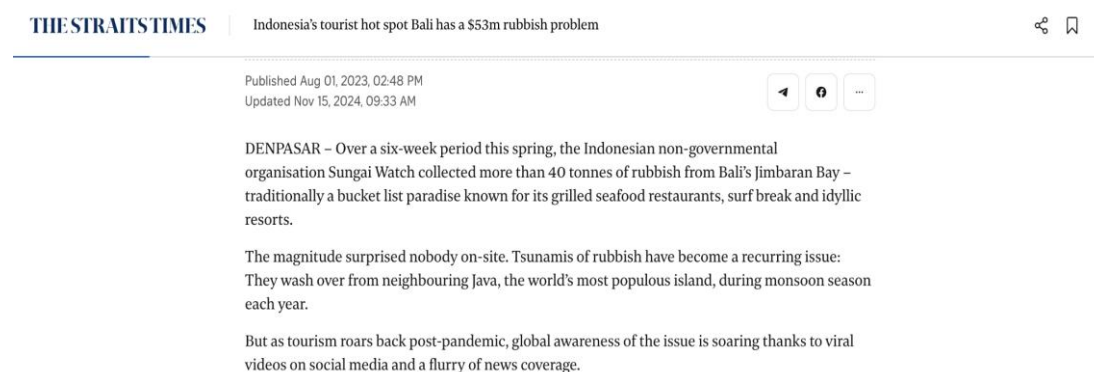


Figure 1. Straits Times News

Source: The Guardian, 2025. Reports of severe congestion, pollution, and garbage accumulation in the Kuta, Seminyak, and Legian areas, which are major problems in Bali tourism.

“The magnitude surprised nobody on-site ... Sungai Watch collected more than 40 tons of rubbish from Bali's Jimbaran Bay ... tsunamis of rubbish ... government estimates 52 per cent of Bali's garbage is mismanaged ... open dump sites pollute the island's waters and litter piles up on the shores and roadsides.” (Straits Times via Reuters, 2024)

Reuters reported that flooding due to extreme rainfall caused road access to Ngurah Rai International Airport to be disrupted, and areas in Badung such as Legian were submerged in water, hampering mobility and creating emergency socio-environmental conditions (Reuters, 2025). This is consistent with the analysis (Gössling et al., 2020) which emphasizes the importance of integrating spatial planning and destination management so that tourism does not become a factor that exacerbates the vulnerability of cities.

“The city planning does not consider disasters. All of the infrastructure construction is geared toward making Bali more attractive to tourists and investors.” (Reuters, 2025)

The main causes raised by the media are uncontrolled mass tourism, the rampant construction of hotels and beach clubs without adequate control, and ineffective spatial regulations. International media such as *The Straits Times* (2024) describe the decline in environmental quality due to a surge in tourist visits. Academic literacy supports this, where (Gössling et al., 2020) emphasizing that uncontrolled tourism can cause water and air degradation, as well as suppress the availability of green space and food.

"The phenomenon of overtourism is increasingly felt in popular tourism pockets such as Canggu, Kuta, and Ubud. The number of tourists that continues to explode has put pressure on road infrastructure, the waste system, and the quality of life of local residents." (Radarlambar, 2025)

Media moral evaluations tend to be negative, placing Badung as a symbol of the excessive exploitation of Bali's tourism space. Recommendations for solutions that have emerged include a moratorium on hotel construction, tourist taxes, and diversification of tourist destinations to the North and East Bali regions. These findings are consistent with the view that overtourism emerged as a consequence of the accumulation of mass tourism without sustainable destination management (Milano et al., 2019).

The media framing of Denpasar emphasizes the problem of tourism urbanization and its impact on the functioning of the city. Local and national media reported that major flooding in Denpasar (as part of the Bali floods in September 2025) caused damage to critical infrastructure, such as roads and buildings, and caused temporary closures at several road points, showing how drainage systems and urban planning are unable to anticipate the negative impacts of the growth of development and expansion of tourist spaces (Reuters, 2025; REUTERS, "Floods hit Bali").

“Floods on Indonesia’s holiday island of Bali have killed at least nine this week and affected 600 people, blocking off major roads in the capital and disrupting a busy travel destination ...” (Reuters, 2025).



Figure 2. Reuters News

Source: The Guardian, 2025. Reports of severe congestion, pollution, and garbage accumulation in the Kuta, Seminyak, and Legian areas, which are major problems in Bali tourism.

The causes raised include the weakness of drainage infrastructure, the high volume of tourist and local vehicles, and the lack of optimal city planning for the flow of visits (Dewa & Evita, 2025; Jemberie et al., 2023; Yazdanfar & Sharma, 2015). The media's moral assessment views Denpasar as failing to balance its role as an administrative center as well as a tourism city, with local residents being the most affected. The solutions offered include revitalizing traditional art markets, improving transportation and drainage systems, and adjusting urban spatial planning policies to be more responsive to the pressure of tourist activities.

"The rapid recovery of tourism has given rise to new challenges, namely excess tourists or overtourism in Canggu, Kuta, and Ubud, exploding garbage, and long congestion." (Alwardah, 2024)

Ubud, Gianyar regency has received a thicker framing related to cultural issues and local identity that are disturbed due to the increasing number of tourists. Although the media has not been as intensive as Badung and Denpasar in terms of reports of flooding or physical damage, the discourse on "cultural commercialization" and the loss of cultural authenticity has emerged repeatedly in international and local news.

"Balinese culture, which is sacred and rich in spiritual values, is now also increasingly eroded by the process of commercialization... Many rice fields are converted into hotels, villas, and restaurants..." (Kompasiana, 2025)

One of the articles (Peck, 2022) mention how tourist behavior and the introduction of rules of conduct ("dos and don'ts") and tourist taxes are tried to be applied to preserve culture and the environment, including culture in Ubud.

"However, the influx of tourists has brought environmental degradation, cultural insensitivity, and strained infrastructure. Efforts to mitigate the negative impacts include a \$9 mandatory tourist tax introduced in 2024 ... Despite these measures, only a third of tourists paid the tax last year, and enforcement has been inconsistent." (Peck, 2022)

For example, the imposition of a tourist levy of IDR 150,000 which is mandatory for foreign tourists starting February 2024, is also followed by regulations related to dress

procedures in temples and prohibitions on behavior that is considered impolite (Euronews / Rebecca Ann Hughes, 2025).

“The Bali Tourism Tax Levy was introduced in February 2024 ... while the IDR 150,000 is a mandatory requirement for all international tourists, by the end of the first year of the policy, it was clear that as few as 35% of visitors had made their payment ... Governor Koster told reporters, ‘If this trend continues, the potential annual revenue is estimated to reach IDR 340 billion.’” (The Bali Sun, 2025).



Figure 3. The Bali Sun

Source: The Bali Sun, 2025. Report on the implementation of a mandatory Bali tourism tax for international tourists in February 2024, noting that only 35% of tourists paid the tax in the first year of its implementation.

Media recommendations related to Ubud include limiting the number of tourists in culturally sensitive areas, implementing slow tourism, and strengthening regulations on land use, especially for the construction of villas or homestays around traditional villages.

Comparative analysis shows that although there are similarities in environmental and spatial pressures, such as floods, garbage, and congestion in all three locations, the media raises different aspects that characterize local characteristics: Badung is more framing of accommodation development and direct environmental impacts, Denpasar is seen more through the lens of an administrative city, public functions, and infrastructure, while Ubud is more geared towards the cultural dimension, identity, and commercialization.

"Bali has various problems that have not been significantly resolved, namely, overtourism, traffic jams, garbage, damaged roads, land use conversion, fraudulent excavation..." (Atnews, 2025)

For example, The Guardian news features the transformation of Bali's landscape from rice paddies and green spaces into villas and resorts, especially in culturally frontier regions such as Ubud, as a direct result of tourism expansion (The Guardian, 2025). (Mihalic, 2020) emphasizing that the imbalance in the distribution of tourism benefits triggers local resistance and lowers the legitimacy of tourism in the eyes of the public. Local media also reported that

only about 35% of tourists pay the mandatory tourism levy, which is a source of criticism of the effectiveness of tourism impact management policies (News.com.au, 2025). Thus, the literature reinforces the argument that Bali faces serious risks if it does not immediately reposition its tourism strategy for a fairer and more sustainable one.

Theoretically, the results of this study confirm that the framing model Entman, (1993) relevant in explaining how the media constructs the social reality of overtourism in Bali, with the media choosing clear aspects of problems, causes, moral judgments, and solutions in each location. The use of the latest news such as Denpasar residents' desperation for mobility during floods, discussions of tourist taxes, and tourist behavior regulations shows how the discourse on overtourism is not only an academic issue, but part of public debate and policy. Practically, this finding provides direction that the provincial government of Bali, as well as the district and city governments in Badung, Denpasar, and Gianyar (Ubud), need to strengthen regulations, supervision, and education to tourists and tourism actors, especially in the aspects of spatial planning, environmental carrying capacity, and cultural preservation, so that tourism growth does not sacrifice local values and the environment.

Strategic Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions that have been presented in the previous section, it is clear that the phenomenon of overtourism in Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud has caused serious pressure on space, environment, and socio-cultural balance. The impact in the form of congestion, pollution, floods, degradation of cultural heritage, and community resistance shows the need for concrete steps to overcome the excessive exploitation of tourism. For this reason, this study proposes several strategic recommendations that can be used as a reference in the formulation of policies and practices for sustainable Bali tourism management.

First, it is necessary to strengthen destination management based on carrying capacity. Destination management in Bali, especially in Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud, must refer to environmental, social, and cultural carrying capacity. The concept of carrying capacity allows local governments to set daily visit limits in certain tourist locations, as has been implemented in several international destinations that face similar problems. The implementation of this model will help prevent ecosystem degradation, reduce congestion, and maintain the quality of the tourist experience.

Second, the implementation of stricter spatial regulations is a strategic step. Research reports show that land conversion in Bali continues to increase, especially in coastal and urban areas, for the construction of villas, hotels, and restaurants. The government needs to strengthen spatial planning regulatory instruments so that tourism development does not damage protected areas, productive agricultural land, and cultural and spiritual sites. Thus, Denpasar's urban planning can be more adaptive to face the risk of flooding and congestion, while the Ubud area can be protected from excessive commercialization.

Third, it is important to diversify destinations to other regions in Bali as an equity strategy. So far, the concentration of tourists is still concentrated in Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud, which exacerbates overtourism in the region. The development of alternative destinations in Buleleng, Jembrana, and Karangasem will not only reduce the pressure on the tourism center, but also provide more equitable economic benefits for the Balinese people. This diversification can be done through the promotion of geoparks, ecotourism, and community-based tourism.

Fourth, the education of tourists and tourism industry players must be improved to create more responsible tourism behavior. International and local media often highlight the behavior of tourists who do not respect local norms and exacerbate environmental problems, such as waste and pollution. Education can be carried out through public campaigns, tourist behavior regulations, and green certification programs for tourism industry players. With this approach, tourists not only enjoy Bali as a destination, but also help maintain its sustainability.

Overall, this strategic recommendation emphasizes that the sustainability of Bali tourism can only be achieved through an integrated approach that combines carrying capacity management, spatial planning, destination diversification, and sustainable education. Without these measures, Bali risks facing a tourism crisis that harms local communities, tourists, and global image as a cultural and spiritual destination.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that overtourism in Bali—particularly across Badung, Denpasar, and Ubud—has generated substantial pressure on spatial, environmental, and socio-cultural dimensions, manifesting in congestion, pollution, land conversion, urban planning deficiencies, and the commercialization of cultural identity. By emphasizing how spatial exploitation directly undermines environmental carrying capacity and social equilibrium, the study contributes to the broader literature on sustainable tourism while offering practical policy implications, including visit control strategies, spatial planning reinforcement, and destination diversification. It further asserts that tourism sustainability demands cross-sectoral integration encompassing environmental, social, cultural, and spatial governance, alongside capacity-based management and stakeholder education. Nonetheless, as this study relies primarily on literature reviews, secondary data, and media framing analysis, future research should prioritize field-based, community-centered approaches that incorporate the perspectives of local residents, industry actors, and tourists. The application of quantitative or mixed-method designs would further strengthen the validity of findings and yield a more comprehensive understanding of overtourism dynamics in Bali—ultimately informing more equitable and sustainability-oriented tourism development rooted in *kearifan lokal*.

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