

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE STRATEGY IN PRIORITY TOURISM DESTINATIONS: THE CASE OF BOROBUDUR

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Keywords: ambidextrous storytelling, resource orchestration, competitive dynamics, Borobudur DSP, narrative strategy.</p> <p>Received: December 19, 2025</p> <p>Approved: May 29, 2026</p> <p>Published: June 29, 2026</p>	<p>The transformation of global tourism requires destination management strategies that extend beyond physical development toward the orchestration of symbolic and narrative resources. In the Borobudur Super Priority Destination (DSP), narrative functions as a strategic asset shaping destination identity, competitiveness, and sustainability. However, fragmented institutional coordination, top-down storytelling, limited community participation, and weak digital narrative integration have created a gap between policy aspirations and local cultural realities. This study adopts a qualitative policy-oriented case study approach centered on Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 88 of 2024 concerning the Borobudur–Yogyakarta–Prambanan (BYP) National Tourism Destination Master Plan. The analysis combines qualitative document analysis with an integrative review of Scopus-indexed literature on tourism storytelling, organizational ambidexterity, resource orchestration, and destination governance. The findings reveal that the disconnection between policy design, institutional orchestration, and local meaning-making processes generates narrative fragmentation that weakens destination competitiveness and authenticity. In response, this paper proposes the Ambidextrous Narrative Orchestration framework, which conceptualizes destination competitiveness as the outcome of dynamic interactions among ambidextrous governance, narrative strategic assets, and adaptive resource orchestration. The study contributes theoretically by extending ambidexterity and orchestration perspectives into culture-based tourism narrative management while offering practical insights for collaborative and narrative-driven tourism governance.</p>

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the global tourism landscape has experienced profound transformations. Heightened demands for sustainability, increasing inter-destination competition, and the evolving expectations of tourists for meaningful and authentic experiences have catalyzed a paradigm shift in destination management strategies. Within this dynamic context, narratives have transcended their traditional role as mere promotional tools. Instead, they have emerged as strategic instruments in value creation, place-making, and destination differentiation (Bassano et al., 2019; Zhang & Ramayah, 2024). A growing body of literature indicates that compelling destination narratives can foster emotional engagement, reinforce identity, and enhance long-term appeal (Dionisio & Nisi, 2021; Guleria et al., 2024).

These developments have led to the emergence of the *storynomics* approach, which conceptualizes storytelling as a dual vehicle for generating both economic and cultural value. Central to this approach is the integration of narratives within the design of tourism experiences, leveraging cultural heritage, indigenous creativity, and digital technologies (Kasemsarn et al., 2023). This integration is especially relevant in the post-pandemic era, wherein destinations are compelled not only to restore economic vitality but also to rebuild cohesive narratives that unify local stakeholders under a vision of sustainability (Muangasame & Tan, 2023).

In this milieu, destination narratives must be viewed as dynamic and adaptive rather than linear or static. Narratives embedded in local traditions and values must be continuously reframed to accommodate external shocks and global expectations. The framework of *ambidextrous storytelling* offers a strategic lens to simultaneously exploit existing cultural assets while exploring innovative narrative expressions (Maclean et al., 2021; Vo Thanh et al., 2020). This dual capacity necessitates agile narrative governance that aligns with both socio-cultural evolution and technological disruption. As such, narrative ambidexterity enables destinations to remain relevant while preserving cultural authenticity.

Despite its strategic potential, the implementation of storytelling within destination governance, particularly in developing countries, continues to face substantial barriers. Zins & Abbas Adamu (2024) reveal that many Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) deploy narratives without theoretical grounding, often relying on generic archetypes that fail to balance cultural integrity and innovation. Similarly, Bassano et al. (2019) caution that narratives devoid of community involvement risk undermining authenticity and inclusivity. These critiques resonate in the Indonesian context, especially within the development of five Super Priority Destinations (Destinasi Super Prioritas/DSP), where top-down narrative construction remains prevalent, and grassroots participation in narrative formation is minimal. One of the most prominent examples is the development of the Borobudur Temple Compounds as a strategic cultural tourism destination in Indonesia.

The Borobudur Temple Compounds, located in Borobudur and Mungkid Districts, Central Java, Indonesia, is one of the world's most significant Buddhist heritage sites and was officially inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991. The complex consists of Borobudur Temple, Mendut Temple, and Pawon Temple, which collectively represent the spiritual stages toward Nirvana in Buddhist cosmology (UNESCO, 2025). The site is internationally recognized for its monumental Buddhist architecture, extensive stone

reliefs, and cultural-historical significance dating back to the 8th and 9th centuries during the Syailendra Dynasty (UNESCO, 2025). In addition, the surrounding area includes several cultural villages and community-based tourism destinations that preserve local traditions, crafts, and cultural practices.

The Ministry of Tourism (Kemenpar) of the Republic of Indonesia plays a central role in formulating the strategic roadmap for tourism development in the Borobudur area, including through the establishment of the Borobudur Authority Agency (Badan Otorita Borobudur/BOB), which is responsible for integrating cultural heritage preservation with sustainable tourism initiatives. The tourism potential of Borobudur Temple is reflected in the increasing number of tourist arrivals, reaching approximately 230,095 international tourists and 1,055,934 domestic tourists in 2024, based on data published by Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Magelang, which cites the Dinas Pariwisata, Kepemudaan, dan Olahraga Kabupaten Magelang. However, despite strong institutional efforts to strengthen destination branding and tourism infrastructure, empirical observations indicate a disconnect between policy-driven narratives and organically evolving community discourses. This fragmentation creates a narrative dissonance between top-down tourism visioning and bottom-up cultural realities, posing challenges for the development of inclusive, authentic, and resilient destination narratives.

This narrative dissonance constitutes the central problem addressed in this study. Specifically, the prevailing approach to destination narrative construction in Indonesia's DSP framework, exemplified by Borobudur, operates through a centralized, monumentalist logic that privileges institutional voice while marginalizing community co-authorship. This top-down orientation creates three interrelated challenges: (1) narratives that lack cultural resonance with local communities, (2) limited adaptive capacity to respond to shifting tourist expectations and external disruptions, and (3) fragmented stakeholder alignment that undermines sustainable tourism development. The persistence of this problem, despite growing scholarly attention to participatory and adaptive storytelling, signals a critical implementation gap that demands both theoretical and empirical investigation.

To address this issue, the *resource orchestration* perspective provides an insightful explanatory framework. It posits that narratives, as intangible cultural assets, require strategic curation, integration, and mobilization to generate competitive advantage. The ability of tourism organizations to orchestrate resources through ambidextrous learning mechanisms is pivotal in enhancing organizational agility and resilience. In tandem, digital transformation within tourism underscores the importance of establishing digital trust and collaborative governance, particularly to avoid the atomization of narrative ecosystems (Nanchen et al., 2021).

Equally important, the roles of local actors in constructing and sustaining destination narratives are often marginalized in formal tourism strategies. Bertella (2023) underscores the significance of small-scale actors in peripheral regions who serve as vital agents in crafting place-based meanings and delivering culturally resonant experiences. Unfortunately, narrative planning that is overly centralized often fails to reflect the multilayered socio-cultural dynamics present in local contexts. This disconnect can dilute narrative effectiveness and hinder participatory tourism development.

In the case of Borobudur, the dominant narrative approach has historically focused on monumentalism which emphasizes historical and spiritual dimensions in a fixed, monolithic fashion. Such a strategy limits the scope for reinterpretation and constrains

community co-authorship. In contrast, contemporary narrative strategy should embrace dialogic construction, enabling the blending of traditional elements with modern visitor expectations. The transmedia storytelling framework proposed by Dionisio & Nisi (2021) exemplifies how multifaceted narratives can expand engagement and democratize narrative ownership.

Conceptually, the intersection of storytelling, ambidexterity, and resource orchestration offers a fertile ground for rethinking strategic narrative design. This integrative approach facilitates the reconciliation of cultural depth with managerial agility, enabling destinations to simultaneously preserve heritage and innovate adaptively. However, a critical examination of the existing literature reveals three significant gaps.

First, while ambidextrous organizational learning has been extensively studied in corporate and innovation management contexts, its application to narrative strategy in destination governance remains theoretically underdeveloped. Existing tourism studies predominantly treat ambidexterity as an operational capability rather than as a communicative and cultural construct.

Second, resource orchestration theory has been applied to tangible assets and dynamic capabilities in tourism (Sirmon et al., 2011), yet its extension to intangible narrative resources, particularly in heritage-based destinations, has received scant attention. The mechanisms through which DMOs can curate, bundle, and deploy narrative assets across multiple stakeholder groups remain underspecified.

Third, empirical research integrating these domains within developing country contexts is notably absent. Studies in Southeast Asia have examined storytelling practices (Kasemsarn et al., 2023) and sustainability governance (Muangasame & Tan, 2023) separately, but none have systematically investigated how these elements interact to shape destination narrative resilience. This absence is particularly pronounced in Indonesia's DSP framework, where the tension between centralized governance and community-based narrative construction presents a compelling empirical puzzle.

Accordingly, this study advances the field by proposing and empirically examining an integrative conceptual framework that synthesizes ambidextrous storytelling with resource orchestration theory. The novelty of this contribution is threefold. First, it reconceptualizes destination narratives not merely as promotional content but as strategic, communicative, and social resources subject to orchestration dynamics—thereby extending resource orchestration theory into the cultural-symbolic domain. Second, it operationalizes ambidextrous storytelling as a governance mechanism that enables destinations to simultaneously exploit established cultural narratives while exploring emergent, community-driven narrative innovations. Third, by grounding this framework in the empirical context of Borobudur DSP, this study provides context-sensitive insights into narrative governance challenges specific to heritage destinations in developing economies.

This paper aims to critically investigate the practices and theoretical underpinnings of narrative strategies within the DSP framework, using Borobudur as a focal case. It explores how ambidextrous storytelling can be operationalized as an orchestration strategy that empowers local actors, aligns institutional and grassroots narratives, and fosters long-term sustainability.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do institutional and community-based narratives currently coexist and conflict within Borobudur's destination governance?

2. What mechanisms enable or constrain ambidextrous storytelling practices in the orchestration of destination narrative resources?
3. How can an integrative framework of ambidextrous storytelling and resource orchestration inform more inclusive and adaptive narrative strategies for heritage-based destinations?

In doing so, this paper contributes a conceptual model that reframes narratives as orchestrable strategic resources, offering both theoretical advancement and practical implications for destination managers navigating the complexities of heritage tourism in the post-pandemic era.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative policy-oriented case study design to examine how storytelling, ambidexterity, and resource orchestration are conceptually embedded within Indonesia's tourism governance framework, particularly in the context of the Borobudur DSP.

The study is centered on the analysis of **Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 88 of 2024 concerning the National Tourism Destination Master Plan for Borobudur–Yogyakarta–Prambanan (BYP) 2024–2044** as the primary institutional framework guiding long-term tourism development and destination governance. The master plan is specifically designed to address several major challenges in the development of the BYP Tourism Destination Area, including high population density, inadequate connectivity, insufficient basic public services, and the need to strengthen destination management, particularly the management of cultural heritage sites. Within this framework, the Borobudur Main Tourism Area (Kawasan Pariwisata Utama/KTA Borobudur) is designated as the primary focus of tourism development, integrating tourism governance, cultural heritage preservation, spatial planning, infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, and regional economic integration.

The research also combines two additional sources of evidence: (1) integrative literature review, and (2) analytical reflection grounded in tourism governance debates to strengthen analytical rigor through triangulation and to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the institutional logic underlying tourism destination governance.

Integrative Literature Review

In addition to policy analysis, this study employs an integrative review of scholarly literature to develop the conceptual foundation of the study. The literature review focused on three interrelated concepts: storytelling in tourism, organizational ambidexterity, and resource orchestration. Relevant academic articles were identified through Scopus-indexed journals to ensure the quality and international relevance of the references used.

The literature selection process involved keyword-based searches using combinations of terms such as “tourism storytelling,” “destination storytelling,” “organizational ambidexterity in tourism,” “resource orchestration,” “destination governance,” and “sustainable tourism management.” Articles were selected based on three criteria: (1) relevance to tourism or destination management contexts, (2) conceptual or empirical discussion of storytelling, ambidexterity, or resource orchestration, and (3) publication in peer-reviewed international journals.



Analytical Reflection and Interpretive Strategy

The term “analytical reflection” in this study refers to an interpretive analytical process through which the findings from policy documents and scholarly literature are critically compared and contextualized within the realities of tourism governance. This approach does not rely on personal opinion or anecdotal observation; instead, it involves theoretically informed interpretation grounded in existing debates on destination governance, institutional coordination, and sustainable tourism management.

The analytical reflection was conducted by comparing the normative aspirations articulated in Perpres No. 88/2024 with governance challenges frequently identified in tourism governance literature. Through this interpretive process, the study evaluates how policy narratives may facilitate or constrain the implementation of collaborative and inclusive storytelling practices.

This interpretive orientation is informed by strategic management perspectives, particularly ambidexterity and resource orchestration theory. Ambidexterity is used to assess how tourism governance simultaneously balances preservation-oriented and innovation-oriented strategies, while resource orchestration provides an analytical lens for examining how institutional actors mobilize and coordinate cultural, social, and organizational resources within destination development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Critical Analysis of Strategic Narrative Dynamics in Borobudur DSP

This section presents the findings and discussion regarding the strategic development of the Borobudur DSP through the perspectives of ambidexterity, resource orchestration, and competitive dynamics. The analysis compares the main findings with the directions outlined in Presidential Regulation No. 88 of 2024 and relevant previous studies. The discussion also identifies several gaps between strategic planning and practical implementation.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Borobudur DSP Development: Findings, Master Plan Alignment, and Previous Research Perspectives

Findings	Relevant Master Plan	Previous Research	Discussion
Borobudur’s competitive advantage lies in inimitable resources such as cultural heritage, spiritual values, and emotional connections.	The master plan positions Borobudur as a world-class cultural tourism destination rooted in heritage and living culture.	Ndubisi & Nair (2023).	The findings demonstrate that Borobudur’s intangible assets possess strong strategic value. The key challenge is integrating these cultural resources into cohesive, immersive, and emotionally meaningful visitor experiences.
The development of Borobudur DSP reflects an ambidextrous approach that combines cultural heritage preservation with tourism experience innovation.	The master plan emphasizes balancing heritage conservation and destination innovation through the integration of Borobudur–Yogyakarta–Prambanan.	March (1991); Vo Thanh et al. (2020); Zehrer & Hallmann (2015).	The findings indicate that restricting temple access while introducing thematic travel circuits already reflects ambidexterity. However, implementation remains suboptimal because narrative innovation and community participation are still limited.



Findings	Relevant Master Plan	Previous Research	Discussion
Local communities are still positioned mainly as operational actors rather than co-creators of destination narratives.	The master plan emphasizes community empowerment and the development of culturally based tourism villages.	Cerquetti et al. (2022); Bertella (2023); Afandi et al. (2025).	Although training and certification programs have been implemented, their transformative impact remains limited because communities are not fully involved in cultural interpretation and meaning-making processes. Stronger participatory engagement is necessary to sustain destination authenticity.
BPOB has not yet functioned effectively as a strategic orchestrator and remains predominantly administrative.	The master plan emphasizes collaborative governance and institutional strengthening among stakeholders in destination management.	Sirmon et al. (2011); Idisondjaja et al. (2023); González-Rodríguez et al. (2023).	Theoretically, destination management requires orchestration capability to integrate resources and stakeholder interests. In practice, BPOB has not fully performed its role as a strategic facilitator, resulting in fragmented coordination across institutions.
Infrastructure development has accelerated, but cultural and narrative dimensions remain weakly integrated.	The master plan targets the development of an integrated tourism ecosystem based on both infrastructure and cultural heritage.	Latifah (2024); Sasongko et al. (2025).	Development efforts continue to focus heavily on physical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and tourism zones. This imbalance risks weakening Borobudur's distinctiveness as a cultural tourism destination if symbolic and local cultural enrichment are not reinforced.
Borobudur's tourism narrative remains top-down and elitist, making it less adaptive to contemporary tourist dynamics.	The master plan promotes cultural narrative revitalization through community participation and local identity strengthening.	Zins & Abbas Adamu (2024); Kasemsarn et al. (2023); Muangasame & Tan (2023).	There is a gap between government-led narratives and authentic local experiences. Previous studies emphasize that successful destination branding depends on co-created and locally grounded storytelling that generates emotional resonance for tourists.

Source: Authors

Theoretical Foundations: Ambidexterity, Orchestration, and Competitive Dynamics

Contemporary strategies for managing tourism destinations necessitate a multidimensional and adaptive approach, transcending the conventional focus on infrastructure development and promotional efforts. The intricate interplay of evolving tourist behaviors, volatile global market trends, and escalating demands for cultural heritage preservation underscores the urgency of long-term, flexible governance models. Within this framework, three interrelated theoretical constructs—ambidexterity, resource orchestration, and competitive dynamics—emerge as pivotal analytical lenses to understand and enhance the strategic capabilities of destination management organizations.

Ambidexterity: Balancing Preservation and Innovation

Ambidexterity, as conceptualized by March (1991), refers to an organization's ability to simultaneously engage in exploitation (the optimization of existing assets and competencies) and exploration (which entails the pursuit of novel solutions, narrative innovation, and creative strategies for destination development). Within the framework of the Borobudur DSP, this dual capacity becomes particularly salient, as the imperative to



preserve cultural heritage intersects with rising expectations for technologically advanced and experience-oriented innovations.

Zehrer & Hallmann (2015) underscore the critical role of stakeholder involvement in navigating the inherent tension between organizational stability and transformation. This aligns with Vo Thanh et al. (2020), who argue that ambidexterity in tourism is not merely a matter of balancing exploration and exploitation, but also necessitates the active and concurrent engagement of both internal stakeholders such as governmental and managerial actors, and external stakeholders, including communities and visitors. Maclean et al. (2021) contend that narrative innovation in destination branding cannot be sustained unless supported by participatory leadership and collective meaning-making processes, thereby reinforcing the need for distributed agency in shaping destination identity.

From an operational perspective, Ahani et al. (2019) reveal that online tourist reviews provide rich data streams that can function as real-time indicators of emerging narrative preferences, offering valuable inputs for the development of adaptive storytelling strategies. In parallel, the integration of Smart Tourism Technologies embodies exploratory mechanisms that enhance tourist engagement during both pre-visit planning and in-destination experiences, thereby expanding the narrative dimensions of place.

Borobudur, in this context, exhibits latent potential for ambidextrous strategy through the restriction of physical temple visits as an act of exploitative conservation, coupled with exploratory initiatives such as thematic travel circuits and the revitalization of localized cultural narratives.

Resource Orchestration: Consolidating Strategic Assets

Sirmon et al. (2011) conceptualize resource orchestration as a dynamic managerial capability involving the acquisition, bundling, and strategic leveraging of diverse resources. Within the context of tourism destinations, this orchestration encompasses not only physical infrastructure and financial capital, but also intangible and symbolic assets, such as cultural narratives, social trust, and the quality of inter-organizational relationships that underpin collaborative governance structures.

Idisondjaja et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of orchestration capabilities in shaping sustainable value creation by DMOs. BPOB as the manager of the Borobudur DSP needs to be seen not just as an administrative institution, but as an orchestrator capable of bridging strategic visions across actors. González-Rodríguez et al. (2023) showed that stakeholder participation directly improves the tourist experience and the quality of destination management.

Competitive Dynamics: Responding to Competition Adaptively

Chen & Miller (2015) define competitive dynamics as a series of strategic responses enacted in reaction to the actions and market signals emitted by rival entities. Within the tourism sector, such dynamics encompass a spectrum of adaptive strategies, including the alignment with evolving travel trends, responsiveness to global market expectations, and the continuous repositioning of destination branding to sustain competitive relevance. The Borobudur DSP, in this regard, operates within a crowded competitive landscape, contending not only with prominent domestic destinations like Bali and Mandalika but also with internationally renowned World Heritage sites across Southeast Asia.

Ndubisi & Nair (2023) emphasize the importance of understanding inimitable versus imitable resources in strengthening destination image. An authentic image is more difficult to imitate and has a long-term effect on competitiveness, so a strategy is needed that can maintain and develop this uniqueness sustainably. This becomes increasingly important in the face of the pressures of homogenization of the tourism market that lead to uniformity of experience. In the context of Borobudur, the competitive advantage clearly lies in the globally recognized cultural heritage, including iconic architecture and high spiritual values. However, if this heritage is only used as an object without revitalizing the narrative and emotional connection with tourists, then this advantage will lose its significance. Consequently, a strategic shift toward adaptive, participatory, and locally embedded storytelling becomes imperative to preserve cultural relevance and enhance differentiation in an increasingly homogenized tourism market.

Furthermore, Dionisio & Nisi (2021) highlight the strategic value of transmedia storytelling in crafting immersive, multilayered narrative experiences. By leveraging cross-platform communication, destinations can create cohesive and resonant stories that not only deepen tourists' engagement but also promote more meaningful, thematic, and experience-oriented travel behaviors. However, the success of such approaches is dependent on narrative coherence and continuity across media formats and among the stakeholders involved in content creation and delivery. Without alignment between narrative producers, platforms, and audience expectations, the intended emotional connection and strategic differentiation may weaken, reducing the overall impact of the storytelling initiative.

As noted by Baker & Crompton (2000), both service quality and experiential satisfaction significantly influence tourist loyalty and the intention to revisit a destination. Recent findings by Hidayah et al. (2025) further demonstrate that even in the case of Borobudur, tourist satisfaction is strongly shaped by destination image, service quality, and sustainability considerations. Their findings further indicate that tourist evaluations of service quality are not only driven by functional aspects but are also deeply shaped by perceived value and emotional resonance. This underscores the notion that strategic experience management constitutes an essential component of competitive dynamics in tourism, wherein emotional engagement and meaning co-creation become critical drivers of sustained competitive advantage.

Consequently, competitive dynamics within the tourism sector should not be narrowly interpreted as mere product differentiation, but rather as the differentiation of meanings that are co-constructed through interactions between destinations and visitors. These meanings are cultivated through the enhancement of perception, emotional involvement, and immersive experiences that collectively foster long-term loyalty and destination attachment.

Analytical Reflections: Practice and Policy in DSP Borobudur

The development of the Borobudur DSP represents a pivotal shift in Indonesia's tourism policy, reflecting a dual orientation toward enhancing global competitiveness while ensuring local sustainability. Through an integrative planning paradigm encompassing infrastructure, tourism ecosystem governance, institutional strengthening, and cultural narrative revitalization, the government has designated Borobudur as one of the five national priority destinations. Nonetheless, a discernible gap remains between strategic

planning and field-level implementation, as well as between the envisioned narrative and the experiential reality encountered by visitors and local stakeholders.

As a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site since 1991, Borobudur carries both the symbolic weight of historical legacy and the strategic promise of cultural capital. Its development trajectory not only mirrors national economic and geopolitical aspirations but also constitutes a contested space wherein meanings are continuously negotiated among the state, local communities, and global tourism markets. In this regard, Perpres No. 88 of 2024 serves as a critical legal instrument that consolidates the spatial and strategic integration of Borobudur, Yogyakarta, and Prambanan into a unified long-term development blueprint. The regulation underscores the imperative of safeguarding cultural heritage, fostering synergy among diverse actors, and enabling institutional transformation through collaborative governance mechanisms. By institutionalizing multi-actor participation and heritage-based planning, the policy aims to ensure that development efforts do not merely commodify heritage, but rather reinforce its significance through inclusive, context-sensitive strategies that balance preservation with innovation.

Nevertheless, the institutional transformation of the BPOB into a Public Service Agency has yet to materialize into an effective strategic orchestrator. In practice, BPOB continues to function predominantly in an administrative capacity, rather than fulfilling a strategic role as a narrative facilitator and integrator of multi-stakeholder interests. This institutional inertia is further compounded by limited coordination capabilities, inadequate adaptive human resources, and the absence of structured deliberative mechanisms.

Moreover, the current narrative development approach remains entrenched in a form of elitist symbolism that inadequately reflects evolving social dynamics and the increasingly sophisticated preferences of contemporary tourists. Dominant heritage and spiritual narratives, primarily orchestrated by state actors, continue to be delivered through top-down channels, thereby constraining the emergence of inclusive and participatory storytelling frameworks, as observed by Zins & Abbas Adamu (2024). This is problematic, especially in light of the growing recognition as highlighted by Kasemsarn et al. (2023) and Muangasame & Tan (2023) that successful destination branding increasingly depends on the co-creation of authentic, locally grounded experiences. These experiences should emerge not only from curated heritage but also from the everyday practices, values, and aspirations of local communities, thereby fostering emotional resonance and sustainable visitor engagement.

This phenomenon is further exacerbated by the limited integration of local community capacity-building initiatives into the broader framework of destination narrative strategies. While human resource training and tourism certification programs implemented in the Borobudur region have demonstrated preliminary progress toward community empowerment (Sunartono, 2023), their transformative impact remains constrained. Without a comprehensive narrative framework that positions local communities not merely as service providers but as co-creators of meaning and cultural interpretation, these efforts risk becoming superficial. As underscored by Cerquetti et al. (2022) and Bertella (2023), meaningful community participation in narrative co-production constitutes a fundamental pillar for the long-term sustainability and authenticity of tourism destinations (Afandi et al., 2025).

At the policy level, infrastructural development within Borobudur and its surrounding areas has experienced significant acceleration. Cross-ministerial coordination

has facilitated the construction and revitalization of nearly 73 kilometers of roads and bridges, as well as tourism-supportive zones such as the Kujon Art Village and several initiatives under the *Sarhunta* program targeting tourism villages. These are commendable steps toward strengthening the physical backbone of the destination ecosystem. However, the prevailing emphasis on tangible infrastructure development risks marginalizing the cultural and narrative layers that are essential for sustaining Borobudur's distinctive identity as a world-class cultural tourism site (Latifah, 2024; Sasongko et al., 2025). To preserve its uniqueness and relevance, strategic equilibrium must be achieved between material enhancement and symbolic enrichment rooted in local values and living heritage.

A salient example of this ambivalent strategic orientation is the restriction of tourist access to the upper levels of the Borobudur Temple, which has been implemented alongside the introduction of thematic travel circuits. While, in principle, this dual approach reflects an ambidextrous strategy that balances the imperatives of heritage conservation with the pursuit of experiential innovation, it remains constrained by the absence of an alternative narrative that is both culturally resonant and rooted in local community values. As a result, the initiative risks being perceived as performative rather than transformative. Moreira et al. (2025) caution that destination narratives which remain static and fail to adapt to evolving tourist expectations are likely to lose relevance rapidly. Without continuous narrative renewal that integrates local identity and visitor engagement, such strategies may ultimately undermine the intended objectives of both preservation and innovation.

The limitations of the current narrative strategy also extend to the domains of communication design and distribution channels. In an increasingly digitalized tourism landscape, the competitive advantage of a destination is no longer determined solely by its physical attributes, but rather by its capacity to cultivate emotional connections with visitors through diverse and integrated digital platforms. As noted by Zhang & Ramayah (2024), the implementation of transmedia storytelling wherein narrative content is cohesively disseminated across multiple media formats is essential for sustaining tourist engagement in the digital age.

Regrettably, there is scant evidence of a coherent cross-channel communication strategy being systematically employed to manage the Borobudur narrative. This signals a persistent gap between strategic intent and the operationalization of narrative management. As argued by Abubakar & Mavondo (2014), tourists' perceptions of service quality and experiential value are significantly shaped by emotional and social factors, the dimensions that have not yet been adequately integrated into Borobudur's narrative architecture. Reinforcing this perspective, Ahani et al. (2019) emphasize that online reviews and user-generated content serve as critical indicators of tourist expectations and experiential preferences, which can inform the iterative redesign of destination storytelling. Without incorporating these dynamic feedback loops, destination narratives risk stagnation and disconnection from evolving visitor sensibilities.

From a strategic standpoint, analytical reflections on the Borobudur DSP underscore the critical need to differentiate between imitable and inimitable resources. As articulated by Ndubisi & Nair (2023), elements such as cultural heritage, embedded social values, and emotional connections represent unique sources of competitive advantage that are inherently difficult to replicate. These intangible assets should therefore be fully leveraged within the framework of narrative-based tourism development. While Borobudur possesses these distinctive attributes, the principal challenge lies in effectively integrating

them into a cohesive and immersive visitor experience that conveys meaning and fosters long-term engagement.

One illustrative example is Borobudur Highland, a tourism complex developed in the Menoreh hills featuring five thematic zones which holds significant potential to serve as a laboratory for narrative-driven tourism innovation (Oktavia, 2021). However, in the absence of genuine community engagement and the co-creation of grounded, cross-channel narratives, there is a substantial risk that this initiative will evolve into an exclusive enclave, detached from the local socio-cultural milieu and alienating the very communities it is meant to represent and empower.

This reflection affirms that effective destination orchestration cannot be sustained through formal institutional structures alone. As highlighted by González-Rodríguez et al. (2023) and Zehrer & Hallmann (2015), the depth and quality of collaboration among stakeholders serve as critical determinants in fostering adaptive capacity and long-term sustainability in tourism destinations. In the case of Borobudur, persistent role fragmentation among the Kemenpar, the Borobudur Authority (BPOB), local governments, and community actors presents a systemic barrier. This institutional disjunction hampers the integration of policies, the coherence of destination narratives, and the consolidation of shared competitiveness across governance and operational levels.

In conclusion, the Borobudur DSP stands at a critical juncture between the dominant logic of physical infrastructure development and the imperative for holistic narrative orchestration. The ongoing institutional and policy transformations must be met not only with reformative intent but also with genuinely transformative strategies. Key interventions include strengthening tourism human capital through narrative-based capacity-building, leveraging digital technologies as platforms for meaning dissemination, and co-creating narratives that are grounded in the lived experiences of local communities. As emphasized by Maclean et al. (2021), an effective narrative strategy extends beyond communicative output; it serves as a mechanism for constructing collective identity and a strategic instrument for cross-actor orchestration. Ultimately, empirical insights from Borobudur's practices and policies underscore the necessity of integrating symbolic, structural, and digital dimensions in shaping a globally competitive and locally meaningful destination. Absent a comprehensive paradigm shift, Borobudur risks becoming an architecturally magnificent yet narratively hollow site.

Synthesis Strategy: Towards Inclusive Transformation

A critical dimension of strategic synthesis lies in the capacity to align narratives, policies, and technological systems into a coherent and mutually reinforcing framework. In this regard, Perpres No. 88 of 2024 provides a formalized legal foundation for integrative development across the BYP corridor. However, as evidenced by empirical observations, the disjunction between policy formulation and field-level implementation highlights the weak operationalization of this strategic vision.

For instance, while the construction of approximately 73 kilometers of roads and bridges signifies substantial progress in physical infrastructure, the corresponding cultural and narrative dimensions have not been afforded commensurate strategic attention. In the absence of a well-articulated narrative framework and an innovative system for meaning dissemination, development initiatives risk becoming technically efficient yet symbolically hollow. Maclean et al. (2021) emphasize that narrative strategy transcends mere

communication; it is a vehicle for constructing collective identity and facilitating cross-actor orchestration.

Accordingly, strategic investments must prioritize narrative-based human resource development, the integration of smart tourism technologies, and the establishment of a collaborative digital ecosystem. These elements are indispensable in translating theoretical frameworks into actionable practices, thereby ensuring that infrastructural advancement is anchored in cultural resonance and long-term destination sustainability.

Strategic synthesis should not be construed as a compromise between theory and practice. It should involve the deliberate construction of reflective and forward-looking interconnections between conceptual frameworks and real-world dynamics. In the context of Borobudur, this entails the formulation of policy designs that simultaneously address three interdependent dimensions: symbolic (heritage and spirituality), structural (institutions and infrastructure), and digital (communication systems and technological platforms). The enhancement of institutional orchestration, the active involvement of communities in narrative co-production, and the reconfiguration of communication channels represent three interlocking pillars of synthesis. As emphasized by Romero-Medina et al. (2024), in the absence of these interconnected efforts, destination management risks devolving into administrative formalism that fails to address the evolving complexities of the global tourism landscape.

Borobudur DSP holds significant potential to serve as a national model for narrative-based tourism transformation. However, realizing this potential depends on the ability of its management strategy to effectively bridge the gap between theoretical idealism and practical intricacies. As Dionisio & Nisi (2021) argue, a compelling destination narrative is one that functions as a platform for the articulation and negotiation of shared values—across the state, local communities, and tourists—thereby fostering inclusive identity formation and sustainable place-based engagement.

Conceptual Model: Ambidextrous Narrative Orchestration

The conceptual model proposed in this study represents an integrative synthesis of the theoretical foundations of ambidexterity, resource orchestration, and competitive dynamics as previously discussed. The visual representation of the model is structured into three interrelated layers—Dynamic Mechanism, Narrative Strategic Assets, and Strategic Output—each serving as a systemic depiction of the ambidextrous narrative management process within destination governance.

In the first layer, Dynamic Mechanism, the flow of three strategic stages is shown: ambidexterity, orchestration, and competitive dynamics. These stages reflect the conceptual framework underlying the destination strategy transformation process (Chen & Miller, 2015; March, 1991; Sirmon et al., 2011). Ambidexterity is represented in the form of tension between the exploitation of heritage values (e.g. Borobudur spirituality) and the exploration of contemporary narratives through thematic travel routes, new experience designs, and digitalization of interpretation (Dionisio & Nisi, 2021; Kasemsarn et al., 2023). The orchestration stage assumes the active role of management institutions such as BPOB in organizing resources in an adaptive, collaborative, and value-oriented manner (Idisondjaja et al., 2023). This process is strengthened by the existence of feedback loops from the community and tourists who play a role in adjusting the strategy continuously (Luštický & Štumpf, 2021).



The second layer, Narrative Strategic Assets, contains elements of symbolic and functional resources that form the basis for the formation of destination narratives. Components such as Cultural Storytelling, Relevant and Inclusive Narratives, and Media, Digital Platforms, and Experiential Events are concrete forms of values managed in the narrative orchestration process (Bassano et al., 2019; Zhang & Ramayah, 2024). This is where the role of Community-Based Resource Activation and Institutional Governance becomes very important. The participation of local actors as producers of meaning and owners of narratives is the main prerequisite so that the narratives formed are not top-down, but rather originate from the socio-cultural roots of the region (Bertella, 2023; Cerquetti et al., 2022).

The third layer, Strategic Output, represents the results of the narrative orchestration process that is carried out ambidextrously. The main targeted outputs are Narrative Coherence, Sacred Narrative Identity, and Sustainable Destination Competitiveness. The three are interrelated in creating a strategic position for a destination at the national and global levels. When the narrative that is built is able to harmonize the values of sacredness, community involvement, and technological adaptation, then the destination's excellence will be formed sustainably (Maclean et al., 2021; Moreira et al., 2025).

This model further illustrates that narrative differentiation cannot be achieved solely through promotional campaigns or surface-level branding efforts. Instead, it must be rooted in the reconstruction of authentic visitor experiences, the emotional engagement of tourists, and the collective agency of local stakeholders in reinterpreting cultural values in ways that are both contextually grounded and strategically oriented. Such an approach aligns with the principles of strategic storytelling, which moves beyond mere information dissemination to actively reshape public perceptions and co-create meaning within destination contexts (Vo Thanh et al., 2020; Zhang & Ramayah, 2024).

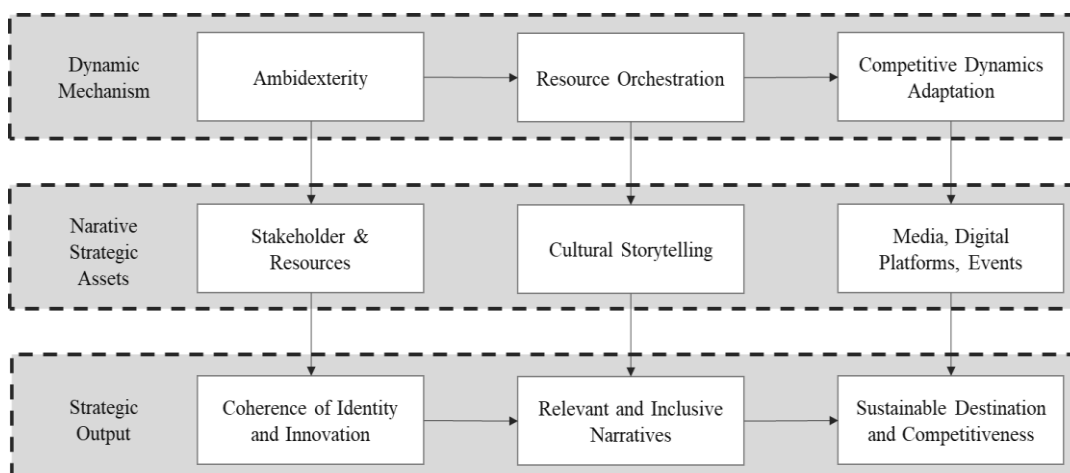


Figure 1. Ambidextrous Narrative Orchestration Model for Competitive Tourism Strategy

Viewed through the lens of strategic management, the operational dynamics of Borobudur’s tourism governance can be understood as a dynamic mechanism that continuously mediates the interaction between ambidexterity, resource orchestration, and destination competitiveness. In this mechanism, ambidexterity enables destination actors to simultaneously pursue heritage preservation and experiential innovation, while resource

orchestration determines how cultural, institutional, technological, and community-based resources are mobilized, integrated, and aligned across multiple governance levels. The effectiveness of this strategic flow depends not only on formal coordination structures, but also on the adaptive capacity of institutions to respond to evolving tourist expectations, digital communication patterns, and local socio-cultural transformations. Consequently, competitiveness within the Borobudur DSP should not be interpreted as a static outcome derived solely from infrastructural superiority, but rather as an emergent capability produced through continuous negotiation between conservation imperatives, narrative renewal, stakeholder collaboration, and market responsiveness.

Within this dynamic mechanism, narrative strategic assets constitute the central intangible resources through which Borobudur differentiates itself from competing destinations. These assets encompass both symbolic and functional dimensions, including cultural storytelling, sacred historical meanings, local traditions, collective memory, community practices, digital narrative content, and the institutional legitimacy attached to Borobudur as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Symbolically, these assets reinforce emotional attachment, authenticity, and identity construction among visitors and local communities. Functionally, they operate as strategic instruments that facilitate destination branding, stakeholder alignment, tourism experience design, and transmedia communication across digital platforms. When effectively orchestrated, narrative strategic assets enable the destination to transform cultural heritage from a passive historical artifact into an active source of experiential and competitive value creation. Conversely, fragmented governance and top-down storytelling practices risk weakening narrative authenticity and reducing the capacity of these assets to generate long-term strategic advantage.

The strategic output of this integrated process is reflected in the emergence of narrative coherence, sacred narrative identity, and sustainable destination competitiveness. Narrative coherence refers to the alignment between policy narratives, visitor experiences, community participation, and digital communication strategies, thereby producing a consistent and credible destination image across multiple touchpoints. At the same time, sacred narrative identity preserves the spiritual and historical significance of Borobudur by ensuring that modernization and tourism commercialization do not erode its deeper cultural meanings. Through the integration of ambidextrous governance and narrative-based resource orchestration, Borobudur can cultivate a form of sustainable competitiveness that is not exclusively dependent on physical infrastructure or mass tourism expansion, but rather rooted in authenticity, collective identity, adaptive innovation, and inclusive stakeholder collaboration. In this sense, the future resilience of the Borobudur DSP will largely depend on its ability to institutionalize narrative orchestration as a core strategic capability within Indonesia's broader tourism governance architecture.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the strategic dynamics of narrative management in the Borobudur DSP through an integrative framework grounded in the concepts of ambidexterity, resource orchestration, and competitive dynamics. The conceptual analysis and critical analytical reflection reveal that the effectiveness of a narrative strategy is inherently tied to a destination's capacity to balance the preservation of heritage values



with the pursuit of contemporary innovation. The proposed *Ambidextrous Narrative Orchestration* model underscores the necessity of aligning strategic mechanisms, narrative-based assets, and competitive outputs to achieve sustainable and distinctive destination positioning in an increasingly dynamic tourism landscape.

The principal conclusion of this study is that adopting an ambidexterity approach in destination management is insufficient if interpreted solely through an administrative or procedural lens. True ambidexterity demands the strategic translation of exploration and exploitation into narrative forms which is articulated through thematic experiential pathways, the digital mediation of cultural interpretation, and the activation of community-rooted meanings. While March (1991) underscored the productive tension between exploration and exploitation, this study contends that, within the Borobudur context, such tension must be mediated by an acute sensitivity to local identities and evolving social dynamics (Kasemsarn et al., 2023), ensuring that innovation does not come at the expense of cultural authenticity.

Furthermore, the proposed conceptual model underscores that competitive dynamics in the tourism sector are not solely driven by promotional efforts or visual branding, but are fundamentally contingent upon the capacity to disseminate and manage narratives in a manner that is both contextually relevant and adaptively responsive. As Zhang & Ramayah (2024) emphasize, narrative influence is only impactful when delivered through channels aligned with audience media consumption preferences. Consequently, the strategic design of digital content distribution systems, the activation of social media engagement, and the integration of transmedia storytelling elements emerge as critical imperatives for amplifying the reach, resonance, and competitive positioning of the Borobudur narrative.

To translate these strategic insights into actionable implementation, it is recommended that the Indonesian government particularly Kemenpar and the BPOB initiate the development of a dedicated Narrative Governance Roadmap for the Borobudur DSP as an operational complement to Perpres No. 88 of 2024. This roadmap should establish measurable strategic priorities, institutional responsibilities, participatory coordination mechanisms, and narrative performance indicators that integrate cultural preservation, community engagement, and digital storytelling into destination governance practices. Concrete actions may include the formation of multi-stakeholder storytelling forums at the regional level, the integration of local cultural narratives into official tourism digital platforms, the provision of funding schemes for community-based creative storytelling initiatives, and the implementation of transmedia communication strategies that connect physical tourism experiences with digital engagement ecosystems. Equally important, periodic evaluation mechanisms should be institutionalized to monitor narrative authenticity, stakeholder participation, visitor emotional engagement, and the long-term sustainability of destination competitiveness. Through such coordinated actions, Borobudur can evolve beyond a heritage attraction into a globally resonant and locally grounded narrative destination capable of sustaining both cultural significance and strategic competitiveness.

The theoretical implications of this study lie in its contribution to extending the application of ambidexterity and orchestration frameworks into the domain of culture-based tourism narrative strategies. The proposed model not only delineates the structural

relationships among key variables, but also underscores the strategic significance of symbolic assets in enhancing destination competitiveness.

The practical implications of this study highlight the urgency of repositioning institutional roles, particularly that of the BPOB, from conventional administrative entities into proactive strategic orchestrators. Institutional legitimacy and effectiveness in tourism governance are contingent upon the ability to facilitate adaptive and collaborative relationships across stakeholder groups. This involves not only aligning local community interests with broader national development agendas, but also redesigning narrative interaction mechanisms to be participatory, inclusive, and sustainable.

The policy implications derived from this study underscore the need to embed narrative strategies as an integral component of national tourism planning and regulatory frameworks. While Perpres No. 88 of 2024 provides a spatial and sectoral blueprint for regional development, it falls short in explicitly addressing the narrative dimension of destination competitiveness. As such, it is imperative to formulate policies that promote the co-creation of narratives, empower local communities as active storytellers, and facilitate the development of digital distribution channels rooted in local cultural values.

Notwithstanding its contributions, this study remains conceptual and policy-oriented in nature, thereby opening several avenues for future research. Subsequent studies may empirically examine the operational effectiveness of ambidextrous narrative orchestration through qualitative fieldwork, stakeholder interviews, or mixed-method approaches involving tourists, local communities, and destination management organizations. Comparative studies across Indonesia's DSP such as Labuan Bajo, Mandalika, or Lake Toba may also provide deeper insights into how differing governance structures and socio-cultural contexts influence narrative competitiveness and collaborative orchestration. Furthermore, future research should explore the role of emerging technologies including artificial intelligence, immersive media, and data-driven personalization in reshaping destination storytelling and visitor engagement. Such inquiries would not only refine the proposed conceptual framework, but also contribute to the broader advancement of tourism governance scholarship in understanding how destinations can remain culturally authentic while strategically adaptive within increasingly digital and competitive tourism ecosystems.

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