



RELIGIOUS RITUALS AS PART OF BALINESE CULTURAL TOURISM IN DIGITAL ERA: A STUDY ON LIVE STREAMING OF TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Digitalization has transformed various aspects of life, including religious practices in the context of cultural tourism in Bali. This research explores the phenomenon of using online media in carrying out traditional Balinese Hindu ceremonial processions, as part of cultural tourism and its impact on religious authorities. Using a qualitative approach, this research analyzes how digitalization enables global access to sacred rituals and how these changes influence the perceptions of local communities, tourists and religious leaders. The findings reveal that the use of technology, especially online media, can increase the visibility of Balinese culture internationally, but also raises challenges related to the commodification of rituals and shifts in religious authority. Apart from that, there is starting to be a debate about the legality of online processions, this needs to be of special concern to policy-making authorities, especially in Hinduism. Several policy proposals were presented in this research. It is hoped that this study will be able to contribute to the discourse on the role of technology in the transformation of religious practices and cultural tourism, which has implications for cultural preservation policies and spirituality-based tourism management.

Keywords: Digitalization, Religious Rituals, Cultural Tourism, Online Media, Religious Authority, Bali

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has influenced various aspects of human life, including religious and cultural practices (Anisah & Marwah, 2024). In recent years, the integration of digital media, especially live broadcasts, has become a rapidly growing phenomenon in the religious and cultural tourism sector (Dwipayana, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly influenced changes in human paradigms, impacting face-to-face meetings and switching to the use of technology to conduct meetings. However, it is important to remember that virtual meetings cannot always completely replace face-to-face experiences.



Some aspects, such as direct physical interactions, informal networking, and the atmosphere of an event, cannot be fully replicated in a virtual environment (Pitria et al., 2023).

Bali, known for its deep Hindu traditions and rich cultural heritage, has seen an increase in the use of live broadcasts to broadcast sacred ceremonies to a global audience. This certainly overlaps with the development of technology. This change creates new dynamics in the way religious rituals are experienced, both by local communities and international audiences (Pinatih, 2021).

Live broadcasts of Balinese Hindu ceremonies, such as Melukat (purification ritual), otonan (birthday commemoration in Hinduism), pawiwahan (wedding) and various other purposes. While this provides greater access to Balinese culture, especially for the global Balinese diaspora and tourists who cannot attend in person, it also raises concerns about commodification and potential misinterpretation of sacred rituals (Nova, 2023). The growing presence of digital media in religious practice raises questions about its impact on the authenticity, sanctity and authority of traditional religious institutions in Bali.

The increasing digitization of religious rituals in Bali has sparked debate among scientists, religious leaders and tourism stakeholders. On the one hand, digital media can serve as a tool for cultural preservation and global engagement. On the other hand, the act of live broadcasting of sacred ceremonies can lead to the commodification of religious practices, reducing their spiritual meaning to a mere visual spectacle for online consumption. Furthermore, this phenomenon can challenge the traditional authority of religious leaders, as rituals become accessible outside their intended sacred spaces.

Despite growing academic interest in digital religion and cultural tourism, there is still limited research on the specific impacts of live-streamed religious ceremonies in Bali. This research aims to fill this gap by examining how digitalization, especially through live broadcasts, influences the perception, practice and authority of religious rituals in the context of Balinese cultural tourism.

The objectives of this research include analyzing the role of live broadcasts in transforming Balinese religious rituals on the impact of cultural tourism, examining the perceptions of local communities and religious leaders regarding the digitalization of sacred ceremonies, determining the potential shift in religious authority due to increased accessibility of rituals via digital platforms and assessing the broader implications of digitalization for the sustainability of Balinese cultural and religious tourism.

This research contributes to the growing discourse regarding digital religion, cultural tourism, and religious authority. With a focus on Bali, as a globally recognized spiritual tourism destination, this research provides insight into how local traditions adapt to technological advances while confronting issues of authenticity, commodification and religious governance. These findings will be invaluable to cultural policymakers, religious authorities, tourism stakeholders, and academics interested in the intersection between technology, religion, and tourism.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Balinese Religio-cultural Imaginaries and Rituals of Digital Materiality (Mohan, 2022) This work applies an anthropological and historical framework to explore how Balinese Hinduism may be studied through digital images and the use of messaging and social media applications.

Discourse of Melukat Ritual as a Self-Healing in the Context of Bali Cultural Tourism Development (Suarja et al., 2023). This study examines the Melukat purification ritual within Bali's cultural tourism, providing insights into how traditional rituals are integrated into the tourism sector.

Multiculturalism in Paradise: Emerging Ethnicity, Religion, Belief, and Tourism in Bali (Jayanti et al., 2023). This research explores the interplay between ethnicity, religion, belief, and tourism in Bali, offering a comprehensive view of how these elements coexist and influence each other.

Bali Temple VR: The Virtual Reality-based Application for the Digitalization of Balinese Temples (Darmawiguna et al., 2020). This paper discusses the development of a virtual reality application aimed at documenting Balinese temples, highlighting efforts in the digital preservation of cultural heritage.

This study contributes to the growing discourse on digital religion, cultural tourism, and religious authority. Focusing on Bali, a globally recognized spiritual tourism destination, this study provides insights into how local traditions adapt to technological advances while addressing issues of authenticity, commodification, and religious governance. The findings will be valuable to cultural policymakers, religious authorities, tourism stakeholders, and academics interested in the intersection of technology, religion, and tourism.

METHOD

Methodologically, this research falls into the category of empirical research. However, because the process of extracting various data refers to application platforms on the internet, this research can be called a study of phenomena on the internet, or in other terms netography (Rahman & Zulhaqqi, 2020). Apart from that, the objects related to all forms of interaction will be used as research data which researchers will analyze using a qualitative approach.

a. Research Design

A case study approach will be used to examine certain Balinese Hindu ceremonies that are often broadcast live, such as:

1. *Melukat* (purification ritual)
2. *Otonan* (birthday celebration in Hinduism)
3. *Pawiwahan* (wedding ceremony in Hinduism)

b. Data Collection Methods

1. Observation of rituals broadcast live, either online
2. Participation in religious ceremonies to understand traditional observances and their digital adaptations.

c. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to identify key themes related to ritual authenticity, religious authority, commodification, and public perception. Comparative analysis between traditional ritual settings and their digital representations to assess significant changes. One effective method is to produce more detailed analysis of the data to find important themes that emerge (Rozali, 2022). In addition, researchers also analyzed social media platforms (YouTube, Instagram, Facebook) to assess how rituals are presented and discussed in digital spaces, as well as reviewing online comments and discussions to understand audience reception and perceptions.

II. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Results

Based on qualitative data collected through ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and content analysis, this research reveals several key findings regarding the impact of live broadcasts of religious rituals on Balinese cultural tourism. Some religious rituals in Balinese Hinduism that are now starting to be transferred to using social media include the following:

Figure 1 comes from the Instagram page, where someone is seen performing a Hindu religious ritual, namely *otonan*. This post was posted by @denpasar.viral.

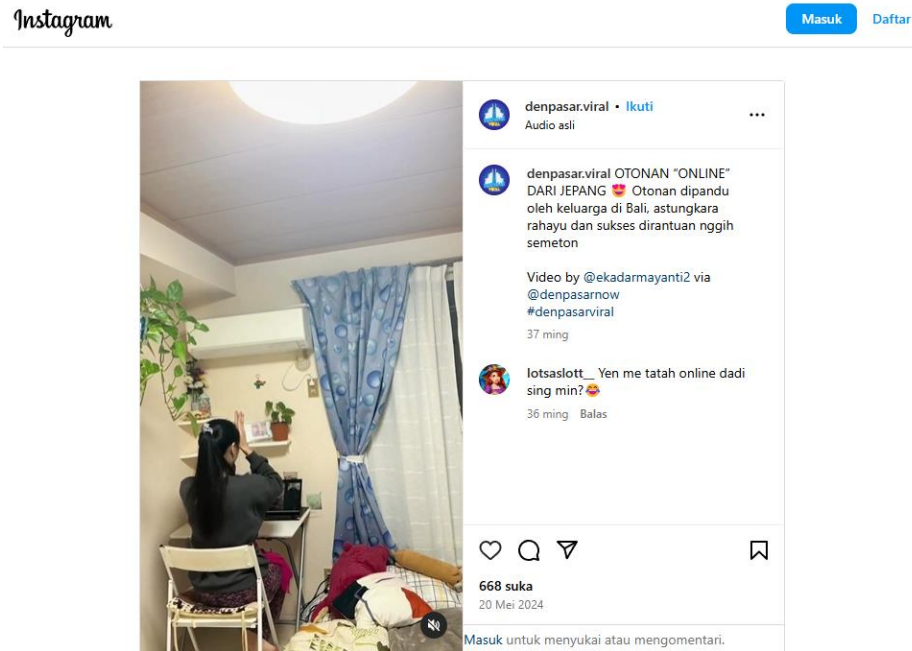


Figure 1. Netizens' Otonan Procession

(Source: <https://www.instagram.com/denpasar.viral/reel/C7LfX52Po6R/>)

Figure 2 comes from Instagram, in the post uploaded by @kintamanihariini you can see a religious ceremony taking place, namely *pawiwahan* a wedding procession name in bali.

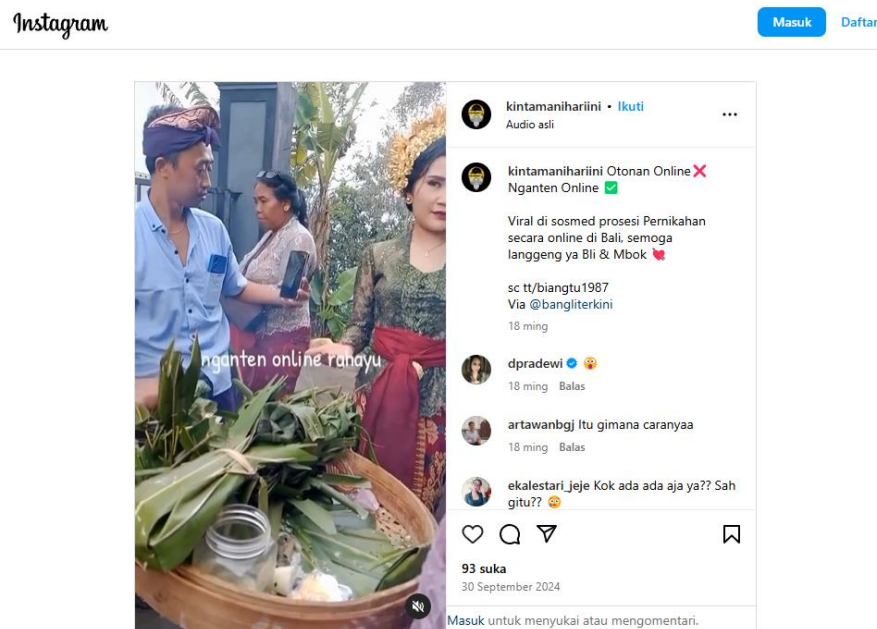


Figure 2. Netizens' Wedding Procession

(Source: <https://www.instagram.com/kintamanihariini/reel/DAhwWdTSZYP/>)

Figure 3 comes from TikTok with the account @ekadarmaya which posted about the *otonan* procession

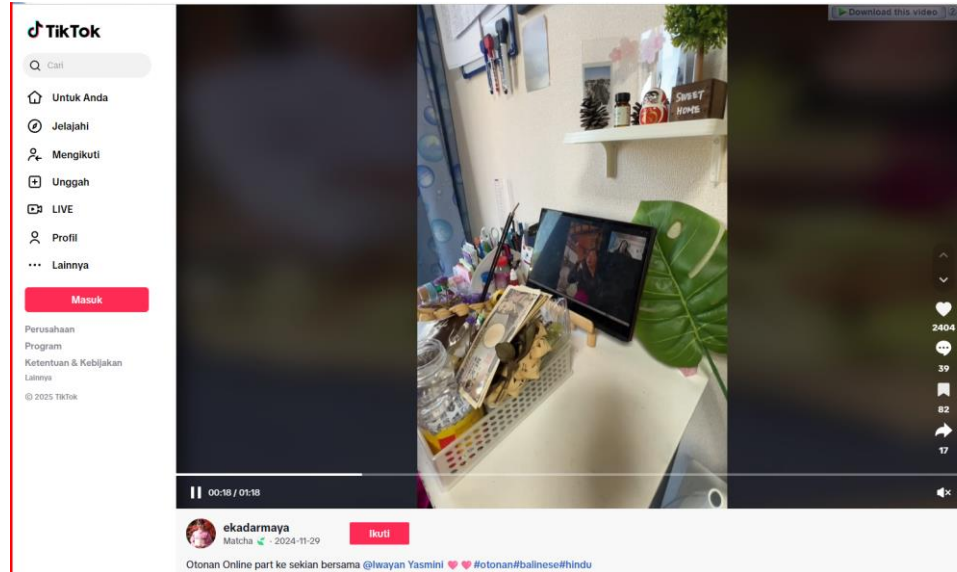


Figure 3. Netizens' Otonan Procession

(Source: <https://www.tiktok.com/@ekadarmaya/video/7442547495516917000>)

Figure 4 comes from Facebook Mela Dianawati which posted about the *otonan* procession



Figure 4. Netizens' Otonan Procession(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1AAbc1t9pj/>)

Figure 5 from TikTok with the account @peramestiaa which posted about the *otonan* procession

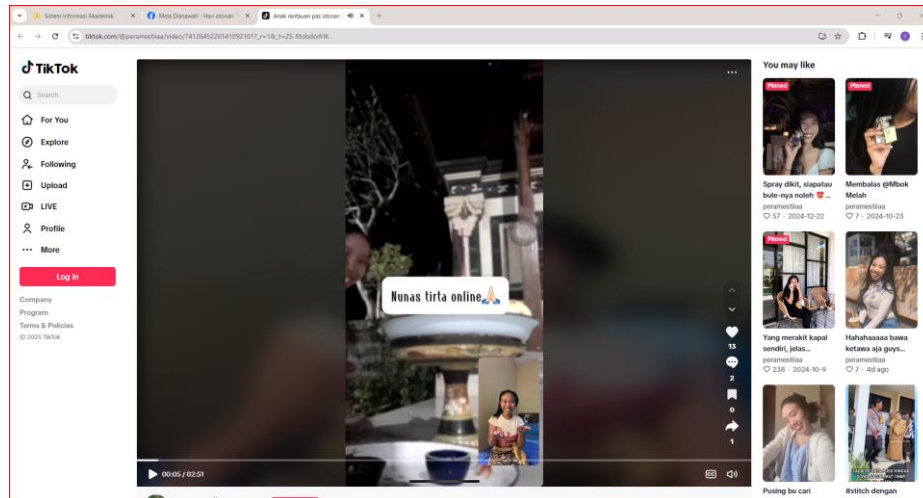
**Figure 5. Netizens' Otonan Procession**(Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSMdXASJB/>)

Figure 6 comes from TikTok with the account @_jikrahbalii which posted about the *wedding* procession

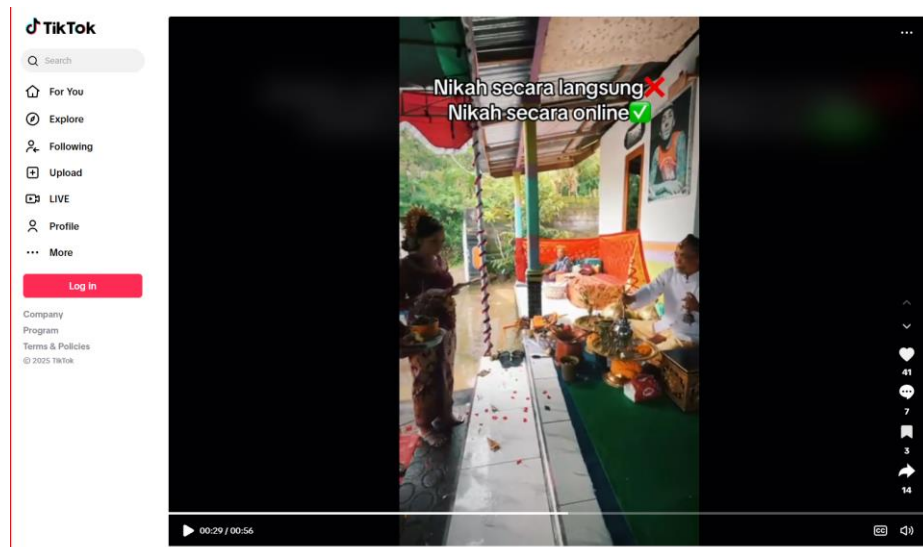
**Figure 6. Netizens' Wedding Procession**(Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSMdXQM1a/>)

Figure 7 comes from TikTok with the account @madamesuperstarindonesia which posted about the *Wedding* procession



Figure 7. Netizens' Wedding Procession
(Source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSMdXQFDN/>)

From the various screenshots above, the ceremony was carried out online due to differences in distance due to work, so to continue carrying out this ritual it is necessary to use online media. Based on these, several things were discovered from changing rituals into the realm of live broadcasts on social media:

a. Increased Global Accessibility and Cultural Visibility

Live streaming has expanded access to Balinese Hindu rituals, allowing a global audience, including the Balinese diaspora, to engage with sacred ceremonies in real-time. Digital platforms such as YouTube and Instagram have become virtual spaces for cultural education, where audiences learn about the meanings and practices of Balinese Hindu rituals. Some temples and religious leaders embrace digitalization as a means of cultural preservation, believing that it helps sustain interest in traditional ceremonies.

b. Shift in Religious Authority and Control over Rituals

Traditional religious leaders (Pemangku and Pedanda) express concerns over the loss of sacred control, as rituals become widely available online. Some Balinese Hindu priests argue that certain sacred aspects of rituals should remain private, emphasizing that rituals are meant to be experienced physically, within specific spiritual contexts. Younger religious leaders and cultural stakeholders tend to view digitalization as a tool for adaptation, balancing modernity with traditional values.

c. Commodification of Sacred Rituals

The increasing visibility of Balinese rituals through digital media has led to commercialization, where certain ceremonies are modified to appeal to tourism trends. Some religious sites have introduced paid live-streaming services, monetizing sacred ceremonies for global audiences, raising ethical concerns regarding the authenticity and integrity of rituals.

Rituals such as Melukat (purification ceremony) have been increasingly marketed as spiritual wellness experiences for tourists, blurring the line between religious practice and commercial tourism.

d. Changing Perceptions of Ritual Authenticity

Interviews with local Balinese communities reveal mixed reactions: Some believe digital access allows for wider cultural appreciation and continuity, ensuring that younger generations remain connected to their traditions. Others argue that digitalization

diminishes the ritual's authenticity, as virtual engagement lacks the spiritual essence and communal participation of in-person ceremonies. Tourists often perceive live-streamed rituals as cultural performances, rather than deeply spiritual experiences, leading to misinterpretations of their sacred meanings.

e. Ethical and Policy Implications for Religious Tourism

The Balinese government and Hindu religious authorities have begun discussing regulatory frameworks to balance digital openness with cultural sensitivity. Some temples have restricted or banned live streaming of highly sacred rituals to maintain their spiritual sanctity. Tourism boards are increasingly promoting "ethical tourism" guidelines, encouraging respectful engagement with Balinese religious traditions.

2. Discussion

a. Digitalization as a Double-Edged Sword

These findings suggest that although digital technology provides opportunities for cultural preservation and global engagement, it also challenges the sanctity and authority of religious rituals. This is in line with previous studies on digital religion, which argue that technological mediation alters sacred experiences and redefines religious authority (Tsuria et al., 2017). This is certainly considered beneficial by the community so that processions take place using online media, but on the one hand it will eliminate the unique characteristics of Bali in terms of tourism because there will no longer be an attraction for tourists if in the end all religious processions are carried out using online media.

b. The Debate on Cultural Heritage vs. Commercialization

The tension between authenticity and commodification reflects broader debates in religious tourism. Scholars highlight how tourism-driven ritual modifications often lead to a loss of spiritual depth, as seen at various religious tourism sites around the world. Bali now faces a similar dilemma: preserving its ritual purity while embracing digital innovation?

Several netizens commented on this new phenomenon, such as the account owner @lotsasslott_ commenting on the procession in picture 1 "*Yen metatah online dadi sing min?*" This account questions whether the *Metatah* procession (Hindu tooth-cutting procession) can be carried out.

In picture 2, the account @ekalestari_jeje commented "How come there are just some of them?? Is that legal?" This account questions the legitimacy of wedding processions carried out via online media. @yuda_brilyan commented "*Ane tawah-tawah gen ke tolih di era ne sekadi mangkin*" this account expresses surprise at what is happening at this time which perhaps has never been seen before. Another comment from the account @artawabgj "how do you do that?" comment on how to carry out the procession via online media

In picture 3, the account @i_don't_care comments "Why don't you go back to Bali, sis?" questioned why the person concerned didn't just carry out the procession in his original home, namely Bali, a comment that was slightly different from the main context came from the account @koukiii with the comment "Do you think that if you go abroad for worship, do you go 3x or not?" This account asks whether the person concerned adheres to worship according to the Hindu religion, namely 3 times a day

Based on the results of the researcher's interview with a Hindu religious figure named Ida Pandita Mpu Jaya Dhaksa Samyoga from Griya Sudha Giri Madana, his opinion about this phenomenon is "there is an element of business in current religious practices, there are also no prohibitions in the Hindu scriptures regarding this matter, but there are things that should not be done if the procession is curated with technology," he added. "The difference in location due to looking for a living is also the main trigger factor why this can happen."

Based on the findings from Balinese Hindu ceremonial organizers who are starting to switch to using technology, it is felt that it is necessary to create regulations which will aim to convince the public about the standard implementation of a ceremonial, what processions are permitted and what is not and what the legality of a procession is if carried out using online media.

c. Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Cultural Tourism

Given these challenges, the study suggests several policy recommendations:

1. Regulating live streaming of sacred rituals, ensuring only appropriate ceremonies are broadcasted.
2. Encouraging religious leaders to engage in digital literacy, so they can better manage online representations of their traditions.
3. Developing cultural tourism policies that respect the sacredness of Balinese rituals, ensuring digitalization enhances rather than dilutes religious meaning.
4. Provide training to Hindu religious leaders who are ritual leaders in small-scale communities, so that they are better able to maintain the validity of rituals and propriety in choosing which processions may or may not use online media
5. Providing understanding to the public through Hindu authority institutions regarding the use of online media in the context of carrying out religious processions

III. CONCLUSIONS

This research contributes to the discourse on digital religion, cultural tourism, and religious authority, by highlighting the complex interactions between technology, tradition, and commodification in Bali. While live broadcasting increases cultural visibility, it also raises critical concerns regarding the authenticity of rituals, religious control, and tourism. The trend of transitioning processions to using online media, if carried out massively, will affect the attractiveness of Bali in the eyes of tourism, thereby reducing tourists' interest in visiting Bali. Hopefully, several policy formulations proposed in this research will be able to maintain Balinese Hindu religious traditions and processions so that they are more organized and continue to maintain Bali tourism in the future. Future research should explore the long-term impact of digitalization on Balinese Hindu practices and develop sustainable strategies for preserving spiritual traditions in the digital age.

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