

Sustainability Transition in Bali Tourism: Thematic Trends and Governance Gaps

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of sustainable tourism in Bali from 2022 to 2026, a critical period for post-pandemic recovery and paradigm shifting. Using a qualitative thematic analysis approach, the study reviewed 30 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2022 and 2026. The articles were identified through a systematic search of the Google Scholar database using keywords related to sustainable tourism in Bali and were selected based on relevance to sustainability practices, governance, environmental management, and cultural preservation. Findings reveal a significant transition toward community-based and spiritual tourism models, driven by local wisdom such as Tri Hita Karana. However, the analysis identifies a persistent 'institutional gap' caused by regulatory fragmentation between governmental authorities and traditional village leadership (Desa Adat). While ecological crises have accelerated the adoption of decarbonization strategies, digital technology integration remains a double-edged sword, risking cultural commodification. This study contributes to the sustainable tourism literature by providing a thematic synthesis of recent research and highlighting the importance of governance coordination, environmental management, and culturally sensitive digital innovation in supporting sustainable tourism development in Bali.

Keywords:

Community Empowerment; Cultural Commodification; Ecological Resilience; Institutional Gaps; Policy Harmonization.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in Bali is currently at a critical juncture in its developmental trajectory. The post-pandemic period (2022–2026) not only signifies economic recovery but also marks a paradigm shift from mass tourism toward a more sustainable and value-based model. Recent literature indicates that the integration of local wisdom, such as Tri Hita Karana, has become a fundamental basis for formulating green business and marketing strategies in Bali (Ardani et al., 2025; Sitiari et al., 2024). This phenomenon is further reinforced by the emergence of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) models and tourism villages, which position local communities as the primary agents of empowerment, thereby ensuring a more equitable distribution of economic benefits (Gede Sutarya, 2022; Januar, 2024; Oka & Subadra, 2024).

However, despite the growing academic enthusiasm for sustainable tourism, significant gaps persist in both the literature and practical implementation. First, regulatory fragmentation remains evident, resulting in government policies that are often misaligned with the authority of desa adat (customary villages), thereby creating uncertainty in destination governance (Palguna et al., 2023; Wiryawan et al., 2026). Second, although digital technologies such as QR-based interpretation have begun to be adopted (Pramesti et al., 2026; Widiati et al., 2023), their effectiveness in preserving cultural sacredness without falling into excessive commodification remains underexplored (Choe & Mahyuni, 2023; Mudana et al., 2025). Third, many existing studies remain largely conceptual and provide limited technical roadmaps for the integrated mitigation of waste and pollution crises (Ningsih & Fachrurreza, 2025; Salam et al., 2024; Surya & Nugraha, 2022).

The urgency of this study is grounded in mounting ecological pressures of an existential nature. The surge in tourist arrivals commonly referred to as revenge tourism has further strained Bali's environmental carrying capacity (Bellinda & Kusuma, 2024; Rahjasa, 2026). Without strategic, data-driven interventions, decarbonization initiatives and low-carbon tourism will remain mere slogans without tangible impact (Apriani et al., 2024; Pertama et al., 2022; Pratama et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2026). Failure to harmonize economic growth with environmental sustainability risks leading to the permanent degradation of local identity (Apliant et al., 2023; Prasiasa et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study is of critical importance as it seeks to synthesize emerging trends and identify institutional gaps from 30 recent literature sources, with the aim of providing a strategic roadmap for a more resilient future of tourism in Bali (Diwyarthi et al., 2026; Esta & Wirantari, 2025; Laksmi & Saputra, 2025; Made Pageh et al., 2022; Natalia & Wiranata, 2026; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Suardani et al., 2026; Surya & Nugraha, 2022).

Based on the complexity of the issues and the urgency outlined above, this study formulates four fundamental research questions. First, in terms of model transformation, it examines the effectiveness of community-based tourism and spiritual tourism models in ensuring the economic sustainability of local communities. Second, regarding the ecological crisis, it investigates the extent to which decarbonization policies and waste management practices can mitigate the negative impacts of post-pandemic overtourism. Third, in relation to governance gaps, it explores the key factors influencing the emergence of institutional gaps in the synchronization of sustainable tourism regulations at both local and regional levels. Finally, with respect to cultural authenticity, the study analyzes how the integration of digital technologies can support the preservation of cultural values without compromising the sacredness of Balinese traditions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using thematic analysis to synthesize trends and gaps in the implementation of sustainable tourism in Bali. The selection of this method is based on its capacity to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) in depth across diverse and heterogeneous literature, thereby enabling a more nuanced understanding of complex sociocultural and ecological issues compared to conventional quantitative methods. The data were derived from 30 scientific articles purposively selected to represent the dynamics of post-pandemic tourism within the 2022–2026 period. Data collection was conducted through a systematic search of google scholar databased between January and March 2026. databases using a combination of specific keywords, namely: “Sustainable Tourism in Bali,” “Sustainable Tourism Implementation in Bali,” and “Tourism Sustainability Practices in Bali.” Google Scholar was selected due to its broad coverage of tourism, sustainability, environmental management, and social science literature relevant to Bali tourism studies. Searches were performed on 10 January, 10 February, and 15 March 2026 to ensure comprehensive coverage of recently published studies.

Articles were excluded if they: (1) focused on destinations outside Bali; (2) were conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, theses, or dissertations; (3) were duplicate records; or (4) did not provide sufficient relevance to the research objectives. Articles were included if they: (1) were published between 2022 and 2026; (2) were peer-reviewed journal articles; (3) focused on sustainable tourism issues in Bali; (4) discussed governance, environmental sustainability, community participation, cultural preservation, or tourism development; and (5) were available in English or Indonesian.

The literature selection process was conducted systematically through the stages of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. Following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, the flow of article selection from the initial search to the final sample of 30 studies is illustrated in Figure 1.

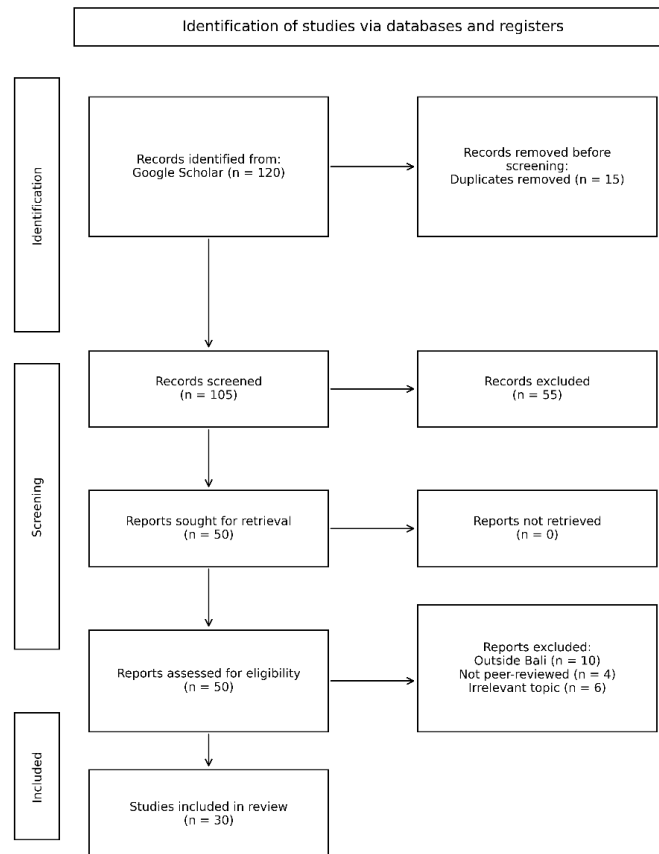


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Literature Selection Process
(Source: Researcher's Analysis, 2026)

As shown in Figure 1, the initial search of the Google Scholar database identified 120 records. After removing 15 duplicate records, 105 articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts. Following the screening process, 50 articles were assessed for eligibility through full-text review. A total of 20 articles were excluded due to geographical mismatch, lack of peer-review status, or topic irrelevance. Consequently, 30 studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for thematic analysis.

The data analysis process was conducted through four systematic stages. The first stage involved data reduction to identify key points related to trends and gaps within each reference. Subsequently, the findings were categorized into four central themes: Model Transformation, Ecological Crisis, Governance Gaps, and Cultural Authenticity. The application of thematic analysis in this study is particularly critical, as it enables the researcher to move beyond mere data description and toward deeper interpretation of phenomena such as institutional gaps and ongoing cultural commodification. The categorized data were then presented in the form of a thematic distribution matrix to facilitate the identification of research gaps. Each article was coded according to the presence of four predefined themes: Model Transformation (T1), Ecological Crisis and Environmental Sustainability (T2), Governance Gaps and Institutional Issues (T3), and Cultural Authenticity and Preservation (T4). For coding purposes, an article was assigned a check mark (V) when the theme represented a substantial focus of the study, either in its objectives, findings, or discussion. Because individual studies frequently addressed multiple dimensions of sustainable tourism, articles could receive more than one thematic code. All coding procedures were conducted by a single researcher and were refined iteratively through repeated comparison across articles to ensure thematic consistency.

The thematic coding process followed a deductive approach. The four analytical themes were established prior to coding based on the study's research questions and the sustainability dimensions most frequently discussed in the literature. During analysis, each article was reviewed in full, including its objectives, findings, and discussion sections, to identify substantial evidence corresponding to one or more thematic categories. The coding framework was refined iteratively through repeated reading and constant comparison across articles to ensure conceptual consistency and minimize coding ambiguity.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied strict inclusion criteria by selecting only peer-reviewed journal articles. Literature source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings across studies from different disciplinary perspectives and publication outlets. Furthermore, the coding process involved repeated cross-checking of thematic classifications through iterative comparison

among articles to enhance consistency and reduce researcher bias. The final thematic structure was continuously refined until conceptual agreement across the reviewed literature was achieved.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

An analysis of 30 selected literature sources (2022–2026) reveals complex dynamics in the development of sustainable tourism in Bali. The following thematic distribution matrix illustrates how each study contributes to mapping the diverse research focuses within the existing body of literature, can be seen at Tabel 1.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis Matrix

No	Author(s) & Year	T1: Transformation	T2: Environment	T3: Governance	T4: Culture
1	(Ardani et al., 2025)	V			
2	(Januar, 2024)	V	V		V
3	(Gede Sutarya, 2022)	V	V		
4	(Pertama et al., 2022)	V	V		
5	(Oka & Subadra, 2024)	V			
6	(Prasiasa et al., 2023)	V			V
7	(Pratama et al., 2024)		V		
8	(Apriani et al., 2024)	V	V		
9	(Palguna et al., 2023)			V	
10	(Choe & Mahyuni, 2023)	V			V
11	(Salam et al., 2024)	V	V	V	V
12	(Ningsih & Fachrurreza, 2025)	V		V	
13	(Surya & Nugraha, 2022)		V	V	V
14	(Bellinda & Kusuma, 2024)		V		
15	(Esta & Wirantari, 2025)	V		V	V
16	(Widiati et al., 2023)			V	
17	(Putra Nugraha et al., 2024)	V		V	
18	(Laksmi & Saputra, 2025)	V			
19	(Apliant et al., 2023)		V		
20	(Mudana et al., 2025)	V			V
21	(Made Pageh et al., 2022)	V			
22	(Natalia & Wiranata, 2026)	V	V		V
23	(Suardani et al., 2026)	V			V
24	(Wiryawan et al., 2026)	V		V	
25	(Diwyarthi et al., 2026)	V	V		V
26	(Pramesti et al., 2026)		V		V
27	(Rahjasa, 2026)		V		
28	(Sari et al., 2026)		V		
29	(Pratiwi et al., 2025)	V	V		V
30	(Sitari et al., 2024)	V	V		V

Source: Research's Analysis, 2026.

A check mark (V) indicates that the article substantially discusses or contributes evidence related to the corresponding thematic category. T1 = Model Transformation; T2 = Ecological Crisis and Environmental Sustainability; T3 = Governance Gaps and Institutional Issues; T4 = Cultural Authenticity and Preservation.

The thematic distribution analysis presented in Table 1 highlights several key discussion points regarding the research landscape and future direction of sustainable tourism studies in Bali. First, the dominance of the model transformation theme (70.00%) indicates that this area represents the most mature focus within the literature. This suggests a strong academic consensus that the future of Bali's tourism lies in a shift toward Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and tourism villages. While the abundance of studies provides a solid theoretical foundation, it also signals a potential saturation of the theme if not complemented by innovative approaches.

Second, environmental urgency (36.67%) emerges as the second most prominent theme. Despite its critical importance, this finding implies that although awareness of ecological challenges is high, technical and empirical solutions, particularly those related to decarbonization are still evolving and remain less extensively explored compared to social-based tourism models.

Third, the relatively lower proportions observed in governance (26.67%) and cultural dimensions (40.00%) reveal significant research gaps. In particular, the limited focus on governance underscores a lack of in-depth studies addressing the synchronization between governmental regulations and desa adat institutions. This gap represents a crucial finding, emphasizing the need for more integrative policy-oriented research to ensure that sustainability initiatives move beyond symbolic or ceremonial implementation.

Finally, the cultural dimension (40.00%) reflects a growing yet dynamic discourse surrounding the tension between cultural preservation and digitalization. The increasing integration of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and social media, poses risks of cultural commodification, often advancing more rapidly than the regulatory frameworks designed to safeguard the sacred values of Balinese traditions.

3.1.1. Effectiveness of Model Transformation: Community-Based & Spiritual Tourism

An analysis of the literature indicates that the transformation toward Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and spiritual tourism is not merely a trend, but a strategy for economic resilience. This model has proven effective in empowering local communities as key decision-making actors (Gede Sutarya, 2022; Januar, 2024). The integration of local wisdom values, such as Tri Hita Karana, into business models has been shown to enhance tourists' emotional engagement while ensuring the sustainability of more ethical tourism services (Ardani et al., 2025; Sitiari et al., 2024). Moreover, the involvement of women as entrepreneurial agents in tourism villages introduces a new dimension of inclusivity in the distribution of economic benefits (Oka & Subadra, 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2025). Overall, this model shifts dependency away from mass tourism toward niche markets that prioritize quality over quantity (Laksmi & Saputra, 2025; Made Pageh et al., 2022; Natalia & Wiranata, 2026).

3.1.2. Mitigation of the Ecological Crisis through Decarbonization and Waste Management

In response to the phenomenon of post-pandemic overtourism, the literature emphasizes that low-carbon policies and strict waste management are essential prerequisites for Bali's sustainability (Bellinda & Kusuma, 2024; Rahjasa, 2026). Recent studies indicate that without systematic decarbonization interventions, environmental carrying capacity will reach a critical threshold (Pratama et al., 2024). Green marketing strategies are now increasingly integrated with technical emission mitigation efforts to attract environmentally conscious tourist segments (Apriani et al., 2024; Pratama et al., 2024). However, the primary challenge lies in the technical implementation of waste management systems, which often lags behind the rapid surge in tourist arrivals (Ningsih & Fachrurreza, 2025; Salam et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2026; Surya & Nugraha, 2022).

3.1.3. Causal Factors of Governance Gaps (Institutional Gaps)

A significant finding of this analysis is the presence of institutional gaps driven by a lack of synchronization between formal government regulations and the autonomy of traditional villages (desa adat) (Palguna et al., 2023). The main factors influencing these gaps include differing priorities between macro-level economic growth and the preservation of micro-level cultural values within local communities (Wiryawan et al., 2026). Insufficient cross-sectoral coordination has led to the fragmented implementation of sustainable tourism policies (Diwyarthi et al., 2026; Esta & Wirantari, 2025). Policy harmonization through strengthening the role of local authorities and integrating data systems emerges as a key strategy to bridge governance gaps that have hindered the effectiveness of green tourism programs (Suardani et al., 2026; Surya & Nugraha, 2022).

3.1.4. Integration of Technology and Preservation of Cultural Authenticity

The digitalization of tourism, when managed wisely, can serve as a powerful tool for cultural preservation without compromising sacred values (Pramesti et al., 2026). The use of social media and digital platforms has proven effective in educating tourists about appropriate codes of conduct in sacred places (Mudana et al., 2025; Widiati et al., 2023). However, the risk of commodification remains a significant concern; therefore, content curation strategies grounded in local authenticity are essential (Choe & Mahyuni, 2023; Prasiasa et al., 2023). Technological integration should be positioned as a support for cultural narratives rather than a replacement for genuine spiritual experiences, in order to prevent the degradation of local identity amid global market competition (Apliant et al., 2023).

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of tourism models in Bali (70%) is driven by an urgent need for post-pandemic economic resilience. Theoretically, the integration of Tri Hita Karana the balance between humans, nature, and the divine has become a central foundation in recent literature (Ardani et al., 2025; Sitiari et al., 2024). The analysis further confirms that the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model is not merely a sociological concept, but a practical economic instrument capable of distributing wealth more equitably at the village level (Gede Sutarya, 2022; Januar, 2024). This relationship underscores that the sustainability of tourism in Bali is highly dependent on the strength of social capital and local wisdom.

In contrast to pre-pandemic studies that predominantly emphasized the growth of tourist volumes, the literature from 2022–2026 demonstrates a significant shift toward mitigating the impacts of overtourism and advancing decarbonization efforts (Bellinda & Kusuma, 2024; Rahjasa, 2026). This comparison reflects the emergence of a new collective awareness regarding the ‘threshold limit’ of Bali’s environmental carrying capacity (Pratama et al., 2024). However, this study also finds that technological solutions, such as the digitalization of cultural assets, continue to face resistance, particularly in relation to the preservation of sacred values, in contrast to similar studies conducted in global destinations (Choe & Mahyuni, 2023; Mudana et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of literature on sustainable tourism in Bali, many previous studies tend to emphasize conceptual frameworks without sufficiently addressing implementation complexities at the local level. For instance, while Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is widely promoted as an inclusive model, several studies overlook the uneven capacity of local communities to manage tourism resources effectively. This creates a discrepancy between theoretical expectations and actual outcomes, particularly in villages with limited institutional support and financial resources. Furthermore, the integration of local wisdom such as Tri Hita Karana is often discussed normatively, without clear operational indicators to measure its effectiveness in practice.

A comparative analysis of recent studies reveals contrasting findings regarding the role of digitalization in sustainable tourism. On the one hand, studies such as (Pramesti et al., 2026; Widiati et al., 2023) highlight the potential of digital tools in enhancing tourist education and promoting responsible behavior. On the other hand, research by (Choe & Mahyuni, 2023; Prasiasa et al., 2023) emphasizes the risk of cultural commodification, particularly when digital content prioritizes market appeal over authenticity. This divergence indicates that digitalization is not inherently beneficial or harmful, but rather contingent upon governance mechanisms and content curation strategies. Therefore, the effectiveness of digital integration depends heavily on the alignment between technological innovation and cultural preservation frameworks.

These inconsistencies highlight a critical research gap in understanding how governance structures mediate the relationship between sustainability initiatives and their outcomes. While environmental and socio-cultural dimensions have been widely explored, limited attention has been given to the role of institutional coordination in ensuring policy coherence. This study addresses this gap by positioning “institutional gaps” as a central analytical lens, demonstrating that fragmentation between governmental and customary institutions significantly undermines the effectiveness of sustainable tourism policies. By synthesizing these findings, this research contributes to a more integrated understanding of sustainability transition, emphasizing the need for harmonized governance as a prerequisite for long-term resilience.

The theoretical implications of this study contribute to the literature on institutional gaps by demonstrating that failures in sustainability are often not caused by a lack of regulation, but rather by the fragmentation of authority between formal government institutions and traditional village governance (*desa adat*) (Palguna et al., 2023; Wiryawan et al., 2026). From a practical perspective, the implications for policymakers highlight the need for a more technically grounded ‘decarbonization roadmap’, rather than relying solely on green marketing campaigns (Apriani et al., 2024). Destination managers are also required to strengthen the role of women and local communities as primary agents in strategic decision-making processes (Pratiwi et al., 2025).

A crucial insight from this synthesis is the emergence of a ‘digital paradox’. On the one hand, technologies such as QR systems and social media enhance transparency and facilitate visitor education (Pramesti et al., 2026). On the other hand, if left uncurated, they may accelerate the degradation of authenticity through instant commodification (Prasiasa et al., 2023). This highlights an urgent need to develop a digital governance system that is ‘decentralized’ while remaining aligned with customary law.

This study is limited to a synthesis of secondary literature drawn from 30 selected articles; therefore, the mapping results are highly dependent on the quality of data reporting within these sources and may not fully capture the rapidly evolving on-the-ground realities in real time. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies examining the actual impact of tourist levy policies on funding for environmental sustainability projects (Salam et al., 2024). Furthermore, more in-depth research is needed on models for integrating artificial intelligence (AI) to safeguard and preserve sacred sites without diminishing visitors’ spiritual experiences (Esta & Wirantari, 2025; Surya & Nugraha, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that sustainable tourism in Bali during the 2022–2026 period is undergoing a significant paradigm shift toward a more resilient model grounded in local wisdom values. The key findings indicate a dominant discourse surrounding Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and spiritual tourism as instruments for strengthening local economic resilience; however, their effectiveness remains constrained by institutional gaps arising from regulatory fragmentation between government authorities and *desa adat*. The urgency of mitigating the ecological crisis through decarbonization and waste management has emerged as a critical response to the pressures of overtourism, while the integration of digital technologies requires carefully

curated strategies to prevent the excessive commodification of cultural identity. Overall, this study offers a strategic roadmap that emphasizes the need for cross-sectoral policy harmonization and the strengthening of data-driven governance to ensure a more authentic, inclusive, and sustainable future for Bali's tourism sector. Future research should move beyond literature-based analyses by incorporating field-based investigations, particularly through interviews with desa adat leaders, tourism managers, local government representatives, and local residents. Such approaches would provide deeper insights into governance dynamics, community perceptions, and the practical challenges of implementing sustainable tourism policies at the destination level.

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