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Deconstructing the Aesthetics of Balinese Women's Identity in Tourism Digital Magazine Advertisements

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Abstract--This paper examines the phenomenon of the deconstruction of Balinese women's identity in tourism digital magazine advertisements through the perspective of commodity aesthetics. The massive development of the digital tourism industry has shifted the visual paradigm from authentic local beauty representations to global beauty constructions for the sake of the market. The main objective of this research is to dismantle the visual mechanism of identity deconstruction and analyze the shift of cultural use value (*Taksu*) to aesthetic exchange value in the digital media ecosystem. The research method used is qualitative with a descriptive-analytical approach through the Art Assessment approach. The analysis method used integrates the theory of Visual Communication Design, Roland Barthes' Semiotics, and Wolfgang Fritz Haug's commodity aesthetics. The data was collected through observations on digital magazine platforms such as *Bali and Beyond* and *The Yak*, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results of the study show that identity deconstruction is carried out through a structured commodity aesthetic mechanism, namely the physical features of local women manipulated through *digital imaging* techniques to approach Western beauty standards (*Westernization*). This phenomenon creates a visual simulacra that positions non-local figures as the main representation of Bali, while authentic identities are relegated to the

margins. Research also proves that the implementation of Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2020 has not been effective in reducing the hegemony of the cross-border digital market. In conclusion, the formulation of a visual strategy based on local wisdom is needed as an effort to purify the image, to restore the sovereignty of the representation of Balinese Women's Authentic Identity (IAP) in the virtual space.

Keywords---Deconstruction, Aesthetics, Balinese Women's Identity, Digital Tourism Magazine Advertisement.

Introduction

Advertising is a tool for shaping a product image in consumers' minds (Widyatama, 2007). As an *above-the-line* (ATL) medium, magazine advertising has the advantage of selective market reach and longer message active periods. However, behind its pragmatic function, tourism magazine advertisements in Bali currently show problematic visual phenomena, especially related to the representation of female figures as the main illustration. The use of female figures in advertising has historically been based on aesthetic power and persuasive properties that are considered to be able to effectively attract consumer attention (Satria, 2022). Etymologically, the term "woman" is rooted in the word *empu* (master/supporter), which implies dignity and a central position. In Bali, the tradition of using women's beauty as a tourist magnet has existed since colonial times through poster media that represent local women as symbols of spirituality and cultural elegance (Swandi et al., 2021). However, today there is a significant shift in the visual paradigm. Local female figures with exotic characteristics are increasingly marginalized and replaced by non-local models (Western faces).

This shift indicates a reconstruction of beauty standards in Bali's tourism industry. White skin and Western facial features are now positioned as *subliminal messages* that form ideal beauty stereotypes in the eyes of people and tourists (Wicaksono, 2012). The use of this foreign model is not only a creative strategy but also reflects the dominance of the ideology of capitalism and Orientalism in visual communication. This directly obscures the spirit of the authentic identity of Balinese women, which should be the main foundation of culture-based tourism advertising.

This phenomenon is juridically contradictory to Bali Provincial Regulation Number 5 of 2020 concerning Standards for the Implementation of Balinese Cultural Tourism. The regulation firmly mandates that tourism promotion must be based on local wisdom. The neglect of local identity in magazine advertising, such as the use of foreign models who are consuming non-local products without a clear product correlation, can create message ambiguity and threaten the position of Balinese women in the creative industry (Tajeddini et al., 2017).

This shift in representation, theoretically, is a tangible form of commodity aesthetics. As Haug (1986) points out, in industrial systems, the visual appearance of a product is often manipulated to create promises of sensory

satisfaction that go beyond its original function. Furthermore, Haug argues that in capitalism, commodities must be "apparently" valuable before they are actually consumed. The use of non-local female models in advertisements for Bali tourism magazines serves as an "aesthetic promise". The model does not stop at being an illustration, but becomes a tool to spark consumer desire by offering a globally standardized 'high-end' lifestyle image.

Commodity aesthetics often use beauty and eroticism to wrap products. In this case, the female body is commodified; The beauty of the model is "lent" to a hotel entity or destination. This creates the illusion that by consuming these tourist products, consumers will get an aesthetic experience equivalent to the beauty of the model displayed. This tendency ignores local uniqueness because it is considered not in accordance with the tastes of the dominant market. The replacement of local women's faces with Western models shows that the industry considers "global beauty" to have a higher *exchange-value* than cultural use. This is a form of removal of Balinese women's authentic identity in favor of satisfying the capitalistic market aesthetic.



Figure 1. Hotel Magazine Ads in Bali with Non-Local Face Models
(Source: Research Document)

The empirical evidence in Figure 1 shows a real visual disconnection, namely, non-local female figures are shown consuming foreign culinary attributes (such as *macarons*) without the slightest representation of Balinese local identity. This fact validates Haug's theory of commodity aesthetics, namely that visual 'surfaces' are constructed in such a way as to create the illusion of universal international luxury. The validity of this argument is even stronger when it is clashed with the fact that although Bali has a juridical mandate through Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2020 to maintain 'Taksu' in the implementation of tourism, the practice on the ground actually shows a massive deconstruction of identity. The gap between regulation (*das sollen*) and visual reality (*das sein*) is authentic evidence of the existence of a crisis of representation that requires an in-depth study of Visual Communication Design. Through a comprehensive analysis of Visual Communication Design, this study aims to examine how Balinese women's identities are reconstructed and how aesthetic elements are used to insert certain

ideologies. The focus of the research is directed at the analysis of the shift of representation from locality to a postmodern aesthetic, to provide a critical foundation for industry players and policymakers to redefine promotional strategies that are not only commercially persuasive but also culturally sovereign.

The locus of this research is specifically set on advertising media in tourism digital magazines (*e-magazines*) that promote destinations, accommodations, and lifestyles in Bali. The selection of the locus for digital media is based on the shift in media consumption behavior after the COVID-19 pandemic, when Bali's tourism industry massively shifted its promotional channels from print media to digital platforms that have a global reach without geographical boundaries.

The locus of this research is operationally focused on advertisements published in leading tourism digital magazines operating in the jurisdiction of the Province of Bali, such as magazines managed by hospitality associations or tourism media vendors based in strategic tourism areas (such as Nusa Dua, Seminyak, and Ubud). These regions were chosen as representative loci because they are the epicenter of the meeting between international capital interests and local cultural regulations. The determination of the locus in digital magazine advertising is crucial because the media is at the forefront of shaping the visual perception of Bali in the eyes of the world. In the digital space, the deconstruction of Balinese women's identity occurs intensively, namely, the boundaries between the local and global spaces become blurred due to the dominance of commodity aesthetics (Nohl, 2001). By establishing the locus of digital media that remains juridically tied to the administrative area of Bali, this study can dissect the extent to which the implementation of Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2020 is complied with in the virtual public space. The formulation of the problem in this paper is: How is the deconstruction of Balinese women's identity visually constructed in tourism digital magazine advertisements through the aesthetic mechanism of commodities?

Research Methods

The article with the title "Deconstruction of the Aesthetics of Balinese Women's Identity in Tourism Digital Magazine Advertisements" is designed using a qualitative method with a descriptive-qualitative approach. As research that falls under the umbrella of the Visual Studies, this design is focused on dissecting visual phenomena using deconstruction strategies to dismantle the structure of Balinese women's identities in digital media.

The descriptive approach in this research is carried out through a process of data collection and recording based on the perspective of a relevant theoretical framework. The phenomena found in the field are described, interpreted, and comprehensively explained to answer the research questions. Given its qualitative nature, the analytical specifications in this study are supported by art interpretation and semiotic analysis techniques. Qualitative data refers to quality data obtained by visiting the locations of the research subjects and objects' activities, and the researcher conducts observations and interviews integrated with their activities (Mariyah, 2005).

The design of this research integrates several main theories that are intertwined as a framework of thinking, namely: Visual Communication and Advertising Design Theory is used to dissect formalistic aspects in digital tourism advertising in Bali, Semiotics theory is used to explore the identity of the female illustrations displayed, Commodity Aesthetics theory used to dismantle aesthetic values that have become intertwined with economic interests (visual capitalism).

Results and Discussion



Figure 2. Atlas Pearls And Perfumes Advertisement
(Source: Author's Document)

Analysis of the visual anatomy of the *Atlas Pearls and Perfumes* advertisement reveals a visual communication strategy that systematically deconstructs Balinese's local identity. Through the main illustration elements, the use of female figures with the physical characteristics of Western faces and white skin became the dominant markers that constructed high-end global beauty standards. The choice of this non-local model creates a sharp paradox to *the main headline* titled "The Spirit of Bali". Visually, the figure of Balinese women who are supposed to be authentic representations is actually "eliminated" from the promotional narrative, so that the value of Balinese is now redefined through the face of the West, which is considered to have more prestige value in the international market.

The sharpness of this deconstruction is further strengthened by the typographic aspects and color palette used. The use of *thin capital serif fonts* and the overall dominance of English give a sense of universal modern exclusivity, but at the

same time separate the message from the aesthetic roots and local Balinese script. The visual atmosphere built through pure white and pastel blue colors creates a very effective impression of *purity* to highlight the brilliance of pearl products as the main commodity. However, this choice of colour drastically removes the sense of organic exoticism that is usually attached to traditional Balinese imagery, replacing it with a cooler, more standardized postmodern aesthetic.

The commodity aesthetic of the female body in this advertisement is positioned as a "living mannequin" that lends its beauty to wrapping pearl products. This reality creates an 'aesthetic promise,' and consumers are directed to believe that by owning the product, they will get a 'Balinese spirit' displayed in a glamorous manner. The visual disconnect between the cultural promise in the text and the reality of the model in the image shows that the digital advertising industry tends to get rid of authentic representations of the Balinese soul in favor of achieving a *higher exchange value*. This practice clearly shows a neglect of local wisdom mandated in Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2020, as a form of deconstruction of the original identity of Balinese women in order to satisfy the tastes of the global capitalistic market.

The description shows that the Commodity Aesthetic mechanism of Wolfgang Fritz Haug works in this advertisement by manipulating 'aesthetic promises' to hide the underlying economic motives. In line with Haug's thinking, *Atlas Pearls and Perfumes* construct the image of beauty as a commodity, so that consumer desires shift from the objective function of the product to the aesthetic satisfaction that is artificial.

The visual appearance of products in the digital tourism industry system is often manipulated to create artificially sensory promises of satisfaction. The use of non-local female models in these advertisements serves as an instrument of sensory manipulation; the beauty of the model is 'lent' to pearl products to create the illusion that consumers will embrace an aesthetic experience equal to the model's charm. Haug argues that in capitalism, commodities must be "seen" as valuable through an alluring outward appearance before they are actually consumed. Therefore, the Western face shown goes beyond the function of illustration; At the same time, it is a medium to spark passion by presenting the image of a 'high-end' lifestyle that has become a global standard.

This mechanism systematically ignores local uniqueness because the authentic identity of Balinese women is considered to have no competitive *exchange-value* in the eyes of the dominant market compared to "global beauty". This phenomenon is a tangible form of the removal of Balinese women's identity, which is supposed to be a representation of the authentic Balinese soul, but for the sake of satisfying the capitalistic aesthetic of the market, the industry prioritizes the aesthetic promise of the West to accumulate capital rather than obeying the mandate of local wisdom.

The disconnection between the use of the narrative of "The Spirit of Bali" and the visual foreign model proves that commodity aesthetics has created a systemic identity crisis, namely, the reality of creative practices in the field tends to be

subject to the supremacy of Western tastes and ignores the juridical ideals contained in the Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2020.

The next ad is the ads *The Royal Purnama* and *The Anvaya* (Figure 3), which show the sharp contrast between the exclusivity of private space and cultural representation reduced to mere performance. Deconstructively, this ad operates a binary opposition between "Modernity/West" that occupies the center position and "Tradition/Local" that is drawn to *the* margins.

The illustration of the model in advertising has gone beyond its function as a decorative element, but has shifted into a fully commodified exotic object. On *The Anvaya's advertising panel*, the appearance of Balinese dancers visually marks the discrediting of the position of cultural subjects. In the lens of Commodity Aesthetics, the figure no longer represents the spiritual sovereignty that is the spirit of Balinese art, but is reduced to an "aesthetic promise" in the form of visual decoration. Its presence now only serves as a complement to the instrument for an exclusive and standardized banquet consumption experience.

The denial of local authenticity became increasingly evident through the selection of models with the physical characteristics of Western faces dressed in traditional clothing. This practice creates a paradox of exoticism; On the one hand, the advertisement sells a narrative of Balinese cultural distinctiveness, but on the other hand, it "grafts" a global aesthetic by removing the original representation of local faces. The use of Western facial features acts as an aesthetic engineering that aims to bridge the desire of the international market with the globalized high-end beauty standards, while at the same time confirming that Balinese exoticism is just a commodity that can be "worn" or released for the sake of lifestyle.

The dancers' gestures and expressions have undergone an image mechanization that alienates culture from its roots. The dancer's character is present as an exotic spectacle object that is constructed in such a way as to satisfy the tourist's gaze. This phenomenon is in line with Haug's theory of image manipulation techniques, a process that shifts the sacred value of Balinese culture for the sake of the exchange value of tourism products. Consequently, the Balinese identity in this advertisement is no longer a living cultural entity, but merely an aesthetic background that has been polished to enhance its commercial appeal in the eyes of a global audience.



Figure 3. Advertisement The Royal Purnama & The Anvaya
(Source: Author's Document)

The typography and visual language of the advertisement are written and designed in an English style; this fact deliberately creates social distancing. This mechanism builds an imaginary wall that states that these luxurious experiences are only for certain circles, while the authentic identity of the local culture is deliberately marginalized in favor of an aesthetic that is considered more "selling" globally. The dominance of the use of English can be seen through phrases such as "Taste of Bali" and "Immersive dining experiences" as a visual communication strategy that firmly establishes foreign tourists as the main audience. This choice of language creates an imaginary boundary that positions the local community only as a decorative servant, rather than as a dialogue partner in the information space.

This distance is further emphasized through the use of thin and elegant serif typography to build a minimalist image of modern luxury. Semiotically, the choice of fonts deconstructs the traditional impression of organic, then replaces it with an aura of global prestige. Through this visual processing, elements of Balinese script and local terminology are eliminated from the main information space, creating a tourism narrative that is exclusive and alienated from its own cultural roots.

The atmosphere of this advertisement is built through the calm and clear navy-blue color palette in The Royal Purnama section. The use of the mirror effect constructs what is called sterile global luxury. This creates an atmosphere of exclusive "private tranquility", but ideologically it shows a sharp disconnect because the atmosphere seems to be detached from the hustle and bustle of the real socio-cultural reality of Bali.

This ad's Property and Background are Lifestyle Symbols. The presence of a property in the form of a *modern-day bed* in the pool area affirms the identity of the tourism space, which is private and closed. In this composition, the Balinese identity (local architecture or landscape) is only presented as a "landscape" in the distance that is decorative in nature. Western high-end lifestyle properties are positioned as the main object, which deconstructively suggests that Bali's local identity has been "removed" from the center of tourism's private space and remains only as a background commodity.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper reveals that the deconstruction of Balinese women's identity in tourism digital magazine advertisements is carried out through a highly structured commodity aesthetic mechanism. This practice works by manipulating visual appearance to create an "aesthetic promise" that appeals to the global market, while simultaneously eroding the cultural and spiritual value inherent in the original identity. Balinese women's identity is no longer displayed as a sovereign cultural subject, but is reduced to an aesthetic object whose function is adjusted to the logic of capital. In this process, commodity aesthetics act as a uniform tool that forces local representation to submit to international beauty standards, so that the authentic Balinese women's identity slowly fades and is replaced by an image that is entirely oriented to market exchange rates.

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