

REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN TOURISM
PROMOTION OF BALI AND SAMARKAND ON INSTAGRAM: A
SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Tourism has increasingly evolved beyond its traditional role as an economic sector into a multidimensional social and cultural phenomenon that shapes identities, cultural meanings, and global perceptions of places. In the contemporary digital era, the emergence of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed tourism promotion by providing destinations with unprecedented opportunities to communicate directly with global audiences. Among these platforms, Instagram has become one of the most influential digital spaces for destination marketing because of its visual orientation, interactive features, and global reach. Through photographs, videos, captions, hashtags, and user engagement, Instagram enables tourism organizations to construct attractive destination images while simultaneously representing the identities, traditions, lifestyles, and cultural values of local communities. Consequently, tourism promotion should no longer be understood solely as a marketing activity but also as a sociocultural process through which meanings are produced, negotiated, and disseminated within the global digital environment.

Keywords: Social identity, tourism promotion, Instagram, representation, digital tourism, Bali, Samarkand, sociology of tourism, cultural identity, globalization.

Despite the rapid growth of research on digital tourism marketing and destination branding, existing studies have predominantly focused on marketing performance, destination image, tourist satisfaction, travel intention, and consumer behavior. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how tourism promotion constructs social identity and how digital media influence the representation of local cultures from a sociological perspective. The relationship between tourism promotion, identity construction, and globalization remains insufficiently explored, particularly in comparative studies involving destinations with distinct historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Addressing this gap, the present research investigates the representation of social identity in Instagram tourism promotion of Bali, Indonesia, and Samarkand, Uzbekistan, two internationally recognized cultural destinations that possess unique historical legacies and diverse cultural identities while increasingly participating in the global tourism economy.

Bali has long been recognized internationally for its Hindu traditions, artistic heritage, spiritual tourism, community-based cultural practices, tropical landscapes, and distinctive cultural performances. In contrast, Samarkand represents one of the oldest cities along the historic Silk Road and is internationally known for its Islamic architecture, Persian-Turkic heritage, historical monuments, and multicultural history. Although these destinations differ significantly in geographical location, historical development, religious traditions, and sociocultural contexts, both utilize Instagram as an important platform for promoting tourism and communicating destination identity to international audiences. The comparative analysis of these two destinations therefore provides an opportunity to understand how different societies strategically represent their identities while responding to similar processes of globalization and digital tourism promotion.



The primary objectives of this research are threefold. First, the study seeks to analyze how social identity is constructed and represented through Instagram posts promoting Bali and Samarkand. Second, it aims to compare the similarities and differences in the representation of cultural, social, religious, historical, and symbolic elements between the two destinations. Third, the research explores the sociological implications of these digital representations for local communities, destination branding, cultural preservation, and global audiences. By examining both visual and textual content, the study seeks to reveal how tourism promotion selectively emphasizes particular cultural narratives while simultaneously shaping international perceptions of authenticity, heritage, and local identity.

This study is theoretically informed by Hall's Representation Theory, which argues that media do not merely reflect reality but actively construct meaning through systems of representation. From this perspective, Instagram functions as a cultural institution that produces particular understandings of destinations by selecting specific images, narratives, and symbols. The study also applies Social Identity Theory developed by Tajfel and Turner to explain how collective identities are communicated and reinforced through tourism promotion, enabling destinations to construct distinctive identities that differentiate themselves from competing destinations. Furthermore, the concepts of globalization and glocalization provide an analytical framework for understanding how local cultural identities are continuously negotiated within global tourism markets, where destinations seek to preserve cultural uniqueness while adapting to international expectations and consumer preferences.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative comparative case study design. Data are collected from official tourism Instagram accounts promoting Bali and Samarkand, together with selected regional tourism accounts that actively contribute to destination promotion. The study focuses

on Instagram posts published between 2022 and 2024, including photographs, videos, captions, hashtags, and audience interactions. Data analysis employs qualitative visual and textual content analysis supported by thematic coding to identify recurring representations of culture, religion, heritage, community life, traditions, modernity, natural landscapes, and symbolic identity. Comparative analysis is subsequently conducted to examine similarities and differences in destination representation between Bali and Samarkand and to explore how digital tourism promotion contributes to broader sociological processes of identity construction and globalization.

The expected contribution of this research extends both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study contributes to the sociology of tourism by integrating representation theory, social identity theory, and globalization studies to explain how digital media participate in constructing destination identities within contemporary tourism promotion. Rather than conceptualizing Instagram merely as a marketing platform, the study positions social media as an active sociocultural arena in which meanings, identities, and cultural narratives are continuously produced and negotiated. Practically, the findings are expected to provide valuable insights for destination management organizations, tourism authorities, policymakers, and digital marketers seeking to develop culturally sensitive, socially inclusive, and sustainable tourism communication strategies. The comparative perspective further contributes to cross-cultural understanding by illustrating how different societies strategically represent local identities while participating in the increasingly interconnected global tourism industry.

Overall, this research seeks to advance academic understanding of the relationship between tourism, digital media, representation, and social identity. By comparing Bali and Samarkand, the study demonstrates how Instagram functions as a powerful medium through which destinations communicate

cultural values, negotiate local identities, and shape international perceptions within the context of globalization. The research therefore contributes to expanding sociological perspectives on digital tourism and provides a foundation for future studies examining the role of social media in the representation of culture, heritage, and identity in contemporary tourism.

Keywords: Social identity, tourism promotion, Instagram, representation, digital tourism, Bali, Samarkand, sociology of tourism, cultural identity, globalization.

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