

**JOURNAL OF TOURISM,
HOSPITALITY AND
ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT
(JTHERM)**
www.jthem.com



**JOURNALISM FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: A POLITICAL
ECONOMY DISCOURSE OF WEST NUSA TENGGARA LOCAL
MEDIA ON THE RINJANI ECOTOURISM ISSUES**

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 16.10.2022

Revised date: 07.11.2022

Accepted date: 22.12.2022

Published date: 31.12.2022

To cite this document:

Teluna, A. R. L., Nur, M. J., & Muhlis. (2022). Journalism For Sustainable Tourism: A Political Economy Discourse Of West Nusa Tenggara Local Media On The Rinjani Ecotourism Issues. *Journal of Tourism Hospitality and Environment Management*, 7 (30), 206-214.

DOI: 10.35631/JTHERM.730016

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Abstract:

The practices of eco-journalism in West Nusa Tenggara local media have not been sufficient in journalistic performance in favor of environmental sustainability. This study aims to describe and analyze the news construction of West Nusa Tenggara or NTB local media in reporting the Mount Rinjani ecotourism industry during 2020. The study focuses on describing the pattern of power relations between the political-economic components of the West Nusa Tenggara local media institutions in reporting the issue of the Rinjani ecotourism business developments. The method used in this research is a case study. Using media-political analysis of news construction and the dynamics of power relations, the data were analyzed. Data collection uses related news clippings and in-depth interviews. The results show that in terms of quantity, the contents of *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Kicknewstoday.com* do not make Rinjani Ecotourism be the central issue in daily news headlines. Meanwhile, on the side of the discourse aspect, West Nusa Tenggara local media tend to describe government policies about Rinjani ecotourism as they are normal. West Nusa Tenggara local media lack in providing the news with critical notes on various aspects of Rinjani's ecotourism development. In addition, the results of the political-economic analysis reveal that the West Nusa Tenggara local media structurally tend to build a synergy of power with the local government regarding the development of Rinjani ecotourism.

Keywords:

Eco-Journalism, Local Media, Sustainable Tourism, Rinjani Ecotourism

Introduction

Mass media, national or local, plays a crucial role as a source of information encouraging knowledge and concern about environmental problems. Presumably, the more informed the public about environmental problems, the more they likely to support politicians and policies committed to environmental protection (Boykoff & Yulsman, 2013; Boykoff & Luedecke, 2017; Schäfer & Painter, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate mass media contributions, especially local mass media, to form public environmental consciousness.

Local mass media can articulate the local communities' information needs and fill market niches in the regions (Kekezi & Mellander, 2018; Nygren, 2019). Therefore, local mass media have a unique position and role in social, political, economic, cultural, and ecological dynamics of a region (Yegen, 2017). Even though it cannot be separated from questions about its independence, the presence of local media is very useful to channel and accommodate local voices and the local choices of residents. This kind of role can help local governments to design and implement policies that are in line with aspirations while meeting the needs of the people (Mecfal, 2016).

In the Indonesian context, the role of local mass media is has been increasingly important in the context of regional autonomy after the Reformation Era since 1998 (Nugroho et al., 2012). The decentralization policy of the local government is regulated in the Indonesian Decentralization Law, Act 32 of 2004 and supported by the Law of Financial Balance between Central and Regional Governments or Act 33 of 2004. According to the LSPP Team, the relations of media and local governance in the context of autonomy are very important because government decision-making is impossible without the participation of communities (Yusuf, 2011).

Decentralization is the process of handing over authority to local governments to carry out their functions and roles independently through the transfer of political, administrative, and financial authority from the central government to regional governments or below (Aritonang, 2016). One of the powers delegated to the regions is regulating natural resources in their respective regions. Local governments have made various efforts to manage their natural resources in order to obtain regional revenue coffers. On the one hand, this authority accelerates the management of natural resources in the regions, but granting this authority creates various ecological problems in many cases.

One of these efforts is developing natural tourism or ecotourism that utilizes various natural beauty and exoticism. Ecotourism is a form of travel to natural areas to conserve the environment and preserve the life and well-being of residents (Mondino & Beery, 2018). In other words, when a local government develops ecotourism, it means that the local government explores, develops, and increases the attractiveness of various existing natural potentials so that both domestic and foreign tourists flock to their area. In this case, the role of local media is crucial in covering and promoting ecotourism in a region (Akash & Aram, 2018; Sharkova et al., 2017).

West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) is one of the local governments in Indonesia that is so enthusiastic to develop ecotourism to boost the regional economy. This study aims to map and describe the construction of local NTB mass media contents in reporting the development of the Mount Rinjani ecotourism area in the first trimester of 2020. In addition, this study aims to find and

describe the pattern of power relations between the political economy components of the local NTB media in reporting on the issue of developing the Rinjani ecotourism area.

Since the UNESCO session on 12/4/18, Mount Rinjani has been designated as a world heritage. It means that the global-scale organization engaged in education, science, and culture has determined Mount Rinjani as part of the world heritage after going through an assessment process. This acknowledgment is also inseparable from the NTB government's awareness of the region's tourism potential. The tourism sector is the hope of the NTB government to provide prosperity and to build sustainable tourism in NTB.

The stipulation of Mount Rinjani as a world geopark gave birth to various interests, from economic, educational, social, political, cultural to environmental conservation (Sadikin et al., 2020). Making Rinjani a leading tourism place in its status as a world geopark is undoubtedly a challenge. Therefore, a synergy of various interested parties is needed to make Rinjani a place for the center of civilization. Of course, we can see the direction of Rinjani's development as a geopark from the media's coverage. So that, the practice of eco-journalism by local media is essential to be studied.

Eco-journalism or environmental journalism is a term to refer to the practice of journalism that takes environmental issues as the object of reporting. This term is most often used is in environmental journalism (Bødker & Neverla, 2012; Howarth, 2012; Mocatta, 2015). Several other similar terms are green press, environmental reporting, ecological journalism and earth journalism (Sharkova et al., 2017). Shortly, environmental journalism's main concern is to the environment, environmental issues, and environmental groups.

Regarding media framing of environmental issues in Indonesia, (Dewi, 2011) analyzed how the *Jawa Pos* daily covered the mudflow environmental disaster at the Brantas Block mining in East Java. Dewi (2011) concludes that in the news of the Sidoarjo hot mudflow incident, *Jawa Pos* has raised several crucial environmental issues. The *Jawa Pos* newspaper, in its reporting, has not been able to produce informative environmental journalism products. *Jawa Pos* tends to accept and understand environmental messages based on press releases from the government and corporations (PT. Lapindo Brantas Inc.). Some facts in the field that should appear in the news, for example, about material that gushes from bubbles and the permissible levels, or the sinking of the railroad tracks, which within one day after the news stating that it was safe, did not appear. There has been a blurring of empirical facts.

In addition, Santana, Krishnamurti and Iskandar (2017) conducted a study to identify the mapping of environmental issues by *Pikiran Rakyat* and *Tribun Jawa Barat* through editorial policies and editorial management, news targets, and environmental journalism advocacy models. That study found that both of media had the same issue domain and scheme in their reporting on environmental issues. Meanwhile, the target of reporting on environmental issues from these two local media has a different foundation or footing. The advocacy model for reporting on environmental issues between *Pikiran Rakyat* and *Tribun Jawa Barat* has a different mapping, even though both of them position themselves as the agents of information dissemination. The advocacy model of *Pikiran Rakyat* is a matter of evaluation and rehabilitation, while *Tribun Jawa Barat* positions itself as an agent for the enforcement of development and structuring of environmental issues.

This study uses a media-political economy analysis to describe the media's relations and power gaps to produce news contents with specific constructions. It can be analyzed from the practice of eco-journalism by local media in reporting Rinjani ecotourism. According to Mosco (2009), the political-economy approach to communication must begin with a philosophical foundation that accepts reality, abstract ideas, and concrete observations. Many elements construct reality, so it is not only economics or culture that is the key to understanding the reality of communication. Three processes become our starting point in media political economy research: commodification, spatialization, and structuration.

Commodification is the process of changing the use values into the exchange values, the changing of the use value of something into a marketable product to determine its value at the time of the exchange (Mosco, 2009). The study of commodification in media is carried out by looking at the contribution of media institutions in the specific communication elements such as the contents, audience, and media workers.

Spatialization is the process of overcoming space barriers motivated by structural changes due to the changes in the use of time and space. Meanwhile, structuration focuses on analyzing social action regarding the constraints and opportunities in the structure in which the action occurs. Thus, spatialization can expand the concept of social class to be categorical, relational, and formational.

The tradition of media studies explains that the construction of mass media news represents many things, including the interests and economic-political power relations behind the media concerned and behind the socio-political structure of the society. Therefore, this study aims to map and describe the construction of local NTB mass media contents in reporting the issue of the development of the Mount Rinjani ecotourism area in the first trimester of 2020. In addition, the study also seeks to find and describe the pattern of power relations between the economic-political components of the local media in reporting the issue of the Rinjani ecotourism developments.

Method

The practice of environmental journalism by local media in NTB is treated as a social text that includes news texts, media institutions, journalist competencies, and socio-political and cultural contexts. Therefore, the method used in this research is a qualitative method for investigating, finding, identifying, understanding, and explaining the research problems. The subjects of this research are the local media institutions and journalists in NTB, especially *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Kicknewstoday.com*, and public policy authorities related to the Rinjani ecotourism developments in the local government. These three local media have a wider audience reach than other media. Meanwhile, to support objectivity, this research also makes news scripts from the three local media in the period January-March 2020 related to the environmental issues in the context of governance and ecotourism development of Rinjani. Data were analyzed to understand the social situation, the relationship between these parts, and the overall research problem. There are three major parts in the problem of this research; news text, social context, and agency-structure relations related to journalistic work by the media.

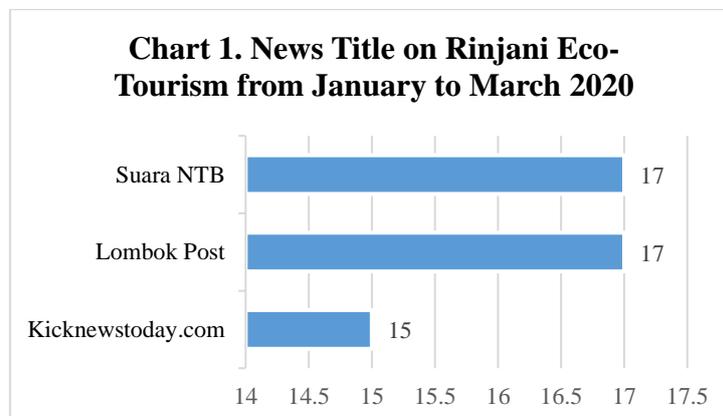
Result and Discussion

Local Media's Coverage on Rinjani Ecotourism

The first indicator that shows the practice of environmental journalism by local media is the content of the news. When a local media institution takes environmental issues as its news topic, it is an actual eco-journalism practice. For this reason, the results of this study began with mapping the content of local media in NTB, especially *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Kicknewstoday.com*, which raised environmental issues related to the development of Rinjani ecotourism during the period January - March 2020.

Quantitatively, in the first three months of 2020, there were 49 news titles from the three local NTB media that mentioned the news related to environmental issues surrounding the development of Rinjani ecotourism. Of these, *Suara NTB* published 17 articles related to the environment and Rinjani ecotourism. Environmental news appeared on February 6, 2020, as many as five news.

In the same period, the *Lombok Post* newspaper published 17 articles on environmental issues. The news with environmental issues appeared on February 28, 2020, in as many as six news. The news contents on that date revolved around the increasing number of visitors to Rinjani after the Lombok earthquake disaster and the rapid construction of various facilities at several gates and climbing points. Meanwhile, NTB's online local media, *Kicknewstoday.com*, during the January - March 2020 period, published 15 news headlines with environmental topics related to the development of Rinjani ecotourism. The portion of the news is illustrated in graph 1.



Besides the number of news titles, the practice of environmental journalism by local media can also reveal from the size of the column allocated by the media to accommodate news around those titles. Determination by column in a news report shows how the editorial policy views the value of the news. Column size is also closely related to the detail aspect of news writing. The larger the column allocation is provided, the more detailed the news presented will be. Newspapers tend to pack environmental news in sizes < 25-50 cm/column.

Suara NTB published environmental news with a total of 6 columns where each news column is 3 cm in size, so it can be concluded that the column size in the overall environmental news related to Rinjani ecotourism during the January-March 2020 period is less than 25 cm. Likewise, with the *Lombok Post*, it was noted that although this newspaper published much

environmental news, the number of columns provided was no more than 25 cm. Environmental reports on February 28 appeared six times, but the number of columns used was not more than 25 cm.

Based on the results of the framing analysis above, quantifiably, the contents of *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Kicknewstoday.com* do not make Rinjani Ecotourism be the main issue contained in daily news headlines. Meanwhile, on the discourse aspect, the three media tend to describe government policies and the ordinary conditions of Rinjani's destinations, and very few provide coverage with critical notes on various aspects of Rinjani's ecotourism development.

Rinjani Ecotourism and Local Media Political Economy

In a broad context, the development of Rinjani ecotourism is part of a significant effort to conserve the environment in Rinjani and to make it a globally attractive tourist destination. Permadi, Manullang and Rachmat (2016) explain that Mount Rinjani, which has status as National Geopark, has been proposed in 2016 to become a Global Geopark Network (GGN) in the UK. The history of a series of catastrophic (paroxysmal) eruptions of Mount Rinjani since the formation of the Segara Anak Caldera in the 13th century on Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara, until now, the volcanic activity in the caldera, is still ongoing in the form of the formation of volcanic cones and new lava flows. Mount Rinjani is located in the northern part of Lombok Island with an altitude of +3,726 m above sea level and it is the second-highest volcano in Indonesia.

Geoconservation begins with the need to protect natural resources well known to the public, such as naturalists and geologists. In the context of protecting natural beauty for recreation (tourism) or understanding the value of nature, conservation efforts may have been carried out even though everyone has diverse responses to this problem. Developing ecotourism, geological tourism, and geological parks as alternative tourism is a new paradigm in Indonesia. The importance of conservation efforts on geodiversity and geological heritage and natural resource management in the Rinjani National Geopark area through geo-tourism is very potential. Objects in the Rinjani National Geopark area need to be preserved because they are easily damaged and cannot be renewed. In addition to being unique, rare, and attractive, they are also very useful for educational tourism, especially earth science or geology.

The substantial issue of the Rinjani ecotourism development project is not visible in the content or work plans of the West Nusa Tenggara local media. The news coverage on Rinjani ecotourism was formulated in the local government or central government mission in developing the tourism industry. Thus, the direction of eco-journalism in the local NTB media, in a certain sense, follows the concept and orientation of the development of the tourism industry in general.

Therefore, the political-economic analysis results reveal that the NTB local media are structurally and genetically inclined to build a synergy of power with local government policies in developing ecotourism in Rinjani. Therefore, it can be concluded that the practice of eco-journalism in NTB's local media has not been sufficient in journalistic performance in favor of environmental sustainability.

The stipulation of Mount Rinjani as a world geopark, of course, generated various interests from economic, educational, social, political, and cultural to environmental conservation. Making Rinjani a leading tourism place in its status as a world geopark is undoubtedly challenging. Therefore, a synergy of various interested parties is needed to jointly make Rinjani be the place for the center of civilization. Of course, public can see the direction of Rinjani's development as a geopark from the face of the local media.

The results of this study show several local media agendas. First, local media in NTB tend to promote Rinjani as the tourism area by offering the story of natural beauty and attractions. Unfortunately, promotional agenda information is the primary meaning of local media news. Thus, local media do not direct potential tourists to gain experience in sustainable tourism development and cultural development in the Rinjani area. It can be seen that the logic of local media news is to prefer an economic perspective to a sustainability mission. Tourists come to Rinjani and have their activities there; they carry out consumption activities that impact economic turnover.

Second, the NTB local media tend to be complacent with ceremonial activities. In this case, local media seems to have no agenda other than following the government's agenda. The public space in the media is filled with ceremonial activities from various government agencies that are considered to bring Rinjani in a better direction. This condition makes the local media not critically view the policies and activities of various government agencies. Local media rarely pay attention to the political intention behind every ceremony.

Even so, it is worth appreciating the performance of local media, which raises important issues and impacts many people. Although the numbers are not many, this kind of agenda still needs to be appreciated. News such as the waste problems in Rinjani, the welfare of porters, the surrounding community, the cultural development, and the scientific findings related to Rinjani, informed by local media. It means the media's potential in holding their agenda and taking their side to the broader public. With the issue of waste, community welfare, scientific and cultural development that has taken place in Rinjani, the local media have shown that behind the promotion and all the ceremonial activities, there is something important going on that concerns the interests of many people.

Conclusion

The economic-political analysis of the media both on news construction and the dynamics of power relations that affect media institutions, especially *Suara NTB* daily, *Lombok Post*, and *Kicknewstoday.com*, shows that in terms of quantity, the content of these media lack in covering Rinjani Ecotourism as the main issue contained in the daily news headlines. Meanwhile, on the discourse aspect, the three media tend to describe government policies and the ordinary conditions of Rinjani's destinations, and very few provide coverage with critical notes on various aspects of the Rinjani's ecotourism development. In addition, the results of the political-economic analysis reveal that the NTB local media are structurally and genetically inclined to build a synergy of power with local government policies in the development of Rinjani ecotourism. Therefore, it can be concluded that the practice of eco-journalism in NTB's local media has not been sufficient in journalistic performance in favor of environmental sustainability.

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