

ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE GAY TOURISM PHENOMENON AT SEMINYAK, BALI

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to discover the public's perception in regards to a growing tourism trend worldwide, which is the gay tourism phenomenon. With growing numbers of the LGBT community worldwide, gay tourism is seen as a tool to increase tourism activities in most of western societies. Bali is seen as the most liberal island among Indonesia's seventeen thousand islands, its liberal society has accepted the whole concept of gay tourism with rising destinations promoting it capturing a lot of demands. As the largest Muslim country in the world, majority of the Indonesian public does not accept the whole idea of gay tourism being installed in Indonesia, causing different opinions. This research carried out a qualitative approach through direct observations at gay tourism destinations at Seminyak area, Bali, as well as interviews with employees of gay bars, and the general public. Findings revealed that even though it's a growing trend and the whole concept is getting accepted, most of Indonesia's general public still does not accept the adaptation of it due to internal and external factors. As a contributor of the economy, it could still be concluded that gay tourism would not be developing in the future for Bali and Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Stated inside the 1945 Constitution No 6 1996 chapter 1, an archipelago nation is a nation that consists of islands. Indonesia is one of the biggest archipelago nation in the world with tons of natural resources (Mujib, 2020). In fact, this made Indonesia a country full of tourism potential, with its strategic location, located between the continents of Asia and Australia, as well as the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean (Mujib, 2020).

The tourism industry in Indonesia is considered one of many sectors that contributes a lot towards the Indonesian economy, due to increasing number of visitors each month and year (Lubis & Pinem, 2021). It can be said that Indonesia offers thousands of tourist destinations from natural to manmade, however Indonesia is a country famous for offering special interest tourism for psychologically segmented markets wanting to enhance their particular interest. Most common examples would be cultural tourism, culinary tourism, and adventure tourism (Wu, Lin, & Wang, 2020).



Figure 1

Amount of International Visitors to Indonesia (Kemenpareraf, 2022)

Another example of special interest that has a growing number of interest, is pink tourism or could also be known as gay tourism. Gay Tourism is tourism activity that is targeted for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community to travel across the globe and meet up with other LGBT fellows (Gevisser, 2020). Originating since the Grand Tour era (17th century CE), gay tourism's main objective is just to connect people of the same interest belonging to the same community, but then rapid number of members grew during the Victorian era especially in giant European capitals such as Berlin, Paris, and London. Growing numbers of the LGBT community causes growing entertainment facilities across Europe, in order to accommodate their daily and tourism interest. Growing facilities pulled a lot of interest, Figure 2 shows how dominant the LGBT community within the present day, which causes gay tourism activities to increase and spread worldwide.

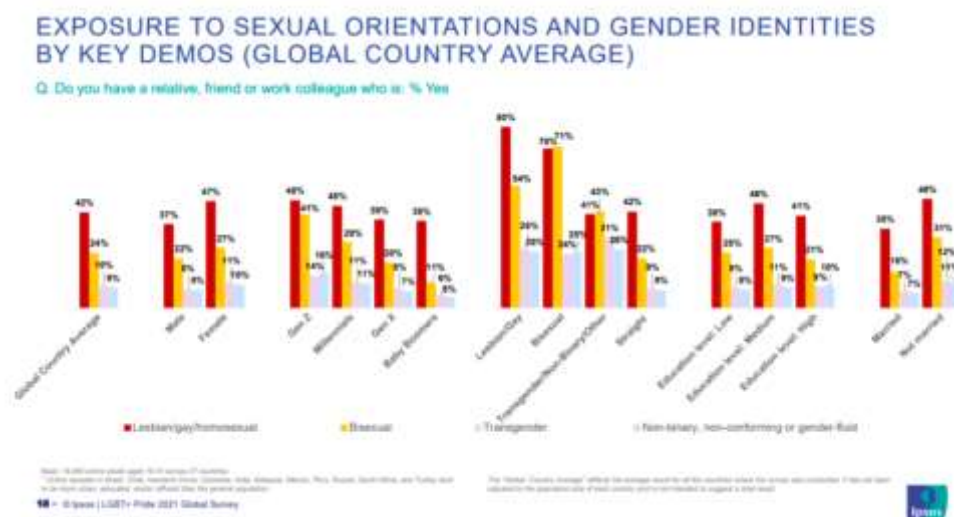


Figure 2

Average Rate of LGBT Sexual Orientation 2021 (Ipsos, 2021)

The LGBT concept is still considered to majority of the world's conservative mindset, including Indonesia with high orientation towards religion (Fealy & Ricci, 2019). Although LGBT still owns a bad reputation in Indonesia, plenty of western influence influences younger Indonesians, causing them to accept the whole LGBT concept or even becoming part

of the LGBT community itself (Wijaya, 2020). Due to different opposing perceptions, the gay community finds it difficult to travel and conduct gay tourism, so this leads to the creation of the gay space (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2017). The gay space consists a designated area which allows LGBT members and non-LGBT members to become themselves without any sorts of judgement, it protects everyone in it physically and mentally (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2017).

Although the presence of the LGBT community still considered a taboo in Indonesia, Bali's liberal society adapting the Hindu religion does not go against the LGBT community. It made it the perfect destination for the LGBT community to enjoy the natural beauty of the island, as well as cultural tolerance they adapt. The growth of gay community in Bali started in the 1930's and continues to grow up to today (Gorman-Murray & Nash, 2017). Bali offers a lot of touristic areas for both international and domestic tourists, the Seminyak area is considered the one of the pioneers promoting gay tourism, Joe Bar and Mixwell Bar are two of the destinations for gay tourism.

Considering that Bali is still part of Indonesia which adheres to the eastern culture being associated with religion, Bali also still adheres to its traditional customs (Ardhana & Wijaya, 2017), it is necessary to know what are the perceptions towards this phenomenon from the local community. The phenomenon of gay tourism also needs to be known from both social and economic perspective. Based on this background, the researchers are interested in examining the local community's perceptions of gay tourism in Seminyak, Bali as well as highlighting the social and economic impacts towards Bali and its tourism scenes, and also the Indonesian tourism scene

METHODOLOGY

This research uses the method of qualitative descriptive approach, which can be defined as a method without the use of statistical analysis but using the power of analysis theoretical research from related academic journals, as well as private documents, field observations by observers and research themselves, and interview results from relevant and reliable sources. Primary data was gathered from field observations, as well as interviews with relevant informants, while secondary data were gathered from relevant researches in relation to gay tourism. A purposive sampling method with specific criteria were used to scale down the total number of informants (Ardhana & Wijaya, 2017). Employees from the gay bars are employees with power and ownership, while the general public were both customers of the gay bars and individuals living closeby or affected by the gay bars.

A total of five informants were interviewed for this research, two from the gay bar and three from the general public. Ayubie Tsunami (male transgender) as the drag queen of Bali Joe Bar, Seminyak gave an opinion as one of the senior entertainers of the gay tourism scene at Seminyak Bali. Ni Luh Putu Sekari (female), a parking attendant at the gay tourism scene at Seminyak, Bali gave her point of view in regards to the whole situation taking place at Seminyak. Bagus Budiarta (male) and Ni Putu Dewi (female) gave their opinions as few of the general publics. Lastly, I Nyoman Arya (male) a local merchant nearby, gave his opinion regarding how businesses are affected within the area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Researcher did a direct observation towards the Seminyak, Bali area. Based on the result from the direct observation, Seminyak is a destination that is being loved by both locals and foreigners, and both daytime and nighttime. Seminyak is a free enterprise zone where locals gets to set up their businesses such as accommodations, tour operators, souvenir shops, car and motorcycle rentals, private beaches, and food and beverages. Day times are usually spent by the families and elders, either doing shopping, window shopping, spending time at cafes, or enjoying their time at other family-friendly tourist attractions such as the beaches and the beach clubs (Sigg, 2016). Relatively quiet and calmer, especially being compared to infamous neighboring Kuta which was developed much more earlier. Night times are usually for the younger generations to enjoy the night scenes such as the bars and dance clubs (Talbot, 2016). Alcohols are also very accessible in the night scenes of Seminyak, being present not just in bars and night clubs, but also in mini marts and direct dealers, which makes the daytime and nighttime quite the complete opposite.



Figure3
Souvenir Shop at Seminyak (Personal Documentation, 2023)

Types of night clubs in Seminyak area varies, from high-end prestigious night clubs, to low-cost uncivilized night clubs. Seminyak is famous for offering three gay bars next to each other as seen in Figure 4, Mixwell, BaliJoe, and Six Bar. It attracts the LGBT community across the world as the whole area itself gave a lot of attraction for the LGBT community inside and outside the clubs. Inside the club, it offers specific entertainment for the LGBT community with Gogo dancers and drag queens doing the performance, as seen in Figure 6 and 7.



Figure4

3 Gay Bars in Seminyak (Personal Documentation, 2023)



Figure 5

Gogo Dancers at BaliJoe (Personal Destination, 2023)



Figure 6

Drag Queen Entertainment at BaliJoe (Personal Documentation, 2023)

The place was crowded with visitors from both the LGBT community and non-LGBT community (Talbot, 2016). According to the direct interview with one of the tourists, stated that the LGBT community came for the purpose of gay tourism to interact with other gay individuals, meanwhile the non-LGBT community came out of curiosity or they got invited

by friends from the LGBT community. Most of them are also friends of the performers and are present to support their friends.

Another uniqueness which raised some eyebrows of the local community, is that transgender individuals dressed in women dress are present outside of the bars ([Winfield, 2019](#)). They are selling sexual services, just like what prostitutes would do. The difference with prostitutes is that they are targeting the LGBT community for their kind of sexual experiences, as can be seen in figures 6 and 7.



Figure6
Transgender Outside the Bars (Personal Documentation, 2023)



Figure 7
Transgender Outside the Bars (Personal Documentation, 2023)

Direct interviews from different evidences of different categories, all mentioned their personal opinion regarding the practice of gay tourism ([Farmaki & Kladou, 2020](#)). Based on Mr. Nyoman's interview, he mentioned that, he was shocked at first to see the growing number of bars and activities around it. He was not surprised though because he knew that from the older Bali days, the LGBT community already existed and created their own scene, however not as booming and accepted as today. Mr. Nyoman mentioned that they acted just like a normal couple and a normal human being, so there's nothing to be bothered about. Mrs. PutuSekari, as a parking attendant mentioned that, the Seminyak location is already as

suitable as possible and can be marked as a gay tourism spot. She mentioned as well regarding growing numbers of gay tourists, and it became a “must see” destination for them.

Another interviewee Mr. Bagus, a local who often passes Bali Joe Bar said that, everyday these gay bars are filled with visitors. During weekdays especially in the low seasons, might not be that many but they are still there, however during the holiday seasons the places are packed with gay tourists of different culture. The roads are also packed as well causing a heavy traffic jam. Mrs. Putu also added the same fact as Mr. Bagus, and added that gay tourists are also present on the roadsides, visible to other visitors and locals. To strengthen the facts about gay tourism in Seminyak the researcher decides to interview AyubieTsunamie who is a transgender “drag queen” and he said, “Yes, this area has long been famous for gay tourism. We tried moving to the Kuta or Legian area, and it was not welcomed positively, there were few tourists or people who view gay tourism as a changemaker that could bring good things, instead the majority saw it with a negative view. So this Seminyak area, especially the Bali Joe Bar area, becomes the nest for the gay community, not just gay people but all the LGBT community. They (LGBT people) can be free to do activities and travel safely here.”

1. Internal Factors

b. Internal

Based on the interview with the respondents they said about their own perception both internally and externally about this phenomenon (Farmaki & Kladou, 2020). Mr. Nyoman as a street retailer said that he does not have any negative or positive opinion regarding the gay tourism phenomenon. He accepts their presence within the Seminyak area as the community really brings positive impact for his store. He believed that the LGBT community are also human beings that needs to be respected, and so far he got all the respect from the community. “There are a lot of flirts and cat callings. That is a normal thing we would get here in Bali, especially in the night scenes full of drunk individuals” he added, however the best response would be ignorance. He also stated that he wouldn’t take advantage of them like opening a gay accommodation or others, he would prefer stay neutral and let his regular business continue, as well as being a support for the gay tourists who are visiting the Seminyak area.

Mrs. Putu Sekari gave her opinion quite similar to Mr. Nyoman, she represented the neutral side of it especially internally. She quoted, “I got nothing against it personally, my job as a parking attendant here would only say, as long as they stick to the rules and can cope properly, I would be satisfied.” Same as Mr. Nyoman, the increasing numbers of the LGBT community had benefited her job through the years. She added, that there are uncooperative tourists from the LGBT community rejecting to pay the parking fee, however she sees that as a normal thing in Bali especially Seminyak, with all the drunk individuals spreading around the area.

According to the interview with the general public, both were able to give different opinions (Oosterveld-Vlug, Pasman, van Gennip, Willems, & Onwuteaka-Philipsen, 2013). Both respected the community, however both came with opposing opinions and concerns, so that they prefer to stay out of it. Mr. Bagus stated that they are human beings and needs to be respected, he also added that Bali is an island for tourists and within the hospitality and tourism industry the LGBT community is also being heavily respected, as tourists or as fellow employees. He believed that this is a true opportunity to promote tourism in

Indonesia, and could also give a perception to the world that Indonesia is open for everyone. He does have concerns because the majority of the Muslim population of the country is not accepting it, so that it is kind of tricky. He stated that it is a good innovation to open up the idea, however it might not be seen as fast growing due to it still being seen as a taboo. On the other hand Mrs. Dewi stated her concern, she stated that she's concerned regarding the health conditions. She knew that the LGBT community could bring sexual disease to the general public, she's much concerned regarding the spread of AIDS and HIV towards the general public.

The transgender drag queen Ayubieon the other hand said, "I have been in this industry for 17 years, with the idea of gay tourism being promoted here in Bali and across the world, I am very happy to hear." He stated that he went through all the struggles of being an openly gay individual within society, but thankful that being in Bali it is much respected than other parts of Indonesia. He's also thankful that Seminyak still has the permit to operate gay destinations promoting gay tourism, so that public perception would eventually change, but most importantly he would still be able to receive his income in order for him to live his daily life and pay his bills. He's aware of all the risks of being an openly gay individual, but he continues hoping that with the increasing number of gay tourism, the public's perception in regards to the LGBT community could eventually shift.

c. External

The public perception regarding the gay tourism phenomenon would also have external factors influencing it (Hattingh & Spencer, 2017). Mr. Nyoman's opinion and observation regarding the LGBT community is quite unique, he mentioned that the Seminyak area is the perfect location for gay tourism as the Seminyak area's tourists are mostly foreign international tourists. During the migration of tourists from Kuta and Legian towards Seminyak, Kuta and Legian still continues to grow but number of domestic tourists are increasing towards those areas. As domestic tourists increase, the Kuta and Legian area would not be suitable for gay tourism due to the Indonesian perception of gay tourism being taboo. He observes that a lot of the gay tourists are shopping at civilized mini marts across his store, even though they are selling the same product. He's still thankful enough that his store is still able to capture the gay market.

Mrs. Putu Sekar said the same thing as Mr. Nyoman, she stated that Seminyak was the origin of gay tourism, so it became the top of mind for gay tourism. She saw other gay bars opening in other areas, but unfortunately it wasn't successful. The gay bars in Seminyak would still allow the LGBT community to express themselves completely and the entertainers fits them more, this is another reason why she stated how successful this area is. Mrs. Putu also mentioned that the parking system is being properly managed by her and her colleagues, so it does not bring negative impacts for other visitors trying to visit Seminyak especially in terms of traffic management.

Mr. Bagus and Mrs. Dewi may have negative perception and concerns and externally, but positive when it comes to external factors. Mr. Bagus stated that the behavior of the entertainers located in front of the bar is not becoming a threat towards the general public, they do not harm and disturb other tourists. "In Bali we have places with annoying hosts trying to capture customer, they would try using all methods," said Mr. Bagus. Ironically the hosts located in front of the bars are not doing those sort of things (Hattingh & Spencer, 2017). The LGBT community present within the area does not apply act hostile as well

towards the other tourists, they are just behaving as normal human beings. “They may do things which we find a bit unusual such as same sex kissing,” added Mr. Bagus, but back again it comes back to us on how we view them and our attitude towards them.

Mrs. Dewi on the other hand praised the bars in terms of sound management. She is amazed how the bars could minimize the noise levels within the area, so that hotels and local houses will not be effected by it. Even though mentioned earlier that traffic is being managed carefully, she mentioned that sometimes traffic could still occur. That is due to the fact of taxis and online taxis are always present either in trying to get customers or trying to drop off customers. Traffic is always present in Balinese streets, so she sees this as something normal rather than unusual.

Meanwhile Ayubie, as an entertainer stated the same thing as Mr. Bagus. He stated that Kuta area is full of locals and domestic tourists who are still against the phenomenon of gay tourism. He added, “As an entertainer it is important to be our true self and also offer what the market really wants, if there are one or two guest unsatisfied with the way we perform, we would no feel comfortable as well.” He also stated that Seminyak is perfect because compared to other areas, number of bars and night clubs are still being controlled, so that there is an appropriate number of tourists being entertained, and not overflowing.

2. Impacts

a. Positive Impacts

The first interviewee Mr. Nyoman mentioned all the positive impacts of gay tourism towards him, he mentioned that he did not receive any negative impacts at all. First thing was he mentioned that there are no impacts especially in regards to Balinese ceremonies, especially with a lot of them taking place without a fixed date. All the Balinese traditional society could still perform their rituals without being distracted by the presence of gay tourism. He also mentioned regarding economic upgrade, in which he receives more customers from the presence of gay tourism. All the street vendor and small business owners experience the same thing due to the increasing number of tourists ([Abdullah, 2022](#)). Most importantly the best positive impact it possibly brings is that the Balinese tolerance towards the LGBT community increases and its starting to get accepted in the Balinese society.

Mrs. Putu stated similar things to Mr. Nyoman, the most important things would be gay tourism is not interfering with Balinese customs. Mrs. Putu also added that the places conducting gay tourism truly respects the employee’s traditional customs and would not hold back or forbid their employees to go for traditional public holidays. As the parking attendant of the Seminyak area, they are economically affected as way in a good way, as there are increasing numbers of tourists within the area. Mrs. Putu admitted as well that she is economically affected when it’s high season, and all her colleagues are affected as well.

The general public represented by Mr. Bagus and Mrs. Dewi stated that the aspect that is affected the most is economic factor. A lot of their relatives and family got jobs, as well as opportunities to sell items and become an entrepreneur. Salaries are affected as well indirectly, most of Balinese’s salaries are increased. Socially they have the same opinion as the others, stating that gay tourism does not affect Balinese customs, which is a big part and factor for Balinese. Mr. Bagus added another important aspect, which is he stated that

the presence and increasing number of gay tourism activities would teach the younger generations tolerance and acceptance, something that the older generation is having difficulties with. He believed this could create a better impact for the future of Bali and Indonesia.

From the perspective of the entertainer Ayubie, he confirmed all the opinions of the other stakeholders. “We respect the Balinese traditional customs, that’s our number one principle. If it’s an important holiday and we need to shut down, we will without any further protest,” said Ayubie. He also added that economically all the employees of the gay bars are affected as well, with growing number of tourists, new sorts of innovations are added and these innovations resulting to extra tips. Work also becomes long hours especially during the high season, overtime is present as well which makes all the employees make higher income (Messenger, 2018).

b. Negative Impacts

For negative impacts two of the general public are being asked and both of them addresses their own concerns (Branley-Bell & Talbot, 2020). Mr. Bagus stated about the negativity of feminism, feminism may not be something negative, however the gay tourism activities are pushing the younger generations to become feminists. “They complain and do a lot of feminist protests, meanwhile there are is nothing to be protest,” stated by Mr. Bagus. These feminist groups are not even wearing women dress, but they say they belong to the community.

Mrs. Dewi stated that a lot of younger generations are not getting the concept right as they knew about the LGBT concept from a young age. She mentioned that during her son’s events at school, she saw male students wearing women dress. To some older generations that is still a concept that is not accepted and possible (Corazza, 2016). Even the concept is being accepted worldwide, a lot of Indonesians still doesn’t accept the LGBT concept and no one could predict when the whole nation or the whole world could really accept it completely.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of direct observation on site and direct interviews with relevant stakeholders, so far it can be concluded that public perception towards the phenomenon of gay tourism at Seminyak, Bali is leaning towards positive. There are two factors that can influence the different perceptions of the public, namely internal factors and external factor. Internal factors are factors that are influenced by the self itself, while external factors are factors that are influenced from the external environment. Out of five sources being interviewed, one out of five had a much more doubtful opinion compared to the other four, influenced by internal factors. A doubtful opinion and her concerns do not mean that there is no chance for gay tourism to not succeed, would only raise ethical concerns but overall, it can be concluded that gay tourism is starting to get accepted especially in Bali.

Apart from perception, gay tourism created a lot of impacts as well for the local community. Impact is divided into two, namely, impact positive and negative impacts. From these two impacts, what happens is: The main focus of research is the impact of social aspects and economy. Economically this phenomenon has a high positive impact especially when talking about rising income and wages for a lot of gay tourism stakeholders due to the rise of gay tourism demand. From a social point of view, it does not have any effect on most

Balinese, as this phenomenon does not disturb the holy respected rituals and ceremonies of the Balinese community, something a lot of night clubs and other recreational areas failed to do. The well-managed traffic system also plays a big part that made the Seminyak people are still living comfortably and still be able to carry out their daily routines.

It can overall be concluded that gay tourism activities in Seminyak, Bali, is not completely seen positively by the general public, however has been widely accepted by the Balinese community positively because most of them have a positive impact on the local society. Seeing that the community's response is not yet complete positive outlook and lack of movement from the government help gay tourism activities. Promoting gay tourism in Indonesia would still be considered difficult as there are still ethical concerns from the point of view of Indonesia's Muslim majority and conservative eastern culture. With the local Hindu culture of being open and liberal in Bali, gay tourism is starting to get accepted, even though it would only be centered within the Seminyak area as other touristic areas are still accommodating local tourists from other parts of Indonesia. Development of gay tourism in Indonesia would still be considered slow or might not be spreading across the nation in the near future, but would survive and innovate around Seminyak, Bali.

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