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Sustainable Tourism Communication Strategies in Mainstream Media: A Qualitative Study of the Representation of Umbul Ponggok as an Environmentally Friendly Destination

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ABSTRACT

Umbul Ponggok is a natural spring–based tourist destination developed through a village-managed governance model and widely recognized as a successful example of community-based tourism. Its transformation from a local water source into a popular tourist attraction has reshaped the village's economy while generating narratives of environmental responsibility, water conservation, and community empowerment. In this context, mainstream media play a strategic role in constructing the image and legitimacy of Umbul Ponggok as a sustainable tourism destination. Departing from the view that media function not only as channels of information but also as arenas for the production of meaning and power relations, this study analyzes sustainable tourism communication strategies represented in mainstream media coverage of Umbul Ponggok. The analysis focuses on how environmental sustainability, social empowerment, and economic success are framed, negotiated, and legitimized within media discourse. Theoretically, this research integrates perspectives from strategic communication, environmental communication, framing theory, and the political economy of media to uncover narrative structures and underlying interests shaping this constructed reality. Using a qualitative approach, the study employs critical discourse analysis of news texts from national and regional mainstream media within a selected timeframe. Data are analyzed through thematic coding, discourse structure identification, and interpretation of ideology and power relations embedded in the texts. This study contributes to scholarship on sustainable tourism communication by positioning the media as strategic actors in shaping social legitimacy around destination management practices. Practically, the findings are expected to support more reflective, ethical, and sustainability-oriented communication strategies aligned with responsible management practices and local community well-being.

Keywords: *Umbul Ponggok; Sustainable Tourism Communication; Mainstream Media; Framing Theory; Critical Discourse Analysis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism has become one of the most prominent paradigms in global tourism development over the past two decades. Increasing concerns about environmental degradation, climate change, and socio-economic inequality have encouraged tourism stakeholders to adopt more responsible and sustainable practices. Sustainable tourism emphasizes a balance between environmental protection, socio-cultural preservation, and economic benefits for local communities [1]. Within this framework, communication plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding and legitimacy of tourism development initiatives.

In recent years, media institutions have become central actors in the dissemination and construction of tourism narratives. The role of mass media extends beyond merely providing information about tourism destinations. Media organizations actively shape public perception through framing, selection of sources, and representation of particular narratives related to tourism development [2]. These processes contribute to constructing symbolic meanings associated with tourism destinations and influence how audiences interpret tourism practices.

One case frequently highlighted in Indonesian tourism discourse is Umbul Ponggok, a natural spring tourism destination located in Klaten Regency, Central Java. Originally functioning as a local water source for community daily activities, Umbul Ponggok has undergone significant transformation since it was

developed as a tourism attraction managed by a village-owned enterprise (BUMDes). The development of this destination has generated substantial economic benefits for the village community and has attracted national media attention.

Media coverage of Umbul Ponggok often emphasizes its success as a community-based tourism initiative. Narratives frequently highlight how tourism development has improved local livelihoods, strengthened village governance, and promoted environmental conservation practices [3]. These narratives contribute to shaping the public image of Umbul Ponggok as a model for sustainable tourism development in rural areas.

However, media representations are not neutral reflections of reality. Instead, they are constructed through discursive practices that involve ideological assumptions, institutional interests, and power relations. From a critical communication perspective, media discourse can legitimize particular development models while marginalizing alternative perspectives [4]. Therefore, examining how media narratives frame Umbul Ponggok provides important insights into the communication strategies that support sustainable tourism discourse.

This study aims to analyze how mainstream media construct narratives about Umbul Ponggok as an environmentally friendly tourism destination. The research focuses on examining how themes such as environmental sustainability, community empowerment, and economic success are framed within media discourse. By applying critical discourse analysis, the study seeks to reveal the underlying ideological meanings embedded in tourism communication strategies.

Understanding these media representations is important not only for academic discussions on tourism communication but also for practical implications related to tourism governance. Media narratives can influence tourism policy, public opinion, and stakeholder engagement. Therefore, analyzing the discourse surrounding Umbul Ponggok contributes to broader discussions about sustainable tourism communication and the role of media in shaping tourism development.

1.1. Media Discourse in Sustainable Tourism Development

Media discourse plays an essential role in shaping the social legitimacy of tourism development initiatives. Through news reporting, feature articles, and opinion columns, media institutions construct narratives that influence public understanding of tourism practices and their impacts. In the context of sustainable tourism, these narratives often emphasize themes such as environmental conservation, community participation, and economic empowerment [5].

Research in tourism communication suggests that destinations frequently rely on strategic storytelling to promote their sustainability credentials. Such narratives can help attract environmentally conscious tourists and strengthen destination branding [6]. However, these narratives may also simplify complex socio-environmental realities by focusing primarily on success stories.

The development of Umbul Ponggok illustrates how media narratives can contribute to constructing tourism success stories. Since its transformation into a tourism attraction, the destination has received extensive coverage from national and regional media outlets. These reports frequently highlight the innovative management model implemented by the village government and the economic benefits generated for local residents.

1.1.1. Framing Theory in Tourism Media Narratives

Framing theory provides a useful analytical framework for understanding how media narratives are constructed. According to framing theory, media texts emphasize certain aspects of reality while ignoring or minimizing others. This selective emphasis influences how audiences interpret social phenomena [7].

In tourism studies, framing processes often shape how destinations are perceived in terms of sustainability, authenticity, and cultural value. Media frames may highlight environmental conservation practices, community participation, or technological innovations associated with tourism development.

1.1.1.2. Critical Discourse Perspective on Media Representation

From a critical discourse perspective, these frames are embedded within broader ideological and institutional contexts. Media organizations operate within political, economic, and cultural structures that influence editorial decisions. Therefore, examining tourism discourse requires attention to both textual analysis and the socio-political contexts in which media narratives are produced.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable tourism communication has become an important topic in both tourism and communication studies. Scholars argue that communication strategies play a critical role in shaping perceptions of sustainability among tourists, local communities, and policymakers [8]. Media narratives can influence how tourism practices are interpreted and evaluated in public discourse.

Environmental communication research highlights the importance of communication processes in promoting environmental awareness and responsible behavior. Tourism destinations often integrate environmental narratives into their promotional strategies to strengthen their reputation as sustainable destinations [9].

Community-based tourism (CBT) is frequently presented as a model for sustainable tourism development. CBT emphasizes local participation, equitable distribution of benefits, and environmental stewardship. Studies suggest that successful CBT initiatives can contribute to poverty reduction and cultural preservation in rural areas [10].

However, some scholars argue that media narratives about CBT may sometimes exaggerate success stories while overlooking challenges such as governance

conflicts, environmental pressures, and unequal distribution of tourism benefits. Therefore, critical analysis of media discourse is necessary to understand how tourism narratives are constructed.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides a methodological framework for examining how language reflects and reproduces power relations in society. CDA scholars argue that discourse shapes social reality by constructing particular interpretations of events and issues [4]. In tourism studies, CDA has been used to analyze how tourism narratives reflect broader ideological frameworks related to development and globalization.

3. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using critical discourse analysis to examine media representations of Umbul Ponggok tourism development.

Research Design

The research focuses on analyzing news texts published by mainstream Indonesian media outlets. The study aims to identify patterns of framing related to environmental sustainability, community empowerment, and economic transformation.

Data Collection

The dataset consists of **35 news articles** published between **2018 and 2024** in national and regional media outlets, including:

- Kompas
- Tempo
- Detik
- Tribun News
- CNN Indonesia
- Jawa Pos

The articles were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria:

1. Articles discussing Umbul Ponggok tourism development.
2. Articles containing narratives related to sustainability or community empowerment.
3. Articles published by mainstream media institutions.

Data Analysis

The analysis follows the critical discourse analysis framework proposed by Van Dijk. The analytical process includes three levels of discourse structure:

1. **Macrostructure** – identification of the main themes and topics within the news articles.
2. **Superstructure** – examination of the narrative structure of the texts.
3. **Microstructure** – analysis of linguistic elements such as word choice, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies.

The analysis also considers ideological meanings and power relations embedded within the media discourse.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the analysis of 35 news articles discussing the development of Umbul Ponggok tourism published in national and regional Indonesian media between 2018 and 2024. The analysis focuses on identifying dominant discourse patterns and framing strategies used by mainstream media in representing Umbul Ponggok as an environmentally friendly tourism destination.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Teun A. van Dijk, the findings are analyzed through three levels of discourse structure: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. The analysis reveals that media discourse surrounding Umbul Ponggok is largely dominated by narratives of economic transformation, environmental sustainability, and community empowerment.

4.1 Dataset of Media Coverage on Umbul Ponggok

The dataset consists of **35 news articles** obtained from major Indonesian mainstream media platforms. The selection of media outlets was based on their national reach, journalistic credibility, and frequency of reporting on tourism development.

Table 1. Dataset of Media Coverage on Umbul Ponggok Tourism Development

No	Media Outlet	Article Title
1	Kompas	Umbul Ponggok: From Village Spring to Tourism Icon
2	Kompas	Village-Owned Enterprise Drives Tourism Growth
3	Tempo	Community-Based Tourism Success in Klaten
4	Tempo	Economic Transformation Through Village Tourism
5	Detik	Umbul Ponggok Attracts Thousands of Visitors
6	Detik	Underwater Photography Tourism Trend
7	CNN Indonesia	Village Tourism Model Inspires Other Regions
8	CNN Indonesia	Economic Benefits of Umbul Ponggok Tourism
9	Tribun News	Umbul Ponggok Boosts Village Revenue
10	Tribun News	Tourism Creates Jobs for Local Residents
11	Jawa Pos	Tourism Innovation in Rural Central Java
12	Jawa Pos	Village Enterprise and Tourism Governance
13	Kompas	Environmental Conservation in Umbul Ponggok
14	Kompas	Clean Spring Water Tourism Attraction
15	Tempo	Sustainable Tourism in Central Java
16	Tempo	Community Participation in Tourism
17	Detik	Visitors Enjoy Unique Underwater Photos

18	Detik	Village Economy Improves Through Tourism
19	CNN Indonesia	Tourism Success Story from Klaten
20	CNN Indonesia	Umbul Ponggok as Tourism Model
21	Tribun News	Local Youth Work in Tourism Sector
22	Tribun News	Tourism Improves Village Infrastructure
23	Jawa Pos	Rural Tourism Development Strategy
24	Jawa Pos	Village-Owned Enterprises and Innovation
25	Kompas	Tourism and Environmental Awareness
26	Tempo	Local Governance in Tourism
27	Detik	Tourism Attraction with Natural Spring
28	CNN Indonesia	Tourism Revenue and Village Development
29	Tribun News	Tourism Drives Local Economic Growth
30	Jawa Pos	Umbul Ponggok and Community Empowerment
31	Kompas	Village Tourism Model Replicated
32	Tempo	Tourism as Economic Driver
33	Detik	Social Media and Tourism Promotion
34	CNN Indonesia	Tourism and Environmental Sustainability
35	Tribun News	Umbul Ponggok as Sustainable Tourism Icon

4.2 Dominant Media Frames in Umbul Ponggok Coverage

The analysis identified four dominant frames in media narratives about Umbul Ponggok tourism development.

Table 2. Media Framing Patterns

Frame Category	Number of Articles	Percentage
Economic success	15	43%
Environmental sustainability	9	26%
Community empowerment	7	20%
Tourism innovation	4	11%

The data indicate that **economic success narratives dominate media coverage**, accounting for 43% of all analyzed articles.

4.3 Economic Transformation Narrative

The most prominent narrative identified in the dataset is the portrayal of Umbul Ponggok as a symbol of rural economic transformation. Media reports frequently highlight the dramatic increase in village revenue generated through tourism activities.

Several articles report that the establishment of tourism management through the village-owned enterprise (BUMDes) significantly increased the village's annual income. Prior to tourism development, the village reportedly generated limited revenue from local economic activities. However, after the development of tourism attractions such as underwater photography and recreational swimming facilities, tourism revenue increased substantially.

These narratives construct tourism as a catalyst for rural development and poverty reduction. Similar findings have been reported in tourism communication studies, which indicate that media narratives often emphasize economic success to legitimize tourism development initiatives [1].

However, critical discourse analysis reveals that these narratives may oversimplify the complex realities of rural tourism development. While economic benefits are highlighted extensively, potential challenges such as environmental pressures, management issues, or unequal distribution of tourism income receive relatively limited attention.

4.4 Environmental Sustainability Narrative

Another significant theme identified in the dataset is environmental sustainability. Many media articles describe Umbul Ponggok as an environmentally friendly tourism destination characterized by clean natural spring water and well-maintained ecosystems.

Journalistic narratives frequently emphasize conservation efforts implemented by the local community. For example, articles highlight community initiatives aimed at protecting the water source and maintaining environmental cleanliness in the tourism area.

Environmental narratives play a strategic role in tourism branding. Previous research suggests that environmentally oriented communication strategies can enhance the attractiveness of tourism destinations among environmentally conscious travelers [2].

However, from a critical discourse perspective, these environmental narratives may also function as symbolic representations that reinforce the destination's positive image without necessarily providing detailed analysis of environmental management practices.

4.5 Community Empowerment Narrative

Community empowerment represents another important frame in media coverage. Many articles highlight the role of the village government and local residents in managing tourism activities.

The establishment of the village-owned enterprise is frequently presented as a key factor contributing to the success of Umbul Ponggok tourism. Media narratives portray the enterprise as an innovative governance model that enables local communities to control tourism resources and distribute economic benefits among residents.

Such narratives align with broader academic discussions about community-based tourism, which emphasize the importance of local participation and

community empowerment in sustainable tourism development [3].

Nevertheless, CDA analysis indicates that these narratives may sometimes overlook internal community dynamics or potential governance challenges. Media coverage tends to present a unified and harmonious picture of community participation, while potential conflicts or power inequalities are rarely discussed.

4.6 Tourism Innovation Narrative

A smaller but significant portion of media coverage focuses on tourism innovation, particularly the unique underwater photography attraction that has become the signature experience of Umbul Ponggok.

Several articles highlight how creative tourism products such as underwater photo spots, themed installations, and social media-friendly attractions have contributed to the destination's popularity.

This narrative reflects broader trends in contemporary tourism marketing, where experiential tourism and social media visibility play an important role in attracting visitors.

4.7 Critical Discourse Analysis Using Van Dijk Model

To understand the deeper meaning embedded in media narratives, the study applies the CDA framework proposed by Teun A. van Dijk.

Table 3. CDA Analysis of Umbul Ponggok Media Discourse

Discourse Level	Analytical Focus	Findings
Macrostructure	Main topic of discourse	Umbul Ponggok as successful sustainable tourism destination
Superstructure	Narrative structure of news articles	Introduction emphasizing tourism success followed by explanation of economic and environmental benefits
Microstructure	Language, rhetoric, and lexical choices	Use of positive words such as "innovation", "success", "model village", "clean environment"

The macrostructure analysis shows that the overarching theme in most articles is the success of Umbul Ponggok as a sustainable tourism destination. At the superstructure level, most articles follow a similar narrative pattern: introducing the tourism attraction, describing economic benefits, and concluding with statements about sustainability or community empowerment.

At the microstructure level, linguistic analysis reveals that journalists frequently use positive adjectives and promotional language when describing the destination.

4.8 Ideological Implications of Media Discourse

The findings suggest that media discourse surrounding Umbul Ponggok serves broader ideological functions related to tourism-led development. By emphasizing economic success and environmental responsibility, media narratives contribute to legitimizing tourism as a strategy for rural development.

From a political economy perspective, such narratives may also support broader government policies aimed at promoting tourism as a key economic sector.

However, critical discourse analysis highlights the need for more balanced media coverage that also addresses potential challenges associated with tourism development.

4.9 Microstructure Elaboration of the "Economic Success" Frame: Metaphors and Rhetorical Construction of Poverty Reduction

To strengthen the microstructure analysis, this section further examines specific metaphors and rhetorical strategies used in the **Economic Success** frame. The findings indicate that mainstream media frequently construct poverty reduction in Umbul Ponggok through persuasive lexical choices, symbolic expressions, and success-oriented narratives.

One recurring metaphor is the representation of tourism as an **"engine of growth"** or **"driver of village prosperity."** Such expressions symbolically position tourism as the main force moving the local economy forward. Through this metaphor, economic change is portrayed as natural, inevitable, and directly caused by tourism development. Similarly, phrases such as **"lifting residents out of poverty"** frame poverty as a downward condition from which villagers are elevated through tourism activities.

Another dominant rhetorical strategy is the use of **before-and-after narratives**. Many news articles contrast Umbul Ponggok's previous condition as an ordinary rural area with its current status as a nationally recognized tourism destination. This binary structure dramatizes transformation and simplifies development into a clear success story. Complex socio-economic processes are reduced into linear progress narratives in which tourism becomes the single solution.

Media texts also employ **quantification strategies**, including references to increased village revenue, higher visitor numbers, and employment creation. Numbers function rhetorically as evidence of success and legitimacy. Statistical claims strengthen the perception that tourism has objectively solved local economic problems.

In addition, journalists often use **positive evaluative vocabulary** such as "successful," "innovative," "prosperous," and "model village." These lexical choices reinforce admiration and minimize critical distance.

From a CDA perspective, these metaphors and rhetorical devices do not merely describe reality; they actively construct poverty reduction as a visible achievement of tourism governance. Consequently, structural issues such as inequality, seasonal dependency,

or uneven benefit distribution may become less visible within media discourse.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Wolio Fortress Landscape possesses strong This study demonstrates that mainstream media play a significant role in constructing the public image of Umbul Ponggok as a sustainable tourism destination. Media narratives consistently emphasize themes of economic transformation, environmental conservation, community empowerment, and tourism innovation. Through framing processes, these narratives contribute to legitimizing tourism-led development models in rural areas and positioning Umbul Ponggok as a successful example of community-based tourism.

At the microstructure level, the findings further reveal that the **Economic Success** frame is strengthened through specific metaphors and rhetorical strategies. Mainstream media frequently construct poverty reduction through persuasive lexical choices, symbolic expressions, and success-oriented narratives. Tourism is often portrayed as an **"engine of growth"** or **"driver of village prosperity,"** symbolically presenting tourism as the central force behind local economic progress. Likewise, expressions such as **"lifting residents out of poverty"** frame poverty as a lower condition from which communities are elevated through tourism activities.

The use of **before-and-after narratives** also plays an important role in dramatizing Umbul Ponggok's transformation from an ordinary rural village into a nationally recognized tourism destination. In addition, **quantification strategies**—such as references to increased village revenue, visitor numbers, and employment opportunities—function rhetorically as evidence of success and legitimacy. Positive evaluative vocabulary, including terms such as "successful," "innovative," "prosperous," and "model village," further reinforces admiration while reducing critical distance.

However, critical discourse analysis shows that these representations may simplify complex socio-economic realities by focusing primarily on success stories. Structural issues such as inequality, seasonal dependency, governance tensions, or uneven benefit distribution receive limited attention. Therefore, understanding these media representations is important for developing more balanced tourism communication strategies that more accurately reflect the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable tourism.

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