

COMMODIFICATION OF THE PURA BABAKAN AREA AS A TOURIST ATTRACTION IN DESA TUA, TABANAN, BALI

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the form of commodification of the Pura Babakan area as a new tourist attraction in Desa Tua, Tabanan, Bali, Indonesia. The commodification is carried out by structuring the Pura Babakan area and developing tourism facilities. It is proven that this commodification can increase the number of tourist visits. The research method used is a qualitative one using a cultural studies perspective. Data collection techniques using observation, interviews, and literature study. The commodification theory is used as a theoretical basis for investigating the commodification problem in the Pura Babakan area. The results of this study explain the form of commodification carried out in the Pura Babakan area, namely by using the myth of the existence of *Pohon Kayu Putih* and the history of Pura Babakan. The distribution of the Pura Babakan tourist attraction is spread through social media, such as Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, and blogs. Pura Babakan is consumed as a place to take selfies around the *Madyaning Mandala* area and as a place for mental health tourism activities by foreign tourists. To get the appropriate commodification, the manager adds several supporting facilities, such as toilets, bridges, and shady halls.

Keywords: Commodification, Pura Babakan Area, Tourist Attraction

1. Introduction

Today the socio-cultural life of the Balinese people depends on the tourism sector, and the world of tourism has changed the image of Bali and the mindset of its people. Bali as one of the tourist destinations in Indonesia has various natural and cultural potentials. Bali is the prima donna for domestic and international tourists due to its unique culture and natural scenery. Therefore, the development of tourism in Bali focuses more on the culture and natural beauty of the island of Bali (Ardika, 2007:28). Tourism has brought significant benefits to the lives of the Balinese people; tourism has become a leading sector for state foreign exchange earnings, regional income, and as a driving force for the Balinese economy.

According to Bali Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2020, Article 1 Paragraph 12, concerning Standards for Implementing Balinese Cultural Tourism, Bali tourism is based on

Balinese culture imbued with the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* which originates from cultural values and local Balinese wisdom, so that mutual relations are realised. dynamic feedback between tourism and culture that makes both of them develop synergistically, harmoniously, and sustainably in order to be able to provide welfare to the community, maintain cultural preservation and the environment.

When talking about tourism, both at the national, regional, and international levels, Bali has always been the main reference. Of course, this is not easy to achieve because Bali tourism is a global cultural phenomenon that can be viewed as a system (Ardika, 2006: 162). Torres also stated that the need to achieve sustainable tourism development is undeniable and widely accepted, but the main obstacle is the realisation of the best strategy, instrument, or action to move towards a more sustainable scenario, and the biggest obstacle is a complicated solution, because it implies a transformation of the traditional tourism production and consumption model, namely by rethinking values and priorities.

Related to the new development of cultural tourism in Tabanan Regency, there is a unique tourist attraction that is currently being developed in the Desa Tua namely, the Kayu Putih tourist attraction. Kayu Putih is the term for a giant woody tree by the Banjar Bayan people, which is a family of *Ficus variegata* tree species that grows firmly in the Banjar Bayan area, Desa Tua, Marga District, Tabanan Regency. The age of the tree is estimated to be hundreds of years old, and under it there is a holy place called Pura Babakan. At its inception, Pura Babakan was a relic temple of Puri Perean which is located in the Banjar Bayan area, Desa Tua, Marga District, Tabanan Regency which was shrouded in a magical atmosphere that came from the influence of the Kayu Putih Tree, so that the temple's commander always maintained the sanctity of the temple. Pura Babakan is revered by the locals as a place to seek protection and healing from various diseases. Pura Babakan is currently starting to be visited by domestic and foreign tourists as a tourist attraction for selfies and as a place to rest. The construction of supporting facilities around the temple is also being carried out to increase the comfort of visitors.

2. Theoretical Framework

Commodification is a process associated with capitalism where objects are qualities and signs are commodities to be sold in the market (Barker, 2005:517). Piliang also explained that commodification is the process of turning something that was not a commodity before into one. Meanwhile, a commodity is everything that is produced and exchanged for something else, which is usually in the form of money, in order to gain profit (Piliang, 2004:21).

According to Piliang (2003), commodification does not only refer to daily necessities, but has also spread to the arts and culture in general. What capitalist society has done to this culture is an attempt to make it comply with the commodity laws of capitalism. A society like this will form a "culture industry," which is a form of culture aimed at the interests of the masses, and its production process is based on the power mechanisms of the producer in determining its form, style, and meaning.

If it is related to the problem of this research, the Pura Babakan area, which was originally a sacred area, but in its current development has become a tourist attraction that has sold values and capitalism through the cultural industry. Therefore, this theory is used to dissect the first research question in the formulation of this research problem, namely, the form of toristification of the Pura Babakan Area in the Desa Tua.

3. Research Methods

This research seeks to interpret the meaning of an event in certain situations according to the perspective of cultural studies. Bogdan and Taylor (Ratna, 2010:94) state that qualitative research in turn produces descriptive data in the form of sentences, both written and spoken. Qualitative research methods also allow researchers to organise, criticise, and clarify interesting data, so that through qualitative research, researchers can obtain interesting findings and build new theoretical frameworks (Endaswara, 2003: 14–15).

Based on the specified research design, the type of data used is qualitative data. The data obtained came from the Banjar Bayan community directly and from related literature. Subagyo stated that data obtained directly from the community, whether conducted through interviews or observations that were recorded and written, are primary data sources (Subagyo, 1997:87).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Development of the Pura Babakan Area as a Tourist Attraction

In the current post-industrial era, all objects, qualities, and signs can be made into commodities through a commodification process and then sold in order to make a profit. Commodification includes the processes of production, distribution, and consumption. The commodification referred to in this study is the phenomenon of the commodification of the Pura Babakan Temple Area in Desa Tua. Commodification is a phenomenon that is often associated with the development of the tourism industry, which affects the condition of the community and the objects or signs around it through a commodification process, so that there are promotional activities through distribution by tourism stakeholders for consumption by tourists.

Before it was opened as a tourist attraction, the Babakan Temple area was a bushy area. The potential of the Pura Babakan area as a tourist attraction was first glimpsed by I Wayan Jadra who is the owner of Desa Kopi and a tourism entrepreneur in Desa Baru, Marga, Tabanan. He suggested that the Jro Penyarikan Pura Babakan open the Pura Babakan area as a new tourist attraction. This proposal was then followed up by the management to hold a large meeting of Pura Babakan managers, which was attended by members of the Pura Babakan management and Banjar Bayan elders in 2013. The result of this large meeting was that the management members and elders of Banjar Bayan agreed to the proposal for the Pura Babakan area to be opened as a tourist attraction.

This was also expressed by I Wayan Demon, a local tour guide who likes adventure and knows the location of a wilderness that has large trees that are in demand by European tourists, especially from Germany. He knows the interests and tastes of adventurous German travellers. Therefore, he brought German tourists with his colleague, Mr. Made, to the Pura Babakan area around 2011. The condition of the Pura Babakan at that time was still covered with shrubs, and no one in the community knew anything about the Pohon Kayu Putih or the Pura Babakan. Nonetheless, the atmosphere of the Pura Babakan area satisfied and entertained the tourists brought by I Wayan Demon at the time. Based on these findings, he began to actively promote the Pura Babakan area as a new tourist attraction.

Based on the explanation regarding the structuring of the Pura Babakan area as a tourism commodity above, it can be concluded that production in the commodification of the Pura Babakan area is the process of developing the function of the Pura Babakan which was previously a place of worship for Hindus, to become a tourism product that will provide economic value to both the local community and the government area.

4.2 Development of Tourism Facilities

As a cultural tourism product, Pura Babakan is an intangible tourism product that is worth selling. Intangible tourism products are tourism products in the form of tourist travel experiences. Intangible tourism products are different from tangible tourism products that can be transferred, such as souvenirs. Mathieson and Wall (Pitana, 2005:71) reveal that for this intangible tourism product, tourists must visit the desired tourist destination directly, so that tourists can enjoy the atmosphere of the intended tourist destination, such as: religious tourism, cultural tourism, sports tourism, wellness tourism, and so forth. Therefore, in order to support the comfort of tourists, it is necessary to develop facilities in the Pura Babakan area, such as: toilets, rest areas, and parks.

The management has an initiative at the end of 2020 to provide guards and provide toilets because before there were toilet facilities, tourists often borrowed the bathrooms of Banjar Bayan residents to relieve themselves. The management of the Pura Babakan has provided all the building materials needed to build the toilet facilities, such as: bricks and

there are suggestions stating that building a toilet does not need to be too fancy, the important thing is that it is closed. It is not necessary to use a tiled floor, but it is recommended to use gravel, but the water in the toilet still has to flow. Desa Tua had provided funding for the construction of a toilet worth around Rp. 300,670,000, but this assistance was withdrawn due to the COVID-19 pandemic that had hit Desa Tua. Thanks to the hard work of the village head and the Banjar Bayan customary residents, the construction of the toilet was finally able to proceed with the help of a grant from the Desa Tua of Rp. 75,000,000. The construction of toilet facilities in the Pura Babakan area had attracted the attention of various parties, including the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia and the Supreme Audit Agency of the Republic of Indonesia, which provided development assistance through a process of approval, construction, and supervision from the local police, but the construction was slow because it was done by 25 people. The process of building a bridge is the same as the process of building a toilet, but this process is the business of the Desa Tua. After the process of building toilets and bridges, the management of Pura Babakan again received donations to build a shady hall and funds to dismantle the walls of Pura Babakan.

Figure 4.1 Toilet Facilities



Source: Doc. Dewa Mega, 2022

4.3 Myths About the Pura Babakan Area

Folklore is often associated with something that belongs together, something that is ancient, and has become a cultural heritage. Engaging in folklore is often seen as an activity that is old fashioned or outdated, underappreciated, and almost considered worthless, except for simply giving moralistic advice to children (Sari, 11: 2020).

The reality is that this is not the case, because folklore still exists and develops with slight changes in production according to needs because, after all, folklore has become part of the postmodern culture of life, which has supported the rotation of the community's economic wheel, which is called storynomics. McKee and Gerace emphasise that storynomics is an attempt to give a nickname to a tourist destination that refers to local folklore in order to gain economic benefits (McKee, 2018: 12). By preparing an interesting story, the production process for tourist destinations will be different, because products that have story value can be used to persuade potential buyers to make a decision to buy a tour package. McKee also said that the concept of "storynomics" is the activity of compiling a story that requires regular and planned stages, so that the story can attract the attention of tourists (McKee, 2018: 53). The use of storynomics to promote tourist areas or improve the quality of the tourist experience when visiting the Pura Babakan area, also known as Kayu Putih Bayan or The White Tree Bayan, as depicted in Figure 4.3 below.

Figure 4.2 The White Tree Bayan



Source: Doc. Dewa Mega, 2022

There are various forms of production that can be carried out for a tourist attraction, including the tourist attraction of the Pura Babakan area. One form of production that is directed at efforts to improve the experience of tourists in the Pura Babakan area is presenting them with magical and unique stories related to the myth of the white tree and the history of the founding of the Pura Babakan. Therefore, tourists are expected to have deeper knowledge

about the Babakan Temple area. Knowledge of what is seen can increase the satisfaction and vacation experience of tourists.

Based on the story of the management, it is said that the Kayu Putih Tree is known as a sacred tree by the Banjar Bayan people because it is believed that there is a set of sacred musical instruments, in the form of *gamelan*, bells, or *bajra* made of gold, which are buried around the Kayu Putih Tree. Therefore, many people are trying to find and dig up the whereabouts of this sacred musical instrument, which is thought to be buried around the Kayu Putih Tree. The manager said that he had never looked for the existence of sacred musical instruments that were buried around the Kayu Putih Tree, but he suspected that if there were stories from other people related to the Kayu Putih Tree, then it was true that there was gold in the Kayu Putih Tree. This is evidenced by the golden colour streaks etched on the Kayu Putih Tree trunks, because based on the confessions of people who study dendrology, it is revealed that Kayu Putih Trees have a characteristic white trunk, and gold stripes are a sign that there is gold in it. The management emphasised that the position of the golden line on the Kayu Putih Tree often changes. He also admitted that no one knows for sure the history of the Kayu Putih Tree, but many people do know the history of the establishment of the Pura Babakan. Therefore, the history of the establishment of Pura Babakan is a comparison of the age of the Kayu Putih Tree in the Banjar Bayan area, Desa Tua, Marga, Tabanan.

The Kayu Putih Tree is believed to be a magical sacred tree because it has a unique mystical history and has unique golden lines on its fine white skin. As revealed by Mr. Alit Doblet, Kayu Putih Tree has a mystical story that cannot be forgotten in its history, namely the story of the *gamelan* chant that is heard at night. He suspects that the *gamelan* is buried around the Kayu Putih Tree. He admits that he has only heard it once in his life, the sound of the *gamelan* is very low, but it sounds very clear, like the *gamelan* in a *wayang kulit* performance. The sound of *gamelan* chanting was often heard in ancient times, but now it is rare.

The mythical view of the Pura Babakan area above is in line with Susanto's thoughts (Yanti, 2017:1198), which state that myth is one of the elements in the religious system that forms the basis of human social and cultural life when viewed from certain contexts. Through myth, the minds of the supporting people can be expressed through the world around them, how they can interpret natural symbols, such as: mountains, seas, forests, rivers, lakes, and so on.

The existence of the Pura Babakan myth can provide knowledge, how the Banjar Bayan people face life with the beliefs they hold, making myths something very valuable that cannot be separated from their lives because they believe these myths provide prosperity for

the lives of farmers, especially in the production of the Pura Babakan area as a new tourist attraction.

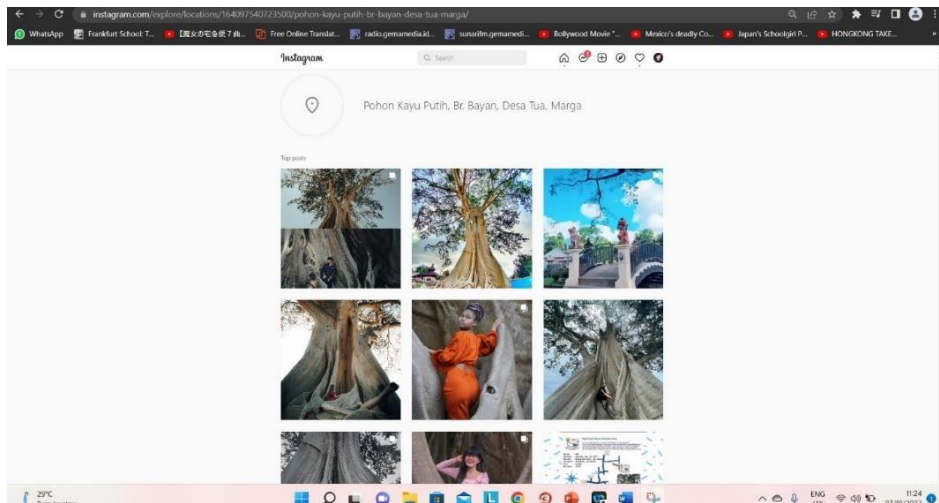
4.4 Distribution of the Babakan Temple Area on Social Media

The marketing of a product in the world of tourism includes the distribution process. Distribution is an attempt to spread the products produced. Distribution will not be perfect if it is not equipped with marketing so that the products distributed reach consumers. In this study, distribution is defined as introducing and promoting the Pura Babakan area so that it is known by the general public, in this case tourists, both domestic and foreign tourists. Through promotion, the Pura Babakan area will be increasingly recognised by the wider community and will invite curiosity about the Pura Babakan area. Furthermore, the promotion of the tourist attraction of Pura Babakan was carried out with various forms of advertising and channels.

1. Instagram

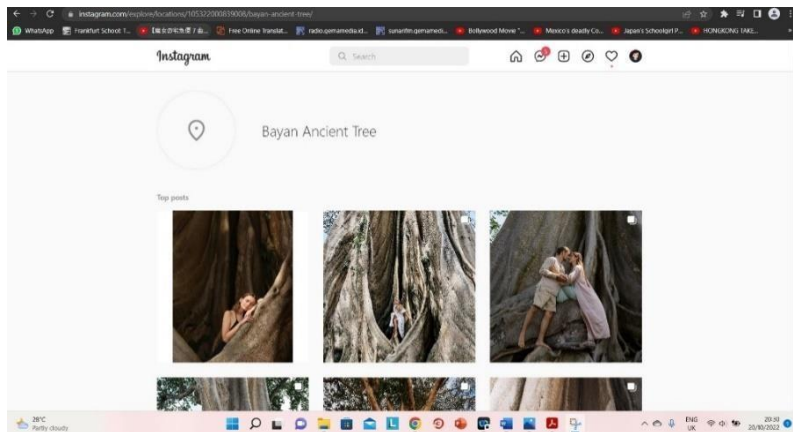
Instagram is one of the social media sites where users can take photos and send them in a short amount of time (Sari, 2017:6). Atmoko revealed that Instagram has five main menus, namely: the home page, comments, explore, profile, and news feed (Atmoko, 2012:28). Based on the search results for the upload location, there are two location codes indicating the location of Pura Babakan on Instagram, namely the Bayan Ancient Tree and the Pohon Kayu Putih, Br. Bayan, Desa Tua, Marga. Search results on Instagram, as shown in figures 4.4 and 4.5, show more splendour of Kayu Putih Trees than Hindu worship activities at Pura Babakan, because the most prominent icon owned by Pura Babakan is the Kayu Putih Tree (*Ficus variegata*) icon. According to Danesi (Widyaswari, 2018: 117), an icon is a sign that represents a reference source through a form of replication, simulation, imitation, or equation. An existing sign is made to visually resemble its reference source. An icon is something that performs a function as a marker similar to the shape of the object (Sobur, 2002). This is caused by the image formed in the tourism market, which is a combination of various factors that exist in a tourist attraction, such as geographical conditions, community conditions, and so on.

Figure 4.3 Location Search Results for Pohon Kayu Putih, Br. Bayan, Desa Tua, Marga on Instagram



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/locations/164097540723500/tree-kayu-putih-br-bayan-des-tua-marga/>

Figure 4.4 Search results for the location of the Bayan Ancient Tree on Instagram



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/locations/105322000839008/bayan-ancient-tree/>

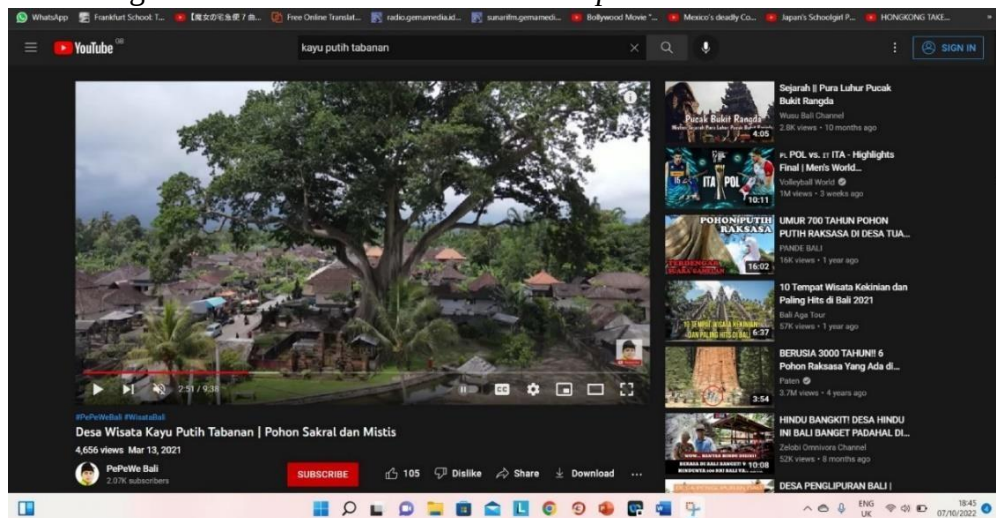
2. Facebook

Facebook is one of the social media that is used to publish content such as profiles, activities, or even user opinions, as well as media that can provide space for communication

phenomenon, which is a video sharing site that functions as a means for sharing videos online (Noor, 2019: 2). Users can participate in uploading videos to the YouTube network and sharing them with other users around the world.

Social media is used as a means for disseminating information about new tourist attractions to attract tourists' interest in a tourist area through video shows that display attractive and informative visuals. In the search results for the keyword *Kayu Putih Tabanan* on the Youtube site, there are videos that introduce the Pura Babakan Area, as shown in the video entitled *Desa Wisata Kayu Putih Tabanan | Pohon Sakral dan Mistis* which explains the natural charm around the Pura Babakan area. The video was uploaded on the *Pepewe Bali* channel, which has been watched by 4,0656 Youtube accounts. The footage was taken using an unmanned aircraft or drone to highlight the Pura Babakan environment from the air and was uploaded on March 13, 2021, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 4.6 Video Screenshot on the *Pepewe Bali* Channel



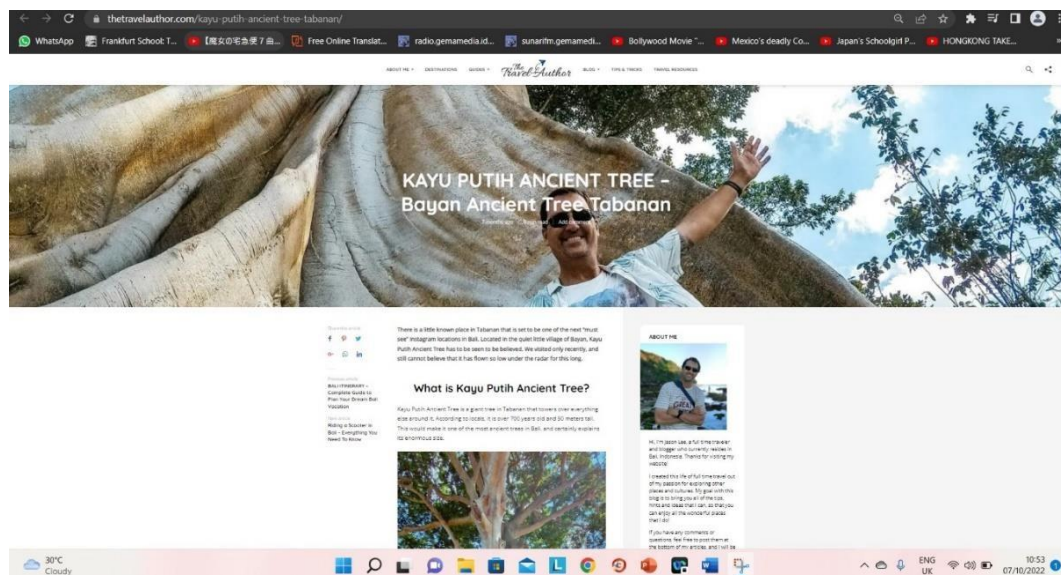
Source: <https://tinyurl.com/ef89kxb6>

4. Blogs

According to Nasrallah (2015), a blog is one of the social media that allows its users to upload daily and special activities, as well as comment and share with each other, both in the form of other web links, information, and so on. Based on search results using the keywords "Kayu Putih Tabanan" and "Ancient Kayu Putih Tabanan" on the Google search engine, there are blogs that offer tour packages and blogs that provide tourist experiences in the Pura Babakan area. As quoted on the Bali Tour Club website, the presence of the Kayu Putih Tree in the Desa Tua, Tabanan is a special attraction for tourists.

Jason Lee describes his experience enjoying the beauty and magic of the Kayu Putih Tree in the Pura Babakan area in a blog article titled "KAYU WHITE ANCIENT TREE -- BAYAN ANCIENT TREE TABANAN." He revealed that the Kayu Putih Tree was one of the giant trees in Tabanan that towered over everything around it. This would make it one of the most ancient trees in Bali, and of course it is very difficult to explain how big it is. Below is a screenshot of Jason Lee's blog article featuring the majestic Kayu Putih Tree on the home page.

Figure 4.7 Jason Lee Blog Article Pages



Source: <https://thetravellauthor.com/kayu-putih-ancient-tree-tabanan/>

4.5 Pura Babakan as a Selfie Spot

Selfie tourism is an activity carried out by individuals or groups of people that involves taking photographs of themselves with photography tools. Today's modern society is no stranger to photographic activities that are part of their activities, to capture certain events or objects (Antopani, 33:2015). Taking photographs to be preserved has become a part of our daily lives. Advances in the field of technology, especially digital technology, are developing very rapidly, so that photography activities seem to belong to everyone. This is evidenced by the general public, who so easily carry out any photographic activity using a smartphone camera or digital pocket camera.

The selfie object that is often used by tourists is the splendour of the Kayu Putih Tree which is located in the *Madyaning Mandala* area of Babakan Temple, as well as the

panoramic view of the rice fields to the south of Pura Babakan. Generally, *Madyaning Mandala* Pura Babakan is used as a photo area and for tourists to rest. The management explained that the *Madnyaning Mandala* area may be accessed by female tourists who are menstruating or by Hindus who are resentful or in a state of mourning to simply rest or to take selfies.

Figure 4.8 Indonesian Tourists Taking Selfies
near the Pura Babakan Guard Post



Source: Doc. Dewa Mega, 2022

4.6 Pura Babakan as a Spiritual Tourism Site

Spiritual tourism is a new trend in the world of tourism that tends to increase. This type of tourism has the potential to be developed and is of sufficient quality because, in practice, it highly respects local cultural traditions, and invites people to love nature and the environment. According to Herdina (2012), spiritual tourism is an alternative tour that can be carried out by urban communities, aiming to restore physical and mental conditions due to the dense daily activities.

Several writers on Bali state that Bali is a place to reminisce about the past in the Eastern world. In the past, the Eastern world was a place to study religion, meditate, and do yoga, so Bali is believed to be a place of peace. This image of the past clashes with the thriving tourism in Bali, which is the result of globalisation. In such developments, the nostalgic image of the past continues to be built to attract tourists. Magical imagery, spirituality, and peace are

conditions present in yoga and meditation. Therefore, yoga and meditation were part of the quest for romance in the East.

The management said that the entire area on the south side of Pura Babakan must be free of crowds and all forms of activity by local residents. Tourist activities can only be accessed via the North Pura Babakan route. The meditation programme has been prepared by the management. When the group of meditation participants arrives, a *melukat* or self-cleansing programme, will be held that aims to purify the body and soul, which is then followed by the opening ceremony to the main event. At the end of the event, a meditation will be held by placing hands on the Kayu Putih tree trunks in order to request energy for drug addiction rehabilitation therapy.

5. Conclusion

The development of tourism in Bali has caused temples, which were previously places of worship for Hindus who are known to be sacred, to be commodified as tourist attractions for tourism purposes. Production is related to Pura Babakan as a temple relic from Puri Perean around the 14th century. The signs are: (a) the *Utamaning Mandala* area, which is often used as a place for meditation; (b) the *Madyaning Mandala* area which is often used as a place for selfies because of the view of the large Kayu Putih Tree; and (c) the natural beauty around Pura Babakan which has a magical nuance. Regarding the production process, the uniqueness of the Pura Babakan area as a cultural asset of the Desa Tua can be transformed into an economic asset through storynomics or its folklore as a tourist attraction, as can the uniqueness of Pura Babakan in the tourism development strategy in the Desa Tua. The distribution process includes the distribution of photos related to activities in the Pura Babakan Area on social media networks, as well as promotions that have been carried out to be able to expand the reach of a wider community to visit. The Pura Babakan is promoted to foreign tourists and domestic tourists. Promotion is carried out through social media networks, such as: Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, and Blogs.

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