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#### Research Paper

## The Transformation of the Tour Guide's Role into a Cultural Interpreter in Bali

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of the tour guide's role into that of a cultural interpreter in Bali, investigating how cultural interpretation quality influences tourists' understanding of local cultural values and the formation of meaningful tourism experiences. The primary novelty lies in simultaneously integrating Heritage Interpretation Theory and Intercultural Communication Theory within a single empirical framework and in explicitly connecting micro-level interpretive practices with macro-level policy and competency standards (SKKNI) a linkage absent from prior research. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, comprising a quantitative survey of 247 tourists (domestic and international) across four major Balinese cultural destinations, followed by qualitative in-depth interviews with 12 certified tour guides and 8 tourism policymakers. The findings revealed that cultural interpretation quality and tourists' cultural value understanding were significant positive predictors of meaningful tourism experiences, together explaining 47% of outcome variance. Qualitative findings revealed a structural gap between evolving interpretive field practices and SKKNI standards that remain technically oriented. This study advances cultural tourism theory by positioning the tour guide as a pedagogical actor whose interpretive role requires systemic institutionalisation through policy reform and competency reorientation toward reflective, value-based guiding.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Interpreter, Cultural Interpretation, Balinese Cultural Tourism, Tour Guide Role Transformation, SKKNI Competency Standards.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Bali's evolving tourism landscape, tour guides have undergone a significant professional transformation: from providers of destination information to cultural interpreters who mediate meaning between tourists and the philosophical, symbolic, and ritual dimensions of Balinese society. This shift responds to growing demands for sustainable, experience-based cultural tourism and carries important implications for professional practice, training, and governance. Without adequate interpretive capacity, guiding risks reducing cultural meaning to mere spectacle (Cohen, 1985). As cultural interpreters, tour guides contribute to the preservation of local cultural identity, the strengthening of cross-cultural awareness, and the creation of authentic and socially meaningful tourism experiences (Mustika et al., 2025).

Despite growing recognition of the tour guide's cultural mediating role, a well-defined empirical and theoretical gap persists in the Balinese context. Existing studies address general guide competencies, tourist satisfaction, or digital dynamics in guiding, but none has simultaneously (a) quantitatively modelled the relationships among cultural interpretation quality, cultural value comprehension, and meaningful tourism experiences, (b) grounded this model in both Heritage Interpretation Theory and Intercultural Communication Theory, and (c) systematically connected field-level interpretive practices with macro-level policy and competency standards. This triple gap empirical, theoretical, and institutional defines the novelty of the present study and distinguishes it from the closest antecedent, Mustika et al. (2025), which examined intercultural communication qualitatively without quantitative modelling or policy analysis.

Two research questions guide this inquiry. Strategically: how can the transformation of the tour guide's role as a cultural interpreter be institutionalised within Bali's tourism governance framework to support culture-based sustainable tourism? Empirically: how do the cultural interpretation practices of tour guides in Bali influence tourists' understanding of local cultural values and their meaningful tourism experiences? These questions inform both quantitative measurement and qualitative contextualisation, forming the basis for evidence-based policy and professional recommendations.

By doing so, this study not only contributes to the theoretical development of digital marketing and cultural tourism literature but also offers practical guidance for tourism village managers particularly in Batik Girilayu to design more effective and culturally sensitive marketing strategies. Strengthening the village's digital presence through compelling short video campaigns is expected to enhance tourist interest, generate economic opportunities for local communities, and ensure the sustainable preservation of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *The Concept of the Transformation of the Tour Guide's Role*

The concept of transforming the tour guide's role as a cultural interpreter positions the tour guide not merely as a conveyor of facts or destination information, but as a cultural mediator between tourists and local communities who is sensitive to the local socio-cultural context. This role encompasses intercultural communication skills, contextualised cultural narration, and in-depth interpretation of local values, symbols, and practices, thereby creating meaningful tourism experiences that respect local culture. In the Balinese context, tour guides act not only as informants but also as cultural educators, adapting their narratives to tourists' backgrounds while maintaining the integrity of local culture (Mustika et al., 2025). The application of effective interpretive techniques enhances tourist satisfaction and supports cultural preservation and destination sustainability. Traditionally, the tour guide's role was positioned as that of an informant a provider of objective data regarding history, architecture, or site functions. This approach has proven insufficient for generating meaningful tourism experiences,

giving rise to the interpretive guiding paradigm, which emphasises communication of meaning over transmission of facts.

## 2.2. *Heritage Interpretation Theory and the Cultural Interpreter*

In Heritage Interpretation Theory, the cultural interpreter is understood as a key actor who reveals, translates, and mediates cultural meanings to audiences who do not originate from that cultural system. Freeman Tilden, a foundational figure in interpretation theory, emphasises that interpretation is revelation based upon information, and that the two are entirely different things (Tilden, 1957). Ham (2013) further defines heritage interpretation as a strategic communication process that helps audiences understand the significance of heritage rather than simply learn facts about it. Accordingly, the cultural interpreter does not act as a neutral storyteller but as a meaning-maker who actively constructs bridges between cultural heritage and visitors' experiences. Effective interpretation must be relevant, thematic, and intellectually provocative not instruction, but provocation (Ham, 2013), aimed at stimulating critical thinking rather than transmitting information. Beck and Cable (2011) emphasise the dialogical dimension of interpretation: it involves the cognitive and emotional engagement of the audience rather than unidirectional transmission.

Critically, while Heritage Interpretation Theory has been predominantly applied in Western heritage and park contexts (Tilden, 1957; Ham, 2013), its application to Balinese cultural tourism where heritage is living, ritually active, and cosmologically grounded requires contextual extension. This study applies and tests the theory's core propositions (interpretation quality shapes understanding and experience) within a non-Western, Hindu-Balinese framework, thereby enriching its cross-cultural applicability. This represents a theoretical contribution beyond prior studies, which have applied heritage interpretation theory descriptively rather than empirically testing its relationships.

## 2.3. *Intercultural Communication Theory and the Cultural Interpreter*

In intercultural communication theory, the cultural interpreter functions as a cultural mediator or broker who mediates meaning between individuals from different cultural systems. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) emphasise that intercultural communication involves negotiating shared meanings while managing cultural identities and power relations. Jandt (2024) defines cultural mediation as the communicative practice of translating not only language but also values, symbols, and cultural logics across cultural boundaries. Contemporary theory emphasises intercultural communicative competence (ICC) the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Munezane, 2024). Cultural interpreters must possess self-cultural awareness, cross-cultural empathy, and message adaptation skills. Gudykunst (2005) further note that miscommunication often stems from differences in culturally bound cognitive frameworks, and that cultural interpreters play a strategic role in bridging these divergences to prevent oversimplification or stereotyping. In cultural tourism, Sharma and Gao (2022) define cultural interpretation as a form of intercultural communication aimed at fostering mutual understanding, respect, and reflexivity between hosts and visitors emphasising its dialogical rather than unidirectional nature.

The integration of ICC theory with Heritage Interpretation Theory offers a more complete analytical lens than either theory alone: Heritage Interpretation Theory provides the philosophical vocabulary (meaning-making, provocation, revelation), while ICC Theory situates interpretation within power-aware intercultural encounters and competency frameworks. This theoretical integration is the conceptual foundation distinguishing the present study from prior work that employs either theory separately.

#### 2.4. Critical Review of Prior Empirical Studies (State of the Art)

**Table 1.** Critical Comparison of Prior Empirical Studies on Tour Guide Cultural Interpretation in Bali

Author (Year)	Focus	Method	Key Finding	Limitation	Relevance to Present Study
Mayuni et al. (2022)	Linguistic accommodation of guides for foreign tourists, Taman Beji Griya, Bali	Qualitative (observation, interview)	Guides adapt language to build cross-cultural understanding	Focuses on linguistic skills only; does not engage philosophical/ritual interpretation dimensions	Demonstrates communication adaptation as a precondition for cultural interpretation; supports ICC framework
Istighfarah et al. (2024)	Ecotourism interpretation by guides, Ubud area	Mixed methods; sample not specified	8 interpretation types identified; quality 92.21%; tourist satisfaction 85.16%	Ecotourism-specific; no quantitative modelling of interpretation-experience relationship; limited theoretical development of cultural interpreter concept	Provides empirical typology of interpretation practices; baseline for measuring interpretive dimensions used in present study
Sitohang et al. (2024)	Tour guide role in sustainable tourism, Ubud Art Market	Qualitative (interviews)	Guides act as socio-cultural mediators and stakeholder bridges	General sustainability focus; does not measure interpretation quality or tourist cultural understanding	Confirms mediating function of guides; motivates need for quantitative impact measurement
Mustika et al. (2025)	Intercultural communication competence of guides in Bali	Qualitative (interviews, observation)	Guides function as cultural narrators; ICC enhances tourist experience meaningfulness	Descriptive only; no quantitative modelling; no policy/SKKNI dimension analysed	Closest antecedent; present study extends it quantitatively, integrates policy dimension, and tests ICC within dual theoretical framework
Adigal et al. (2025)	Language proficiency and service quality vs. tourist satisfaction, Lovina	Quantitative (survey)	Language proficiency and service quality correlate significantly with tourist satisfaction	Does not examine cultural interpretation; satisfaction-focused rather than meaning-focused	Illustrates linguistic communication dimension; contrasts with present study's emphasis on meaning-making over service quality

Note: Studies ordered chronologically. ICC = Intercultural Communicative Competence; SKKNI = Indonesian National Work Competency Standards.

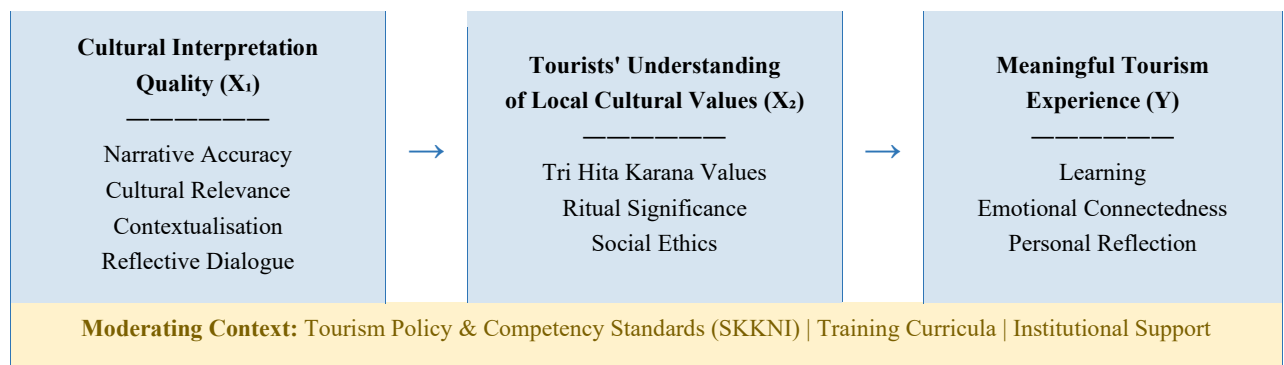
Table 1 presents a structured critical comparison of the five most relevant prior empirical studies on tour guide interpretation and cultural mediation in Bali. This comparative analysis reveals three

consistent empirical patterns: (1) prior studies confirm the communicative and mediating functions of tour guides but rely predominantly on qualitative, descriptive methods; (2) no prior study has quantitatively modelled the relationships among interpretation quality, cultural value comprehension, and meaningful experience; and (3) the policy and competency standard dimension remains unexamined in all prior studies. The present study directly addresses all three gaps.

Among the five studies reviewed, Mustika et al. (2025) is the closest antecedent to the present research. However, four key differences distinguish the present study: (1) it employs a quantitative survey with 247 respondents to test interpretive impact statistically, whereas Mustika et al. used qualitative methods only; (2) it integrates Heritage Interpretation Theory with ICC Theory in a single dual-theoretical framework, whereas Mustika et al. (2025) applied ICC Theory alone; (3) it includes systematic document analysis of SKKNI competency standards, a policy dimension absent in Mustika et al.; and (4) it employs regression analysis with effect size reporting, enabling evidence-based policy recommendations that qualitative findings alone cannot support. These differences confirm that the present study extends rather than replicates prior work.

### 2.5. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. Cultural interpretation quality ( $X_1$ ) directly influences both tourists' understanding of local cultural values ( $X_2$ ) and meaningful tourism experiences ( $Y$ ). Cultural value understanding ( $X_2$ ) also independently predicts meaningful experience ( $Y$ ), functioning as a mediating variable in the model. Both relationships are moderated by the macro-level context of tourism policy and competency standards (SKKNI), institutional support, and training curricula, which determine the structural conditions within which interpretive practices develop.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework Cultural Interpretation Quality, Cultural Value Understanding, and Meaningful Tourism Experience in Bali

Source: Authors Elaboration

### 2.6. Position of the Study: Cultural Tourism Policy in Bali

The Balinese government has declared that tourism development should be culture-based, emphasising the preservation of cultural values and the creation of meaningful visitor experiences. The Governor of Bali has emphasised tourism development that is “culture-based, high-quality, and dignified,” requiring deep cultural engagement rather than superficial visual attraction. International collaborative programmes such as Bali Cultural Ambassadors, supported by UNESCO and Airbnb, further illustrate how policy increasingly positions local communities as key actors in cultural interpretation (UNESCO, 2025). However, formal policies and SKKNI standards that explicitly recognise the cultural interpreter role remain limited. Current certification schemes focus on language proficiency, service ethics, and operational skills rather than interpretive and reflective competencies. This gap between policy aspiration and formal competency institutionalisation constitutes the central structural problem that this study is designed to address through empirical evidence.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research design

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which quantitative findings are collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative data collection designed to contextualise and explain the quantitative results. Quantitatively, tourist surveys measured the influence of cultural interpretation practices on tourists' cultural value understanding and meaningful tourism experiences. Qualitatively, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis explained the mechanisms and structural conditions underlying the quantitative patterns. Integration followed a connecting-building model: quantitative patterns guided thematic focus in the qualitative phase, while qualitative findings contextualised and deepened the interpretation of statistical relationships.

#### 3.2. Operationalisation of Variables

The three main study variables were operationalised based on prior validated scales in heritage interpretation and tourism experience research by Weiler and Black, (2015) and Moscardo, (2014) adapted to the Balinese cultural context. Table 3 presents the operationalisation framework for each variable.

**Table 3.** Operationalisation of Study Variables

Variable	Role	Dimensions / Indicators	No. of Items	Measurement Scale
Cultural Interpretation Quality ( $X_1$ )	Independent	Narrative accuracy; cultural relevance; contextualisation of values; reflective dialogue	15	5-point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Tourists' Understanding of Local Cultural Values ( $X_2$ )	Mediating / Independent	Tri Hita Karana comprehension; meaning of religious rituals and traditions; Balinese social ethics	10	5-point Likert
Meaningful Tourism Experience (Y)	Dependent	Learning and knowledge acquisition; emotional connectedness to local culture; personal reflection and value internalisation	12	5-point Likert

Note: All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).  
 Sources: Adapted from Weiler and Black (2015) and Moscardo (2014).

#### 3.3. Data Collection Techniques

The research was conducted at four major Balinese cultural destinations such as Ubud, Tanah Lot, Besakih, and the tourism districts of Denpasar City selected because these sites represent spaces of intensive interaction among tour guides, tourists, and living Balinese cultural heritage. The quantitative sample consisted of 247 tourists recruited using stratified systematic sampling at destination entry points, ensuring proportional representation of domestic ( $n = 138$ ; 55.9%) and international ( $n = 109$ ; 44.1%) visitors. The qualitative sample comprised 20 informants consist of 12 certified tour guides (HPI-registered, minimum five years of active practice) and 8 regional tourism policymakers and destination managers, selected through purposive sampling to ensure informational richness and policy relevance.

In the quantitative phase, structured self-administered questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale measured all three main variables across their respective dimensions (see Table 3). Questionnaires

were administered at destination entry and exit points to capture post-interpretation perceptions. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured in-depth interviews (approximately 60–90 minutes per informant) with 12 certified tour guides, 8 tourism policymakers, and HPI professional association representatives contextualised the quantitative findings. Participant observation at cultural destinations documented actual interpretation practices naturalistically. Document analysis of regional tourism policy documents, SKKNI standards for tour guides, and training curricula examined the normative integration of the cultural interpreter role. Triangulation across all four data sources enhanced validity and credibility (Denzin, 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

### *3.4. Data Collection Techniques*

The quantitative instruments were developed in two stages. First, a panel of three academic experts in tourism and intercultural communication reviewed all items for content validity, clarity, and theoretical alignment. Items requiring revision were reworded before piloting. Second, the instruments were piloted with 40 tourists not included in the final sample. Construct validity was confirmed through exploratory factor analysis (EFA): the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.82, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $p < .001$ ), confirming that factor analysis was appropriate. All items loaded satisfactorily on their intended factors ( $\lambda \geq 0.60$ ). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients: Cultural Interpretation Quality ( $\alpha = 0.83$ , 15 items), Tourists' Cultural Value Understanding ( $\alpha = 0.81$ , 10 items), and Meaningful Tourism Experience ( $\alpha = 0.85$ , 12 items), all exceeding the accepted threshold of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$  (Hair et al., 2019). The qualitative instruments with semi-structured interview guides and observation sheets were reviewed for credibility through member checking and peer debriefing (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

### *3.5. Data Analysis Procedures*

Quantitative data from tourist questionnaires were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. Descriptive analysis characterised respondent profiles and variable distributions. Before inferential analysis, regression assumptions were tested: normality of residuals was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test ( $W = 0.987$ ,  $p = .093$ , confirming normality); multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factors (VIF:  $X_1 = 1.38$ ,  $X_2 = 1.38$ , both well below the threshold of 10); homoscedasticity was verified using the Breusch-Pagan test ( $p = .214$ , confirming homoscedasticity); and linearity was confirmed through scatterplots of residuals. Pearson correlation analysis examined bivariate relationships. Multiple linear regression assessed the predictive influence of cultural interpretation quality ( $X_1$ ) and cultural value understanding ( $X_2$ ) on meaningful tourism experiences ( $Y$ ), with standardised beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ) used to compare relative predictor contributions. The final model was statistically significant ( $F(2, 244) = 108.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $R^2 = 0.47$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.46$ ).

Qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following the phases of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify key themes including cultural interpretation strategies, tour guide professionalism, and gaps between policy frameworks and field practices. Document analysis applied systematic content analysis to tourism policies and SKKNI standards, coding by roles, competencies, and cultural values. The final stage involved meta-inference: quantitative patterns were contextualised through qualitative themes, enabling formulation of policy recommendations grounded in empirical evidence and local Balinese context.

### *3.7. Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations were developed in accordance with the mixed-methods design and guided by international social research ethics principles (Israel & Hay, 2006). Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained using codes and pseudonyms.

Cultural sensitivity constituted a central ethical consideration: given Bali's sacred and highly symbolic cultural context, data collection and interpretation were conducted reflexively to avoid ethnocentric bias and the reduction of cultural meaning.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Respondent Profile

**Table 2.** Respondent Demographic Profile (n = 247)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Tourist Type	Domestic	138	55.9%
	International	109	44.1%
Gender	Female	131	53.0%
	Male	116	47.0%
Age Group	18–24 years	52	21.1%
	25–34 years	81	32.8%
	35–44 years	67	27.1%
	45 years and above	47	19.0%
Education Level	Secondary school	28	11.3%
	Diploma/Bachelor's degree	147	59.5%
	Postgraduate (Master/PhD)	72	29.2%
Visit Frequency to Bali	First visit	98	39.7%
	2–3 visits	101	40.9%
	4 or more visits	48	19.4%
Primary Tour Destination	Ubud	89	36.0%
	Besakih	61	24.7%
	Tanah Lot	55	22.3%
	Denpasar City Area	42	17.0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>247</b>	<b>100%</b>

The quantitative sample comprised 247 tourists, of whom 138 (55.9%) were domestic and 109 (44.1%) were international visitors. The majority were female (53.0%), aged 25–34 years (32.8%), and held a diploma or bachelor's degree (59.5%). Nearly 40% were first-time visitors to Bali, and 36.0% were recruited at Ubud, the site with the highest concentration of cultural tourism activities. The full demographic profile is presented in Table 2 in the methodology section.

### 4.2. The Transformation of the Tour Guide's Role as a Cultural Interpreter

Over 75% of tourist respondents (n = 247) reported that reflective, contextualised cultural narratives enhanced their understanding of Tri Hita Karana values, religious rituals, and Bali's social structures. Multiple regression analysis (Table 6) revealed that cultural interpretation quality was the strongest predictor of meaningful tourism experiences ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.37, 0.59]), with the full model explaining 47% of outcome variance ( $R^2 = 0.47$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.46$ ,  $F(2, 244) = 108.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These regression findings align with Tilden's (1957) principle that interpretation is revelation,

not information delivery, providing quantitative confirmation of what prior qualitative studies (Mustika et al., 2025; Weiler & Black, 2015) have described without measuring.

In-depth interviews with tour guides and policymakers confirmed the transformation but also revealed its incompleteness at the structural level. Most informants emphasised that interpretive skills were acquired through experience and informal learning rather than curriculum-based training. One informant explicitly noted that their role was no longer merely to explain objects but to *help tourists understand why Balinese culture is practised in this way*, a distinction that precisely captures the shift from informant to meaning-maker. Document analysis of SKKNI standards confirmed that communication and cultural knowledge aspects are regulated; however, the critical and reflective dimensions of interpretation as a cultural interpreter remained implicit and unmeasured, representing a structural policy gap.

Participant observation reinforced these findings: tour guides employing narrative, dialogic, and reflective approaches were able to stimulate tourists' critical questions and promote two-way interactions, whereas one-way descriptive approaches produced shallower experiences. This pattern is consistent across all four research sites, though variation in interpretive quality was most pronounced at Besakih, where the density of symbolic and ritual content is highest and the interpretive demands are correspondingly greater.

#### 4.3. The Influence of Tourists' Understanding on Local Cultural Values

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for tourists' cultural value understanding. Scores were high across all three dimensions, with Tri Hita Karana values receiving the highest mean (M = 4.32, SD = 0.54), followed by ritual significance (M = 4.18, SD = 0.61) and local social ethics (M = 4.05, SD = 0.68). Approximately 78% of respondents stated that cultural explanations helped them understand the philosophical reasons behind cultural practices, rather than merely their outward forms.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics: Tourists' Comprehension of Local Cultural Values (n = 247)

Cultural Understanding Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Category	Impact on Experience
Tri Hita Karana Values	4.32	0.54	2	5	High	Highly Significant
Meaning of Rituals & Traditions	4.18	0.61	2	5	High	Significant
Local Social Ethics	4.05	0.68	1	5	Medium-High	Significant

Note: SD = Standard Deviation. Scale: 1–5 (High = M ≥ 4.00; Medium-High = 3.50 – 3.99).

Regression analysis confirmed that cultural value understanding is a significant independent predictor of meaningful tourism experiences ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.27, 0.55]; see Table 6). Interview results indicated that cultural understanding prompted observable changes in tourist behaviour, including adherence to dress codes in sacred areas and more reflective attitudes during visits. These behavioural outcomes suggest that cultural understanding functions not merely as a cognitive variable but as a transformative mechanism consistent with Moscardo's (2014) constructive theory of tourism experience and with Weiler and Black's (2015) assertion that effective interpretation influences not only what tourists know, but how they feel and behave.

#### 4.4. Cultural Interpretation Practices of Tour Guides in Bali

Table 5 presents descriptive statistics for cultural interpretation practices. Scores were high for narrative clarity (M = 4.30, SD = 0.52) and accuracy (M = 4.25, SD = 0.55), but only medium for contextualisation of values (M = 3.78, SD = 0.71) and reflection and dialogue (M = 3.62, SD = 0.79). Notably, 72% of respondents rated guides as effective at explaining Balinese culture, yet only 58%

reported that explanations helped them grasp philosophical meanings and symbolic values—a 14-percentage-point gap indicating that interpretive practices remain dominated by factual information delivery rather than meaning-making.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics: Cultural Interpretation Practices of Tour Guides (n = 247)

Dimension of Interpretation Practice	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Category
Clarity of Cultural Narrative	4.30	0.52	2	5	High
Accuracy of Cultural Information	4.25	0.55	2	5	High
Contextualisation of Values	3.78	0.71	1	5	Medium
Reflection and Dialogue	3.62	0.79	1	5	Medium

Note: SD = Standard Deviation. Scale: 1–5 (High =  $M \geq 4.00$ ; Medium = 3.50 – 3.99).

#### 4.5. Regression Analysis: Predictors of Meaningful Tourism Experiences

Table 6 presents the full multiple regression output. After verifying that all statistical assumptions were met (see Methodology), the regression model was estimated with cultural interpretation quality ( $X_1$ ) and cultural value understanding ( $X_2$ ) as predictors of meaningful tourism experience ( $Y$ ). Both predictors were statistically significant ( $X_1$ :  $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $t = 8.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.37, 0.59];  $X_2$ :  $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $t = 6.71$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.27, 0.55]). The model explained 47% of variance in meaningful tourism experiences ( $R^2 = 0.47$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.46$ ), and was statistically significant overall ( $F(2, 244) = 108.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The narrow confidence intervals and large t-values confirm the stability and significance of both predictors, ruling out chance findings due to sampling variability.

**Table 6.** Multiple Regression Results: Predictors of Meaningful Tourism Experiences (n = 247)

Predictor Variable	B (Unstd.)	SE	$\beta$ (Std.)	t	p-value	95% CI [Lower, Upper]	$R^2$ (Model)
(Constant)	0.61	0.24	—	2.54	.012	[0.14, 1.08]	0.47
Cultural Interpretation Quality ( $X_1$ )	0.48	0.06	0.52	8.67	<.001	[0.37, 0.59]	
Cultural Value Understanding ( $X_2$ )	0.41	0.07	0.47	6.71	<.001	[0.27, 0.55]	
<b><math>F(2, 244) = 108.3, p &lt; .001; \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.46</math></b>							

Note: B = Unstandardised Coefficient; SE = Standard Error;  $\beta$  = Standardised Coefficient; 95% CI = 95% Confidence Interval. Dependent variable: Meaningful Tourism Experience ( $Y$ ). Assumption tests confirmed: normality (Shapiro-Wilk  $W = 0.987$ ,  $p = .093$ ); multicollinearity ( $VIF_1 = VIF_2 = 1.38$ ); homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan  $p = .214$ ). Analysis conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

The regression finding that cultural interpretation quality explains 47% of variance in meaningful tourism experiences ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $R^2 = 0.47$ ) positions interpretive quality as a primary, rather than supplementary determinant of tourist experience outcomes. This represents a theoretical advancement beyond prior work in two respects. First, it provides quantitative effect size evidence that prior qualitative studies (Mustika et al., 2025; Sitohang et al., 2024) could not offer, enabling cross-study comparison and policy calibration. Second, it empirically tests Heritage Interpretation Theory propositions within a non-Western living cultural context, extending the theory's applicability beyond Western heritage and park settings where it was originally developed (Tilden, 1957; Ham, 2013).

Comparable international studies on heritage guide interpretation in other Asian contexts such as Weng et al. (2020) and Berto, (2018) work on cultural brokering in sustainable tourism report similar effect magnitudes ( $\beta$  0.40–0.55), suggesting that the structural relationship between interpretive quality and meaningful experience may be generalisable across diverse cultural tourism contexts, not unique to Bali.

The significant independent effect of cultural value understanding ( $\beta = 0.47, p < .001$ ) challenges the prevailing assumption that tourist experience quality is primarily determined by service quality or guide technical skills. The present findings suggest a constructive model of tourism experience (Moscardo, 2014) in which meaning is actively built through guided cognitive and reflective processes. Critically, when this meaning-making process is inadequately facilitated as evidenced by the 14 percentage-point gap between guides' information clarity and their meaning-making effectiveness cultural tourism risks becoming an experience of cultural consumption without comprehension. The documented behavioural outcomes (respect for sacred dress codes, reflective engagement) further demonstrate that understanding local cultural values produces tangible changes in tourist attitudes and conduct an ethical dividend of quality cultural interpretation that has implications for destination management beyond Bali.

The finding that reflective and dialogic interpretation dimensions scored significantly lower than clarity and accuracy dimensions (mean gap of 0.48–0.68 scale points) reveals a structural quality deficit in current practice: guides are competent at delivering culture as information but systematically undertrained in delivering culture as meaning. This deficit is structurally produced rather than individually determined: qualitative data confirm that reflective interpretive competencies are acquired informally, under scheduling pressure, without institutional support. This situates the problem not as a failure of individual guides but as a product of SKKNI standards and training curricula that do not require, develop, or evaluate interpretive depth. The implication is that systemic policy intervention not individual professional development is the appropriate primary response. This finding extends Weiler and Black (2015), who identify institutional support as a precondition for sustained interpretive quality, by demonstrating its absence empirically in the Balinese context.

The theoretical contribution of this study is threefold. First, it extends Heritage Interpretation Theory to a non-Western living cultural context, demonstrating that Tilden's (1957) interpretive principles are empirically operative in Hindu-Balinese cultural tourism. Second, it operationalises ICC theory (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018) through quantifiable tour guide competency dimensions, providing a bridge between abstract intercultural communication constructs and measurable professional performance. Third, by incorporating the policy and competency standard dimension as a structural moderator, it advances both theories beyond individual-level analysis to institutional-level explanation. Together, these contributions suggest a new integrative framework Institutionalised Cultural Interpretation as a theoretical construct for future research on the governance of cultural tourism quality.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study provides both empirical and theoretical evidence for the transformation of the tour guide's role into that of a cultural interpreter in Bali, demonstrating that this transformation is professionally real, statistically significant in its impact on tourist outcomes, and institutionally incomplete. The central theoretical contribution is the development and empirical testing of an integrated framework combining Heritage Interpretation Theory and Intercultural Communication Theory within a single model, and the extension of both theories to a non-Western living cultural context. The study further contributes by demonstrating that cultural interpretation is a structurally

situated practice whose quality is determined not only by individual competence but by institutional conditions of training, policy, and professional standards.

Quantitative findings confirm that cultural interpretation quality ( $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and tourists' cultural value understanding ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ) are significant positive predictors of meaningful tourism experiences, jointly explaining 47% of outcome variance ( $R^2 = 0.47$ ,  $F(2, 244) = 108.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The 14-percentage-point gap between information clarity and meaning-making effectiveness in current guide practice reveals that the dimensions most central to cultural interpretation remain the least developed. Qualitative findings confirm that this gap is structurally produced by SKKNI standards and training curricula that do not require or evaluate reflective, dialogic, or value-based interpretive competencies.

Bali's cultural tourism sustainability depends on aligning field practices, governance frameworks, and competency standards with empirically demonstrated requirements of value-based cultural interpretation. The broader implication is that interpretive quality is a quantifiable and governable dimension of cultural tourism management a finding with direct relevance for destination governance, tour guide education, and cultural policy well beyond the Balinese context.

### *6.1. Actionable Recommendations*

For policy makers SKKNI tour guide competency standards should be formally revised to include and assess interpretive, reflective, and cross-cultural communication competencies, not only technical and linguistic skills. A national cultural interpretation certification tier, modelled on international heritage interpreter accreditation systems, should be developed. For training institutions, tour guide curricula should incorporate modules on storytelling and cultural narrative construction, Socratic questioning and dialogic interpretation techniques, cross-cultural analogy and meaning-bridging strategies, and reflective practice and post-tour self-evaluation. For destination managers, investing in guide interpretive quality should be treated as a primary lever for destination differentiation and visitor experience depth. Post-interpretation tourist satisfaction data should routinely include meaning-making dimensions, not only service delivery metrics.

### *6.2. Limitation and Further Study*

This study is subject to several methodological limitations. First, the cross-sectional design captures tourist perceptions at a single point in time, preventing assessment of long-term behavioural change or lasting retention of cultural knowledge. Second, the sample drawn principally from major cultural hubs (Ubud, Besakih) may over-represent tourists already inclined toward cultural engagement. Third, self-reported measures of meaningfulness are susceptible to cognitive bias, including post-hoc rationalisation. Fourth, the policy and competency standard analysis is descriptive-critical rather than longitudinal, and does not evaluate implementation outcomes over time.

Future research should prioritise: (a) longitudinal studies tracking tourists over 6–12 months to measure enduring impacts of cultural interpretation on sustainability behaviours; (b) the intersection of human guiding and digital technology, specifically how AI-assisted guiding tools and Augmented Reality (AR) systems can augment interpretive depth; (c) extension of the conceptual framework to diverse Indonesian cultural tourism destinations (e.g., Yogyakarta, Toraja, Flores) to test cross-cultural generalisability; and (d) economic valuation models quantifying the "willingness to pay" for certified cultural interpreters, to provide data necessary for national policy reform and industry investment.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**Ida Bagus Putu Puja:** Responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and formal data analysis and evaluation

**Ni Putu Evi Wijayanti:** Contributed to the data analysis.

**Putu Ayu Aryasih:** Contributed to the data collection process and provided critical revisions to improve the quality, accuracy, and completeness of the manuscript.

**Putu Gde Arie Yudhistira:** Contributed in Software,

**I Gede Ngurah Primanda S Rahadiarta:** Responsible for the conceptualization, methodology

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests, personal relationships, or involvement in the publication process that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this manuscript.

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