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**Online Mass Media And Organic Image Formation: A Case Study Of  
The Bintan Destination During The Post-Covid-19 Pandemic Recovery  
Period**

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**Abstract**

Online mass media is a information source for tourists, which impacts the formation of their destination image. This article is scientific research aimed at identifying the formation of the image of the Bintan destination through two elements: the two online mass media (Kompas and Detik.com) and tourists during the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery period. Thematic analysis techniques were applied in this study to identify image formation by producing tourism news content originating from those media. Meanwhile, the image formation of the selected tourist was identified through Z.E.M.T. interviews. Data collected from those media and informants was analyzed using the Atlas-TI application. The results of this study show several findings. First, the post-Covid-19 recovery period has impacted image formation by those media. This is shown by the dominant appearance of the theme facility of tourism in the data, especially in the news on Detik.com. Second, the congruence between the two elements (Kompas and Detik.com and tourists) in terms of their emphasis on the theme of natural attractions and tourist activities. Theoretical and practical implications, as well as some suggestions for future research, are discussed and proposed in this article.

**Introduction**

The image has attracted attention from the management of destination organizations or tourism marketing agencies. The image becomes an essential variable in the tourists' decision-making when determining the purpose of their visit (Kanwel et al., 2019; Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019). Even during the recovery period after the crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the image still encourages tourists to travel appropriately (Ahmad, Jamaludin, Zuraimi, & Valeri, 2021).

Therefore, various tourism promotional materials are produced and disseminated using various media by tourist destination management to project the image of their destination, aimed at directing the interest or purpose of tourists's

visitation (Hahm & Wang, 2011; Hunter, 2012; Muhoho-minni & Lubbe, 2017; Taufiqqurrachman, 2020; Sun, Tang, & Liu, 2021; Egger, Gumus, Kaiumova, Richard, & Surkic, 2022).

On the other hand, various autonomous or organic sources of information, including mass media, are factors in forming a destination image (Gartner, 1994; Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Wang, Chan, & Pan, 2014; Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015; Potwarka & Banyai, 2016; Jalilvand, 2017; Gabbioneta & De Carlo, 2019).

Then, to target the internet user community, several autonomous agents have migrated from offline platforms to online ones. At the same time, people's media consumption patterns have changed from print media to online media. Apart from that, various online media contents can be consumed easily with the support of portable and mobile devices.

By using devices connected to the internet, such as smartphones, people can access various online news sites. These conditions have opened up opportunities for increased public exposure to various media reports. As illustrated by data reported by We-Are-Social, in 2022, every internet user in Indonesia will be exposed to online media news for an average of 1.47 minutes per day, an increase of 9.2% compared to the previous year.

However, there is still little research examining the formation of organic images by online media. The role of autonomous agents in image formation has been proven empirically through the works of some scholars, such as Gartner (1994), Hanlan & Kelly (2005), Wang, Chan, & Pan (2014), Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen (2015), Potwarka & Banyai (2016), Jalilvand (2017), Gabbioneta & De Carlo (2019).

Reasonably, the research seeks to fill this space by highlighting the relationship between online media and the formation of the Bintan destination image during the recovery period after the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study is aimed at identifying image themes highlighted by two online mass media (Detik.com and Kompas) concerning the formation of the image of the Bintan destination during the recovery period after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the meanings of the Bintan destination associated by tourists with the image themes portrayed by those media. Two methods will be applied in this research (content analysis and ZMET).

## **Review of Literature**

### **The Image Definition**

Destination image is essentially defined as the knowledge, impression, perception, and imagination of tourists about a particular tourist destination (Lai & Li, 2016). The Image is an important concern, especially among tourism promoters, because it has a significant influence on marketing, especially tourist satisfaction and loyalty as well as interest in visiting (Kanwel et al., 2019; Chaulagain et al., 2019). Even during the recovery period after the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, the image has succeeded in developing interest in tourists' travel (Ahmad et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic, which lasted for approximately two years, has resulted in a significant decline in the number of tourist visits. It cannot be separated from the policies of several countries to limit the human mobility of their citizens. On the other hand, this policy has a direct impact on the continuity of the tourism business.

However, since several countries succeeded in controlling the outbreak's spread, the population of people infected by the virus also began to show a downward trend. Several countries, including Indonesia, began to adopt policies to open the doors to the flow of people in and out, including tourists. For tourism stakeholders, this policy is interpreted as a sign that the world has entered an era of recovery after the global pandemic that has hit the world for approximately the past two years.

Apart from all that, the media (source of information) is an element that is closely related to the image formation process itself. Tourists will actively, passively, and continuously seek information from various sources of information about specific destinations (Xiang Li, Bing Pan, Lixuan Zhang, 2009). For this reason, a marketing strategy is developed to project the image of the destination (Selby & Morgan, 1996) by using offline media (Hahm & Wang, 2011; Hunter, 2012; Muhoho-Minni & Lubbe, 2017), including online media (Taufiqurrachman, 2020; Sun et al., 2021; Egger et al., 2022).

Empirically, tourist destination promoters develop their destination image by producing various promotional materials highlighting several image themes or attributes. For example, the destination image of West Sumatra and Aceh is formed by local authorities through several attributes: social attractions, natural and cultural comfort, transportation and accommodation, friendliness of local residents, traditional food, infrastructure, and recreational activities (Taufiqurrachman, 2020). Also, the Australian authorities developed several image attributes (tourist attractions, tourism environment, cultural and artistic history, infrastructure/tourist facilities, and leisure/tourist enjoyment) in order to attract Chinese tourists as their biggest market (Sun et al., 2021).

Then six themes were revealed in the context of forming Turkey's destination image, such as: Islamic nuance, bridge between east and west, family-friendly, sun-sea-sand destination, safety, and unique food (Kislali, Kavartzis, & Saren, 2020). However, the image is formed not only through exposure to promotional materials produced by tourism marketing agencies. However, there are other elements, which are called organic or autonomous elements. These elements are also factors influencing image formation. Their role within the formation image is presented separately in the next section.

### **The Organic Sources and Destination Image Formation**

An organic image is formed by an agent producing reports, documentaries, films, and news freely and independently (Gartner, 1994). Also, information originating from colleagues and relatives (word of mouth or WOM) of tourists is another element that also plays a role in developing the organic image, including

information distributed among social media users. Then this last source of information is called word-of-mouth information in the electronic version (E-WOM) (Kislali et al., 2020). In general, these two organic agents empirically influence the image formation process, and the image itself has a direct influence on the attitudes of tourists and their interest in visiting a destination (Jalilvand, 2017). In particular, the role of W.O.M. and e-WOM in forming the image of tourist destinations in various countries has been documented through existing research. For instance, Tseng et al. (2015) showed that 630 bloggers wrote about their travel experiences on two blog sites, TrabelBlog.org and TravelPod.com, and what they wrote formed the image of Chinese destinations.

Meanwhile, the image of the city of Sochi, Russia, during the 2014 Winter Olympics was also formed by the blogger community through their visiting experiences and documentation regarding their visiting experiences on their blogs (Potwarka & Banyai, 2016). The study shows that several themes emerge in the content produced by these bloggers, such as tourist destinations that are friendly to foreign tourists and successful hosts as organizers of the Olympics.

Apart from W.O.M. and E-WOM, mass media is another element that influences the formation of organic images. In practice, the mass media routinely provides reports or news to its readers regarding everything, including tourist destinations. Some mass media even provide sections, columns, or space for tourism news. Several other studies have also documented how organic images are formed by mass media. For example, the image of Singapore among tourists from Hong Kong is formed through exposure to information they receive from newspapers (Wang, Chan, & Pan, 2014). Based on these findings, this researcher recommends that Singapore tourism marketing agents monitor mass media coverage.

Several organic agents form the image of tourist destinations in Kenya among two categories of tourists (actual tourists and potential tourists) (Muhoho-Minni & Lubbe, 2017). They have a high level of exposure to the products disseminated by these autonomous agents, such as television news, newspaper reports, and documentary broadcasts on television, including television coverage. These research findings are supported by Gabbioneta and De Carlo (2019) through their study, which highlights the issue of forming the image of the city of Milan, Italy, concerning the role of mass media reporting. The main findings of this research show that the higher the desirability reported by the mass media, the higher the positive image that is formed; on the other hand, the favorability (level of likeability) shown by the news article does not influence the formation of the image.

## **Research Method**

This research seeks to reveal the relationship between online mass media as an organic or autonomous agent and destination image formation in the context of Bintan destination image formation during the recovery period after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study highlights two things: the image themes displayed by online mass media and the meaning tourists give to these themes. For this reason, researchers

formulated several steps: determining the news source, applying thematic analysis, and conducting Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (Z.M.E.T.) interviews.

### The News Source Selection

Two online mass media were selected for this research (Detik.com and Kompas). These two online news media were chosen after considering several things. First, these two online media occupy the highest ranking as the most visited news sites in 2022. Between these two media, Detik.com is ranked first with a traffic-sharing figure of 10.12%, followed by Kompas at 9.53% (Similarweb, 2022). The high number of traffic sharing indicates a high population of users who are exposed to news from these news sites. Second, the three online news sites focus specifically on tourism. It is demonstrated by providing a separate column to present information, reports, and news about tourism, including Bintan tourism. The column was named "Travel" by the editorial management of Kompas and Detik.com. The existence of the "travel" rubric in both media is presented in Figure 1.

All news published through the "travel" rubric originating from those two online media was collected and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. Thematic analysis is a technique used to analyze and interpret patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2017). In particular, this technique is also applied to interpret tourism texts, both in textual and visual form (Walters, 2016). To interpret these texts, thematic analysis provides a systematic and accessible procedure with the aim of generating codes and themes in the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

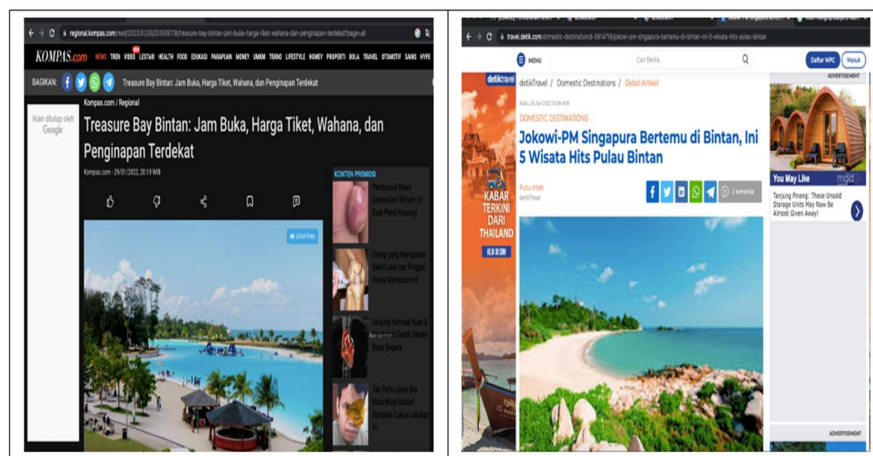


Figure 1. Screenshots of the "travel" column on Kompas and Detik.com

### Applying Thematic Analysis

Referring to the previous statement, the thematic analysis applied in this research aims to find themes highlighted by Kompas and Detik.com through their reporting in the tourism column. This technique is carried out in several stages, as follows: data collection, developing a coding framework, and coding data.

## 1. Data collection

At this stage, all news reports in text format about Bintan in those two online media selected as data sources were collected, organized, and distributed into separate folders, and each news item was given a call number for coding purposes.

This research was focused on developing the image of the Bintan destination during the recovery period after the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, news published outside of this period was not collected as data.

As seen in the historical chronology, March 2, 2020, was the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia, following reports of the first case infected by the virus. Then, the second quarter of 2020 had the heaviest impact of this pandemic on the national economy, so the government formulated strategic steps to maintain national growth (Edward, 2020). For this reason, all news published from the second quarter of 2020 to the fourth quarter of 2022 was collected as data to be analyzed using this technique. The amount of news content published by the two media selected in this study during this period is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Number of tourism news content

No	Media Name	Link URL	Amount of Content
1	Kompas	<a href="https://travel.kompas.com/?source=navbar">https://travel.kompas.com/?source=navbar</a>	62
2	Detik.com	<a href="https://travel.detik.com/">https://travel.detik.com/</a>	85
Total amount			147

## 2. Developing the coding framework

Coding is extracting codes from data and organizing them into specific themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In this step, the researcher reviewed existing studies to develop a coding framework. Through this review step, eight tourist image themes were successfully identified, such as historical or religious buildings, tourist activities, cultural attractions, natural attractions, food and beverage, safety and family friendliness, accommodation and transportation, and local residents. A summary of the literature study is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Image Themes in The Tourism Literature

No	Themes	Authors
1	Historical or religious buildings	(Song, Park, & Park, 2020), (Kislali et al., 2020), (De las Heras-Pedrosa, Millan-Celis, Iglesias-Sánchez, & Jambrino-Maldonado, 2020)

No	Themes	Authors
2	Tourist activities	(Taufiqurrachman, 2020), (De las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020)
3	Cultural attractions	(Taufiqurrachman, 2020), (Song et al., 2020), (De las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020), (Gabbioneta & De Carlo, 2019) (Sun et al., 2021)
4	Food, beverage, clunary and restaurant	(Taufiqurrachman, 2020), (Song et al., 2020), (Kislali et al., 2020), (De las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020) (Tseng et al., 2015)
5	Natural attractions	(Taufiqurrachman, 2020), (Song et al., 2020), (Kislali, Kavartzis, & Saren, 2020), (de las Heras-Pedrosa, Millan-Celis, Iglesias-Sánchez, & Jambrino-Maldonado, 2020)
6	Safety and family friendliness	(Gabbioneta & De Carlo, 2019), (Kislali et al., 2020), (Potwarka & Banyai, 2016)
7	Accommodation and transportation	(Taufiqurrachman, 2020), (Gabbioneta & De Carlo, 2019) (Tseng et al., 2015)
8	Local residents	(Taufiqurrachman, 2020)(Tseng et al., 2015)

### 3. Coding Data

Coding is an essential step in thematic analysis. Through this, the researcher groups the data into several data groups or categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this step, a coding framework was used to extract codes from the data (news texts sourced from Kompas and Detik.com). This process was carried out using the Atlas.ti application. A qualitative data processing application. In the study, the number of sub-themes appearing differs from the amount of news content that has been collected, as presented in Table 1, since some news content produces more than one code (sub-theme).

Next, the codes were organized and distributed into potential themes (see Table 2). Then, the initial themes that had been formulated were reviewed to ensure that they were conceptually related to the code. This stage produces a theme map, which is presented in a separate section (Figures 2 and 3). All of these stages were guided by the steps for conducting thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

### ZMET

The next stage, Z.M.E.T. (Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique), was applied to identify image formation from the tourist perspective. ZMET is a technique developed to identify the meaning, emotions, and image of tourist destinations from the perspective of customers and tourists (Hendler & Latour, 2008; Wang et al., 2014). In the study, this technique was applied to identify the meanings associated by the informants with the Bintan image codes and themes identified through thematic analysis of the news texts originating from Kompas and Detik.com.

In general, this technique was applied in two ways. The first is determining the informant. In general, the selected informants for the study are first-year Umrah F.I.S.I.P. students. They are in the age range of 18–20 years. People in this age range experience the highest level of exposure to information spread via the internet. Referring to statistical data in 2022, they are the age group penetrated by the internet at approximately 98–99% (APJII, 2022). It means that almost everyone at that age has surfed the virtual world and has been exposed to information distributed via the internet network.

All these ten informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. This technique was used to ensure that the selected informants complied with the criteria needed to obtain information about forming an organic image of the Bintan destination. The criteria are as follows: Having an interest or hobby in traveling, Following actively news updates on Bintan tourism, Placing online news sites as a source of tourism information. These criteria were then used as guidelines for researchers to develop pre-tests in order to select those informants. This selection process was conducted through face-to-face interviews.

In the second step, several pieces of news, both in text and image form, representing all the image themes of the Bintan destination identified through thematic analysis, were distributed to the informants. They were given approximately 15 minutes to read it. Furthermore, the meaning of the contents of each piece of news was questioned through in-depth interview sessions. Several questions were asked of all informants, guided by a list of themes and attributes of the Bintan destination image as found through thematic analysis.

Then, the entire interview process was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The Atlas.ti qualitative data processing application was used in the data coding process for analysis and interpretation of the interview results. Several examples of news snippets that were distributed to informants for the meaning-making process through interviews are presented in Figure 4.

## **Results**

### **Result of Thematic Analysis**

The results of the thematic analysis applied in this research show that various image themes are displayed by the two selected online media (Detik and Kompas) in their respective travel news, including Facility of Traveling (FOT), Buildings with Historical/Religious Architecture (B.H.R.A.), Tourist Activities (T.A.), Food/Culinary (F.C.), Safety and Family Friendly (S.F.F.), Accommodation/Transportation (A&T), Natural Attractions (N.A.), Cultural Attractions (C.A.), and Local Residents (L.R.).

However, both media emphasize different image themes. This is shown by the difference in the number of appearances of each theme in their news content. In particular, Kompas media emphasizes A&T, TA, and N.A. themes. As presented in Figure (1), A&T appears 22 times, TA 19 times, followed by NA appearing 17 times. The resort is the sub-theme frequently highlighted by this media in its reporting.



Several resorts in Lagoi and other areas were captured, including Banyan Tree Bintan, Lagoi Bay Villas, Pantai Indah Lagoi Bintan, Mayang Sari Beach Resort, de Bintan Billa, etc.

Meanwhile, Detik.com media also emphasized these themes, especially T.A. and N.A. However, there is still another theme (the facility of tourism), which appears very prominently compared to other themes. Various sub-themes are exposed by this media in this theme, including the government's policy of reducing the quarantine period for tourists, free visas (visas on arrival) for citizens from certain countries, second home visas for foreign nationals (second home), Bintan, Bali, and Batam as one of the entry points for foreign tourists during the recovery period in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic through its two ports (Bandar Seri Udana Lobam and Bandar Bentan Telani Lagoi), the travel bubble as a corridor for Batam-Bintan-Singapore, the elimination of PCR and antigen tests, and etc.

As presented in Figure 3, the FOT theme appeared 29 times in this media news, followed by the N.A. theme, which appeared 27 times, followed by TA appearing 26 times in the data. On the other hand, Kompas highlights the FOT theme in its reporting but does not emphasize it prominently. Meanwhile, Detik.com does not highlight the A&T theme significantly. This is indicated by the appearance of this theme in the data only 13 times. It is much lower when compared to those of the N.A. and AT themes. However, these two media display similarities in several sub-themes (codes) for the T.A. theme, such as swimming, water sports, cycling, and watching sporting events such as Formula One (F1). Likewise, similar sub-themes of the theme of N.A. are portrayed by those media, including beaches, mangrove forest areas, blue lakes, deserts, cherry trees, safari lagoi, etc.

The prominent appearance of the N.A. theme in data originating from these two online media is in line with the superior destinations that this district provides, such as Treasure Bay with a swimming pool, which is claimed to be the largest swimming pool in Southeast Asia, and beach destinations that challenge tourists to do various types of water sports, such as Lago Bay, Sgigi Beach, and Trikora Beach, including Crystal Lagoon, which is claimed as the first artificial sea in Southeast Asia.

Apart from that, several areas in the district, which are widely known as "the land as big as Lad Aini," offer natural beauty with a distinctive tropical climate. Also, several roads in the area are still quiet because they are not yet crowded with high volumes of motorized vehicles. These conditions provide an exciting cycling experience for tourists. Besides exercising by pedaling their bicycles, they can breathe air that is still cool and clean, not mixed with smoke from the exhaust of motorized vehicles. This district is a regular host for international cycling sporting events, such as the Tour de Bintan and O.C.B.S. national championships. In particular, the Tour de Bintan is regularly held every year in this district.

Furthermore, Bintan district was also placed as the center for the Formula 1 circuit construction project. This project became one of the main highlights of both media. This is shown by the appearance of these themes in some of their news content,

especially in the travel column in several editions of their publications. Based on thematic analysis, from the second quarter of 2020 to the fourth quarter of 2022, news with the theme of implementing the F1 circuit construction project has appeared 14 times.

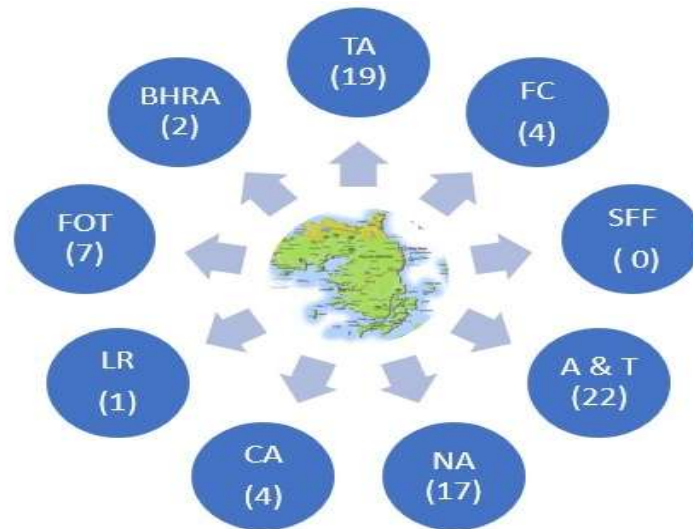


Figure 2. Thematic map of Kompas Tourism News

Source: Result of Data Analysis

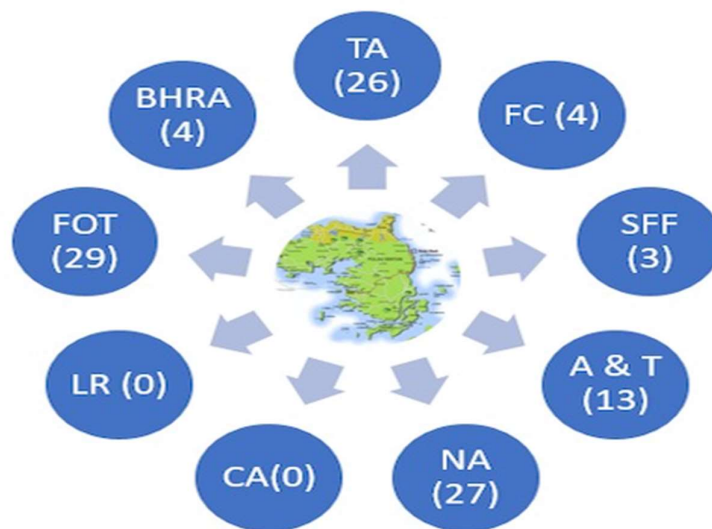


Figure 3. Thematic map of Detik.com Tourism News

Source: Result of Data Analysis

On the other hand, the dominance of the N.A. theme in this research data is also closely related to the superiority of natural destinations found in one of the districts under the government administration of the Riau Islands province, including beach destinations that always attract the attention of tourists, forest areas with their

vast mangroves, and unique blue lakes. It is said that this destination presents the atmosphere of a Middle Eastern destination with its typical expanse of desert.

Other experiences of traveling abroad, specifically to Japan, can be gained by visiting Bintan, especially the Kijang city park destination. In the park, cherry blossom trees grow. This tree is widely known to only grow in Japan and several other Asian countries neighboring Japan, such as China and South Korea. Hence, by visiting Bintan, tourists would enjoy a double travel experience. Firstly, they gain the experience of traveling to Malay destinations with all their unique characteristics; secondly, they also have the experience of traveling to countries that are home to cherry blossoms.

Then, Kompas and Detik.com agree that several other themes are not unimportant for the image formation of Bintan destinations, such as FC, CA, B.H.R.A., SFF, and L.R. These themes were indeed portrayed by those media, but their number of appearances is very low in the data. Especially in Kompas data, the P.L. theme only appeared once. Meanwhile, other themes were higher; for example, F.C. and C.A. appeared four times, followed by B.H.R.A., which appeared two times. Even the S.F.F. theme does not appear at all. Likewise, Detik.com does not highlight news with L.R. and C.A. themes. Meanwhile, B.H.R.A. and F.C. still appeared four times, as did S.F.F. three times.

### **Z.M.E.T's Result**

The results of Z.M.E.T. interviews applied to all informants in this research show that the N.A. theme is the dominant theme for Bintan district destinations. This theme appeared in all respondents' answers as the central theme for Bintan's destination image. They view the natural beauty found in several destinations in Bintan, such as Trikora Beach, several beach points in the Lagoi area, and mangrove conservation areas, as the main reasons for tourists to visit. Some of them even said that Bintan destinations, such as the Blue Lake, were not only beautiful but able to provide an experience of traveling to the Middle East with its desert destinations. Some of them think this destination is very Instagrammable. So, visiting this destination, you can not only enjoy its natural beauty and the experience of traveling to the Middle East, but you can also take lots of pictures, including selfies with attractive backgrounds.

Another unique experience offered by the Bintan destination, according to several informants, is the Kijang city park. In the park, there are cherry blossom trees. Flowers widely known to tourists can only be enjoyed by visiting Japan. However, according to them, the presence of the Kijang City Park destination has refuted this view. They said that now, to get an exciting experience, namely enjoying the beauty of the cherry blossoms in bloom, you do not need to spend much money traveling abroad because just by visiting Bintan, you can enjoy this experience with your family.

When asked where the information about beach destinations, mangrove forests, and the existence of these parks was obtained, three informants' answers were obtained from friends and relatives who had visited the destination. The remaining

seven informants answered that they got the information from news from online mass media that appeared on their social media accounts, including Kompas and Detik.com.

N.A. is another theme highlighted by the informants. Pedaling a bicycle is the most dominant sub-theme among the other sub-themes. They reasoned that the Bintan area was generally quiet, and several roads were still empty, with few motorized vehicles passing through. Apart from that, they say cycling in the Bintan area is not only healthy but also provides an attractive experience. On the right and left along the road, cyclists will be spoiled by green, lush, and fabulous views. This view comes from the trees that grow in rows along the road in the Bintan area.

Furthermore, other sub-themes, such as water sports, also received attention but needed to be more prominent than the cycling sub-theme. Regarding the source of information obtained regarding this matter, some of the answers were inspired by the many cycling sports events they witnessed directly, such as the Tour de Bintan. The Tour de Bintan is an international sporting event in this district. Usually, participants from various countries attend this event. As a significant and international event, the Tour de Bintan is always in the spotlight of media coverage, both local and national. At the same time, some informants followed the event through media reports.

After the N.A. and T.A. themes, the next theme highlighted in third place was S.F.F. by the informants. All informants agreed that the Bintan destination provided a sense of security to visitors and was friendly for children, especially at several destinations in the Lagoi area. According to them, this sense of security is achieved because of a sound security system from the management or tourism operator, such as security officers who are always on guard and lots of children's play rides provided. Some said that this Bintan destination is safe because it is rare to find criminal cases in reports or reports in the mass media.

However, they feel worried about the presence of wild animals, such as crocodiles, that live freely in their habitat. This concern follows several cases of residents being preyed upon by these animals, as reported by the mass media. Therefore, they admit that they tend to avoid mangrove forest destinations, especially during the rainy season. According to them, during this season, crocodiles often come out of their nests to look for prey.

As presented in the previous section, F.C. is one of the Bintan tourism news themes in these two online media. Several types of food, such as otak-otak, gonggong, kerrang bulu, lakse, and others, have received news coverage from Kompas and Detik.com. However, informants generally viewed these foods as not the main reason for them to travel to destinations in the Bintan area. Because these foods can be easily obtained in other areas, such as Tanjungpinang and Batam, you do not need to visit destinations in Bintan. They added that these foods in other areas are cheaper than those in Bintan.

Likewise, the L.R. theme has received media coverage, even though it is insignificant. All informants agreed that there was nothing unique or attractive about this dimension. The reason is that the lives of the people of Bintan, for example, in terms of the lives of traditional fishermen in coastal areas, are not much different from those who live in other coastal areas, such as in Lingga district, Anambas Islands district, and so on. Likewise, plantation areas in this district do not provide any attraction in terms of the daily activities of the local population.

Another interesting finding was also shown through the results of this interview regarding how the themes of C.A. and B.H.R.A. were highlighted by the informants. Almost all informants did not see the local cultural dimension as a tourist attraction, including local food. This is because the people of Bintan are part of the Malay ethnicity and culture. They think that there are still several other areas that offer Malay arts performances, including the ritual practices of the Malay community, such as Tanjungpinang, Lingga, and Anambas, apart from Bintan.

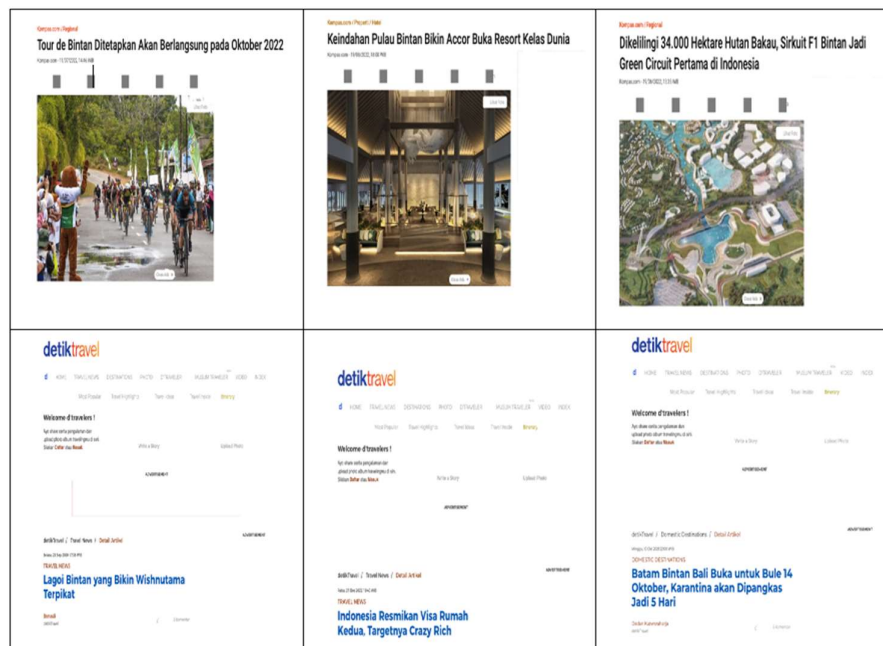


Figure 4. Several pieces of news distributed to informants for the implementation of ZMET

Source: URL Link of Kompas and Detik.com

Some even prefer Batam as a destination to enjoy Malay arts performances. Even though the city's society is diverse, Malay arts performances are often held there. In line with this, there are other exciting tourist activities in the city, such as shopping for electronic goods and various other necessities, such as bags, perfume, computers, and so on. So, traveling to this city can lead to various attractive experiences.

However, in one of these interview sessions, this C.A. theme emerged from an informant. However, the emergence of this theme cannot be separated from the

informant's background, a Malay arts activist. So, his views reflect personal interest rather than objectivity regarding the attractions of the Bintan destination from the perspective of culture or local society.

They were regarding the B.H.R.A. theme. As presented in Figure 3, B.H.R.A. is one of the themes highlighted by Detik.com media coverage, even though its appearance is not significant. However, these themes or sub-themes only appeared in the interview sessions with some informants. When asked for confirmation regarding the destination attractions, all informants answered that the destination needed to be more attractive and included in their visit planning.

## **Discussion**

Based on the results of a thematic analysis of news content produced by two national media (Kompas and Detik.com) in their respective "travel" sections, the image of the Bintan destination is formed unequally when the two media provide a very dominant spotlight on some themes only, such as A&T, FOT, NA, and T.A. themes. In contrast, the C.A., B.H.R.A., L.R., and S.S.F. themes could have experienced more spotlight. In particular, the C.A., L.R., and S.S.F. themes do not appear in Detik.com news content.

In particular, concerning the high number of FOT themes appearing in Detik.com news content, this is a strategic response from tourism operators to increase the number of visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the data shows, the pandemic has created a crisis in the tourism industry, which is the impact of a sharp decline in the number of tourist visits, especially in the Riau Islands province (Kepri Central Statistics Agency, 2023).

Therefore, local tourism operators and agencies collaborate with various media, including online media, to provide maximum coverage of new policies and various tourism facilities, especially health facilities. This is an effort to build trust and perception among tourists that the Bintan destination is ready to welcome visitors in the post-COVID-19 pandemic.

In line with this, existing studies show that this condition is triggered by several things, including a sharp decline in hotel room bookings and flight tickets (Foo, Chin, Tan, & Phuah, 2021), the formation of risk perceptions (Sánchez-Cañizares, Cabeza-Ramírez, Muñoz-Fernández, & Fuentes-García, 2021), including threats and fear (Zheng, Luo, & Ritchie, 2021) among tourists causing them to postpone their visitation plans. At the same time, the low interest of tourists in visiting was also reinforced by the media coverage of Covid 19 (Yang, Isa, & Ramayah, 2021).

On the other hand, the informants of this research and the two selected media have almost the same views. Most informants see N.A. and TA as dimensions of the Bintan destination attractive to tourists. Meanwhile, other dimensions, such as culture, food/culinary, and local residents, could be more attractive. They consider that these dimensions, including local food, are common and available in other destinations in Kepulauan Riau.

Although there is one informant who considers Bintan culture to be an attractive dimension and potentially to be further developed in order to increase its attractiveness, that view likely represents his subjectivity since that informant is an activist concerned with performances or local arts activities.

Furthermore, the congruity between the image themes highlighted by Kompas and Detik.com and those revealed in Z.M.E.T.'s interview sessions with informants confirms the findings of previous studies regarding the impact of mass media on organic image formation, including Wang, Chan, & Pan (2014), Muhoho-Minni & Lubbe (2017), and Gabbioneta & De Carlo (2019). In line with this, several informants stated that these two media were sources of information regarding the preparation of their visitation agenda, especially to destinations in Bintan.

However, apart from that, the findings of this study also need to be more consistent with those of the existing studies regarding several aspects. First, the limited coverage of Kompas and Detik.com and the informants regarding the C.A. theme are inconsistent with the two dimensions. First, the National Tourism Development master plan document places culture as one aspect that has the potential to be developed to strengthen the attractiveness of a destination (see Article 14, paragraph (1), Government Regulation Number 50 of 2011). Second, several previous studies have shown that cultural themes are one of the themes highlighted dominantly in tourism promotional content (Taufiqurrachman, 2020; Song, Park, & Park, 2020; De las Heras-Pedrosa, Millan-Celis, Iglesias-Sánchez, & Jambrino-Maldonado, 2020; Gabbioneta & De Carlo, 2019; Sun et al., 2021).

Second, furthermore, seen from a tourist perspective, local residents are another element that plays a role in forming a positive image of Chinese tourist destinations (Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008; Tseng et al., 2015). Therefore, this element has become a potential theme in the production of promotional content for tourist destinations (Taufiqurrachman, 2020) (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). However, this research shows interesting findings where the theme of local residents is not considered an important element in forming an organic image of the Bintan destination, both by the media and informants.

Third. Another exciting thing is the findings of this study, indicating congruity between the media and informants who consider the B.H.R.A. theme unattractive. Even though various studies show this theme as one of the main elements in forming tourist destinations (Song et al., 2020; De las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020). In line with this, Taufiqurrachman's (2020) study shows that the theme of historical buildings, such as mosques, is exploited to create a friendly tourism image for Muslim tourists in the destinations of Aceh and West Sumatra. In line with this, the Bintan authority stated its commitment to making Bintan a friendly tourist destination for Muslim tourists. For this reason, this theme needs a more proportional portrayal and other themes to strengthen the image of halal tourism for the Bintan destination.

Finally, theoretically and empirically, family-friendly destinations are another theme in forming the image of a tourist destination. This is shown by various studies,

including Gabbioneta & De Carlo (2019), Kislali et al. (2020), and Potwarka & Banyai (2016). At the same time, the government has projected the image of the Bintan destination as a center for family entertainment throughout the year through the slogan "Family Fun 365 Days a Year" (see Explanation of Article 35 of Government Regulation Number 50 of 2011). The results of the Z.M.E.T. interview also show the views of several informants who see the importance of security and family-friendly dimensions as one aspect of the attractiveness of the Bintan destination. However, it is interesting that both media are not interested in highlighting the S.S.F. theme, as shown by the absence of this theme in their news content.

{Bibliography}Kompas and Detik.com highlight various image themes in an imbalanced way because both media are autonomous agents, as stated by Gartner (1994). Furthermore, this scholar emphasized that, as an autonomous agent, the media always conveys various reports or news to its readers independently or freely. As long as a report is newsworthy, media editors will produce and publish it. Based on this, from the perspective of the editors of Kompas and Detik.com, the themes FOT, A&T, NA, and T.A. are newsworthy, so these themes appear prominently in their reporting. On the other hand, other themes are considered not to contain news value.

## **Conclusion**

The research outline shows several aspects. First, the organic image of the Bintan destination during the COVID-19 pandemic was formed unequally, both by online mass media and by tourists selected as informants. Several themes emerged prominently in the data, such as FOT, A&T, NA, and T.A. Meanwhile, other themes, including C.A., B.H.R.A., L.R., and F.C., do not receive a significant portion of the media coverage.

The dominant emergence of the FOT theme cannot be separated from the efforts of tourism operators and management to revive the world of tourism after facing the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, these efforts received support from media editors. A large portion of media coverage shows this.

The theoretical implications of this study show that image formation does not occur in a vacuum since it is influenced by issues or situations that occur when the image formation process occurs. The appearance of the FOT theme in the data is empirical evidence indicating the impact of the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery period on the formation of the Bintan destination image.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also confirm those of previous studies, which show that mass media influences the formation of destination images from a tourist perspective. This is shown by the congruity between the themes highlighted through news originating from those media and those that emerged from informants through Z.M.E.T. interviews. Moreover, some informants admitted to using online mass media, including Kompas and Detik.com, as sources of information regarding planning their visits to various Bintan destinations.



Simultaneously, the findings of this study also have practical and managerial implications in two dimensions. For players in the tourism industry, intensification of destination development projects based on local culture needs to be carried out in order to strengthen their attractiveness to tourists. Even though their local culture is part of Malay culture, they still have uniqueness to be exploited through cultural performance events. Other development projects can be carried out by designing tourist packages that include cultural sites in this district, including Malay House, Arang Kitchen, and Kerang Hill Site.

Then, for tourism operators and promoters, it is recommended to increase the production of promotional content for tourist destinations proportionally. In particular, potential themes that have yet to receive attention from the mass media must be given primary attention, such as C.A., L.R., and F.C.

On the other hand, this research successfully identified the Bintan image formed by two online mass media (Kompas and Detik.com) and tourists selected as research informants during the recovery period after the COVID-19 pandemic. For future research, it is recommended to expand the scope of this image formation study to include two crucial periods (before and after the COVID-19 pandemic). Hence, the themes that emerge from both parties (media and tourists) within those different periods can be identified.

These two time periods are essential. As mentioned in the previous section, the pandemic has hit the tourism industry with a crisis because the number of tourist visits has decreased significantly. In this situation, various breakthroughs have been made by tourism management, including tourism promotion agents, in order to revive tourists' interest in visiting. In line with this, several breakthroughs or efforts by tourism management and promoters received media coverage.

Finally, regarding future research, the researcher suggests including other elements in the study of destination image formation, namely Bintan destination marketing agents. This is because marketing agents are another element responsive to all situations, especially those influencing the tendency for tourist visits.

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