



Whose Culture is Marketed? Gendered Narratives in Heritage Tourism Promotion in the Borobudur–Prambanan Cultural Region, Indonesia

Muhammad Rehan Sabir¹, Dewi Candraningrum², Saima Tahir³, Alaa Alkhateeb⁴

¹Government College University Faisalabad, Faisalabad City. Pakistan.

²Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Solo City. Indonesia .

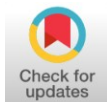
³Nantong University, Nantong City. China.

⁴Al-Sham Private University, Damascus. Syrian Arab Republic.

Corresponding Author: rehanzayer@gmail.com¹

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Abstract:

This study examines how official heritage tourism promotion constructs gendered cultural narratives within the Borobudur–Prambanan cultural region. Heritage tourism promotion is not treated merely as destination marketing, but as a representational arena where cultural identity, historical authority, authenticity, and social visibility are selectively produced. Using a qualitative interpretive design and Critical Discourse Analysis, the study analyzes 87 text–image units from state-linked tourism platforms, including Borobudur, Prambanan, Ramayana Ballet, and Central Java tourism materials. The analysis focuses on seven categories: visibility and invisibility, gender roles, narrative voice, descriptive language, symbolic positioning, agency versus passivity, and cultural authority. The findings reveal that women are frequently visible in promotional images as dancers, artisans, performers, and symbolic markers of tradition, yet their visibility rarely translates into narrative authority. Men, by contrast, are more often associated with historical explanation, institutional voice, ritual legitimacy, and interpretive knowledge. Female-coded cultural practices are commonly commodified through aesthetic spectacle, costume, bodily performance, and emotional atmosphere, while male-coded heritage elements retain intellectual, historical, and spiritual prestige. The study concludes that official heritage tourism promotion reproduces a gendered hierarchy of cultural representation by separating visual presence from cultural authority. More equitable promotional practice requires naming female cultural practitioners, recognizing their knowledge, and presenting women not only as cultural symbols but also as interpreters, transmitters, and authoritative subjects of heritage. This finding highlights the need for heritage tourism institutions to develop more inclusive promotional narratives that acknowledge women’s cultural agency, expertise, and authority in sustaining living heritage traditions.

Keyword: Marketed, Gendered Narratives, Heritage Tourism, Cultural Region



INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism is not merely a sector that displays monuments, rituals, performances, and historical landscapes for visitor consumption; it is also a representational field in which culture is selected, framed, narrated, and circulated through institutional communication. In promotional practice, heritage is transformed into an intelligible and attractive destination image through text, photography, video, captions, digital layout, and official branding strategies. These representational choices determine which cultural objects are elevated as symbols of collective identity, which social actors become visible, and which forms of knowledge are recognised as legitimate. For this reason, heritage tourism promotion must be understood not only as marketing communication, but also as a cultural process that produces public meanings about the past, identity, authenticity, and authority (Farrelly et al., 2019; Scarpi & Raggiotto, 2023; Cerić et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2025).

Within the Indonesian context, the Borobudur–Prambanan cultural region occupies a strategic position in national and international heritage tourism promotion. Borobudur and Prambanan are not only monumental archaeological sites, but also symbolic anchors through which Indonesia’s civilisational history, religious plurality, artistic refinement, and Javanese cultural memory are projected to domestic and global audiences. In promotional practice, these sites are frequently connected with surrounding cultural landscapes, traditional performances, craft economies, royal heritage, and local community-based tourism products. This produces a broader cultural circuit that exceeds administrative boundaries and operates as a functional promotional region shaped by destination branding, digital visibility, and institutional storytelling (Hasanah et al., 2020; Binarti et al., 2021; Reinhart et al., 2023; Abdillah et al., 2022).

The central issue examined in this article is how official heritage tourism promotion in the Borobudur–Prambanan cultural region constructs culture through gendered narratives. The study begins from the premise that promotional materials do not neutrally present heritage; rather, they organise cultural meaning by assigning visibility, roles, voice, and authority to particular subjects. Women may appear prominently as dancers, craft workers, ritual participants, or visual icons of tradition, while men may be positioned as historical interpreters, cultural custodians, institutional representatives, or authoritative narrators. Such representational arrangements are important because they shape how tourists understand whose culture is being marketed, whose labour is aestheticised, and whose knowledge is recognised as the basis of heritage interpretation (Godtman Kling et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2023; Yang & Schänzel, 2025; Lin & Roelofsen, 2025).

Previous tourism scholarship has provided important insights into gender, labour, entrepreneurship, empowerment, and participation in tourism economies. Studies on gender and tourism have shown that tourism can expand women’s economic opportunities, yet these opportunities often remain constrained by unequal access to resources, institutional hierarchies, cultural expectations, and gendered divisions of labour. Indonesian and Asian tourism studies similarly demonstrate that women’s participation in tourism does not automatically translate into cultural authority or equal decision-making power. However, much of this literature still concentrates on employment, entrepreneurship, education, and development outcomes, while the representational dimension of official tourism promotion remains less systematically

examined, especially in relation to heritage destinations in Indonesia (Pickel-Chevalier & Yanthy, 2023; Zhang & Zhang, 2020; Nguyen, 2022; Hutchings et al., 2020).

This article therefore positions itself within the intersection of heritage tourism, gender studies, destination marketing, and critical discourse analysis. It argues that official promotional materials are not secondary or decorative components of tourism development; they are central sites where cultural legitimacy is constructed. Images, captions, website descriptions, brochures, and digital campaigns work together to define what counts as heritage, who embodies tradition, and who is authorised to explain cultural meaning. A gendered analysis of these materials is necessary because visual prominence does not necessarily indicate agency, and repeated aestheticisation of female cultural figures may obscure the intellectual, spiritual, pedagogical, and historical dimensions of women’s cultural work (de Bernardi, 2019; de Bernardi, 2022; Feighery, 2011; Waterton, 2009).

The importance of this topic is also linked to contemporary changes in tourism communication. Destination marketing has increasingly moved into digital and multimodal environments, where websites, social media, short videos, online travel platforms, and institutional visual archives shape tourist expectations before physical travel occurs. In such contexts, projected destination image becomes a powerful mechanism through which cultural regions are imagined, consumed, and remembered. If gendered patterns are embedded in these promotional materials, then they may be reproduced repeatedly across platforms and audiences, making them appear natural rather than constructed. This makes the Borobudur–Prambanan cultural region an important case for examining how gender, heritage, and promotional authority intersect in a digitally mediated tourism field (Wang et al., 2024; Eitzenberger & Thimm, 2024; Choi et al., 2007; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015).

Table 1. Analytical Positioning of the Study within Heritage Tourism and Gender Representation Research

Analytical Aspect	Dominant Focus in Existing Studies	Remaining Gap	Position of This Article
Heritage tourism promotion	Destination image, authenticity, visitor attraction, and branding	Limited attention to how gender shapes cultural meaning in official promotion	Examines promotional materials as gendered cultural texts
Gender and tourism	Labour participation, entrepreneurship, empowerment, and education	Limited analysis of visual and textual representation in heritage promotion	Focuses on visibility, role allocation, voice, and authority
Indonesian tourism studies	Community-based tourism, heritage management, sustainability, and cultural tourism development	Limited feminist discourse analysis of official heritage promotion	Uses Borobudur–Prambanan as a functional promotional field

Analytical Aspect	Dominant Focus in Existing Studies	Remaining Gap	Position of This Article
Cultural commodification	Transformation of cultural practices into tourism products	Limited attention to how commodification is distributed along gendered lines	Analyses how female- and male-associated heritage practices are differently marketed
Methodological approach	Content analysis, destination image analysis, and tourism marketing evaluation	Need for multimodal critical discourse analysis of official promotional texts and images	Applies multimodal CDA to institutional heritage tourism communication

Source: Author, 2026

The originality of this article lies in its focus on gendered narratives as a mechanism through which heritage culture is institutionally marketed. Rather than asking only whether women and men appear in promotional materials, this study asks how they appear, what roles they are given, whether they speak or are spoken about, and whether they are positioned as bearers of cultural knowledge or as aesthetic signs of tradition. This analytical orientation enables the study to move beyond simple visibility counts and examine the deeper symbolic ordering of culture in promotional discourse. In this respect, the article contributes to current debates on cultural narrative, local cultural capital, and living heritage tourism by showing that cultural promotion is also a site of gendered authority production (Syafii, 2025; Trisoko, 2024; Nanita & Sharma, 2025; Cao et al., 2025).

Accordingly, this article aims to analyse how official heritage tourism promotion materials for the Borobudur–Prambanan cultural region construct culture through gendered narratives. It specifically examines who is made visible, what cultural roles are assigned to women and men, how textual and visual elements distribute narrative voice, and who is positioned as a legitimate bearer of cultural authority. By addressing these questions, the article demonstrates that heritage tourism promotion does not simply reproduce cultural identity for tourism consumption; it actively organises cultural hierarchy through repeated multimodal choices. The study’s scientific contribution is therefore twofold: it advances feminist analysis in Indonesian heritage tourism studies and offers a critical framework for understanding cultural commodification as a gendered process within official destination promotion.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative interpretive design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine gendered representation in official heritage tourism promotion within the Borobudur–Prambanan cultural region. The approach was selected because the study focuses on how institutional promotional discourse constructs cultural meaning, distributes visibility, and assigns authority through language, image, and multimodal arrangement. Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the

research prioritised interpretive depth by analysing how gendered meanings are produced across textual descriptions, visual composition, captions, symbolic positioning, and institutional narrative voice. This design is appropriate for studying tourism promotion as a discursive practice because official promotional materials do not merely communicate information about destinations; they actively shape public understandings of heritage, identity, authenticity, and cultural authority (Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Machin & Mayr, 2012; Rose, 2016).

The corpus consisted of 87 text–image units drawn from official digital heritage tourism promotional materials produced or authorised by state and state-linked tourism institutions. The selected sources included the Central Java Provincial Tourism Office website, Borobudur promotional pages, and Prambanan Temple Compounds promotional pages under the relevant institutional management platforms. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select materials that met three criteria: official status, direct relevance to heritage or cultural tourism promotion, and sufficient textual or visual content for gendered discourse analysis. The corpus was limited to English-language public-facing digital materials published or accessible during January 2022–December 2023, because the study focuses on how Indonesian heritage is represented for broader visitor consumption through official promotional communication (Schreier, 2012; Flick, 2018; Bowen, 2009).

The unit of analysis was a bounded promotional representation, defined as a discrete text–image configuration within a webpage section, such as a banner, captioned image, destination description, cultural explainer, event promotion text, or paragraph–image cluster. When several images appeared in one section, each image–caption combination was treated as a separate analytical unit, while uncaptioned images were analysed as standalone visual texts because the absence of verbal anchoring was considered analytically meaningful. The coding process used seven categories: visibility and invisibility, gender roles, narrative voice, descriptive language, symbolic positioning, agency versus passivity, and cultural authority. The terms male-coded and female-coded were used as discourse-analytical descriptors based on representational function, symbolic association, institutional framing, and cultural positioning, rather than as biological claims about the figures or practices represented.

The analysis proceeded through four main stages. First, all eligible promotional materials were identified, logged, and organised according to platform, page title, retrieval date, content type, and preliminary representational features. Second, each unit was coded using the seven analytical categories to trace how women, men, and gendered cultural practices were made visible, described, positioned, and authorised. Third, recurrent patterns were interpreted thematically in relation to gendered visibility, role construction, narrative authority, and cultural commodification. Fourth, trustworthiness was maintained through repeated reading, iterative recoding, category refinement, comparison across platforms, and attention to counter-examples.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Gendered Visibility

Visibility in the corpus is markedly asymmetric, but the asymmetry operates differently across textual and visual modes. In visual promotional materials, women are more frequently present than men. Across the corpus, female figures more frequently

appear in foreground positions in image-dominant promotional materials, while male figures appear less frequently. Mixed-gender or gender-neutral imagery accounts for the remainder. These observations are based on recurring patterns across the coded units and are interpreted qualitatively rather than as statistical measures. This pattern reverses in the textual register. When promotional texts name individuals, quote authorities, or identify figures as bearers of cultural knowledge, male figures are more often foregrounded.

Table 2. Cross-Modal Patterns of Gendered Representation in Heritage Tourism

Mode of Promotion	Observed Pattern	Analytical Implication
Visual promotional materials	Women are more frequently positioned in the visual foreground than men.	Visual presence provides women with representational prominence, but this prominence does not necessarily translate into cultural authority.
Textual promotional materials	Male figures are more often foregrounded when individuals are named, quoted, or identified as holders of cultural knowledge.	Textual authority is more frequently associated with male-coded voices and interpretive positions.
Combined text–image units	Female visibility is commonly constructed through visual appearance, whereas male visibility is more often constructed through verbal explanation or cultural interpretation.	Across the heritage units examined, appearance and authority tend to be distributed along gendered lines.
Cross-modal contrast	The visual prominence of women contrasts with the textual attribution of authority to men.	Gender differentiation operates across modes of representation, not merely through numerical frequency or visual presence.

Source: Author, 2026

Unit BH-01, the Borobudur Destination Info page, opens with a full-width hero image titled *Destination-Hero-min.jpg*, which occupies the entire viewport width. The image presents the tiered stone terraces of Borobudur at close range and is captured from a low-angle perspective. No human figure appears in the frame. The temple itself becomes the central visual subject, presented as ancient, monumental, and implicitly authorless. Directly beneath this image, a second visual element titled *Frame-1171276095-min.jpg* appears as a section banner. This image also contains no visible human figure. The accompanying text block, “Welcome to Borobudur Temple,” states that Borobudur is “the largest Buddhist temple in the world and one of the most popular tourist destinations in Southeast Asia.” This textual framing reinforces the monumental register

of the site. The unit contains no image of a person and makes no reference to any individual, whether male or female.

Unit BH-02, the Borobudur History page, follows this monument-centred structure but introduces a more explicitly gendered textual logic. The named historical actors are the Sailendra Dynasty, identified as the builder of the temple, and Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, identified as the leader of British troops who discovered the site in 1814. Both attributions are male-coded: Raffles through documented historical identity, and the Sailendra Dynasty through the patriarchal organisational structure by which dynastic authority was historically constituted and textually invoked. No woman is named across the page. The accompanying structural image, *Hero-banner.jpg*, shows the upper terraces of the monument without any human figures. The visual and textual registers therefore converge: the site is presented as produced, rediscovered, and explained through male-coded historical authority, while women remain absent from both modes of representation (BH-02).

Unit PR-01, the Prambanan Destination Info page, provides an instructive contrast in how female presence enters the visual register while remaining absent from the verbal one. The hero image for this page, *Prambanan-Desktop-min.jpg*, presents the towering spires of the Prambanan complex against a dusk sky. As in the Borobudur unit, the architectural form dominates the image and no human figure is visible. However, lower on the same page, the thumbnail image for the Ramayana Ballet experience tile, *RAMAYANA-1200x1659-1-768x1062.jpg*, shows a female dancer in full costume in a vertical portrait format. She occupies the entire frame, wearing an elaborate headdress, extending her arms in a classical gesture, and facing slightly away from the camera. No caption accompanies the image on this tile; the only text beneath it reads “Ramayana Ballet.” The visual logic of this pairing is precise: the monument is represented through architecture, while cultural performance is represented through a female body. The two images assign different registers of meaning to temple stone and female dancer, namely the historical-spiritual register on the one hand and the performative-aesthetic register on the other.

The pattern identified across units BH-01, BH-02, BH-04, and PR-01 is consistent. The visual register of the Borobudur and Prambanan heritage platforms tends to assign women to performative and aesthetic positions, while the verbal-historical register assigns authority to male-coded figures. Women are shown, whereas the historical and spiritual meanings of the sites are narrated through dynasties, scholars, and male-named authorities. This does not mean that women are entirely absent from the corpus. Rather, it indicates that women’s presence and men’s presence operate through systematically different representational modes across the unit-level evidence.

The visual foreground prominence of female figures across the corpus requires careful interpretation. At first glance, this prominence might appear to constitute a form of women’s inclusion in heritage representation. However, prominence within an image does not necessarily indicate narrative centrality or cultural authority. A figure may occupy the visual foreground while still functioning as an object of the frame rather than as a subject who acts, decides, or speaks within it. In the Borobudur and Prambanan promotional materials, female visual prominence consistently serves this object-oriented function. The female figure draws the viewer’s attention, orients the visual field, and signals cultural atmosphere, while the surrounding text is more frequently organised

through an institutional register of knowledge associated with male-coded authority in the corpus (Scarles, 2009).

This pattern is also visible in the way the Borobudur platform frames the visitor experience. Its promotional description states: “Visiting Borobudur Temple is an unforgettable experience. The first time you see the grandeur of this magnificent temple’s architecture, you will feel as if you are stepping into history. Surrounded by stunning green scenery, you begin to explore each level of the temple, admiring the reliefs that tell stories of Buddha.” The second-person address positions the presumed visitor as an observer, while the temple and the stories it tells become the primary carriers of cultural meaning. The verbal content centres on Buddha, dynasty, relief, architecture, and history, all of which are framed as heritage categories without female attribution. Women appear elsewhere on the same platform in gallery image thumbnails as costumed performers, yet they are not integrated into the explanatory and knowledge-bearing register of the site (ticket.borobudurpark.com/en/borobudur-temple/).

This representational pattern corresponds to the scopic economy of tourism, in which women’s bodies are made available for visual consumption while their subjectivity and cultural agency are withheld. Representation systems operate through classification: the decision to show rather than quote, to frame rather than attribute, and to visualise rather than authorise assigns women to the category of the seen. In the units examined across the three platforms, this classificatory logic recurs with sufficient regularity to constitute a discernible pattern, although the analysis does not claim that it applies uniformly across all 87 coded units (Aitchison, 2001; Hall, 1997).

A partial exception appears in craft-centred content on the visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id platform. Several batik-related pages include textual references to female artisans and their production knowledge. These references position women as skilled producers and cultural transmitters. They therefore disrupt the dominant pattern, but only within the more limited domain of artisanal content. This disruption does not extend to the higher-status heritage narrative pages concerning temples, courts, royal ceremonial traditions, and major historical-cultural sites.

2. Role Construction

The roles assigned to women and men in the corpus reproduce a division that broadly aligns with public authority and ornamental performance. Men are represented through roles associated with ritual authority, scholarly knowledge, and historical agency. Women, by contrast, are more frequently represented through roles associated with performance, service, and cultural atmosphere. This distinction is not stated explicitly in the promotional materials. Rather, it is produced through the accumulation of representational choices across dozens of text–image units.

On the Prambanan promotional pages, the Ramayana Ballet functions as one of the central vehicles of cultural promotion. The ballet retells the Ramayana epic, which centres on the abduction and rescue of Sita, a female protagonist. The promotional copy for the ballet emphasises narrative drama and performance spectacle. The official management platform frames the performance through narrative action and destination spectacle by stating that “The Ramayana story is about Rama’s journey to save his wife Sita (in Java usually called Sinta) who was kidnapped by the king of Alengka, Rahwana” (injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Ramayana/).

Three male figures Rama, Rahwana, and, by implication, Hanuman as rescuer structure the story. Sita is present as the object of the journey: she is kidnapped and then saved. The promotional text does not describe what she does, says, or knows; instead, she is grammatically positioned as the figure whose vulnerability motivates male action. The Ramayana Ballet page on the Central Java tourism platform provides no counter-description of Sita's agency, because it limits itself to scheduling and venue information and directs visitors to attend the performance rather than explaining its cultural content (visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id/en/art-and-culture/ramayana-ballet).

The promotional framing across both platforms therefore inherits and amplifies the epic's gendered narrative logic without commentary. This pattern is not simply inherited from the source narrative; it is also reinforced through promotional framing. The promotional copy could have foregrounded the dancers' artistic training, the pedagogical traditions through which female roles are transmitted, or the choreographic knowledge embedded in the performance. Instead, it foregrounds spectacle, plot, and destination appeal, while leaving the cultural expertise of female performers largely unarticulated.

The keraton-related content on the Central Java tourism platform similarly assigns gender-differentiated roles. Male figures, including sultans, court scholars, and ceremonial officials, are positioned as the subjects of court culture. Female figures, including court dancers, batik workers, and flower-arrangement specialists, are positioned as the media through which that culture is expressed. Promotional text about the Bedaya court dance, for example, describes the dance as a direct expression of Javanese mystical philosophy and royal power. The dancers, who are exclusively female, are described as carrying or embodying that philosophy rather than as knowing, interpreting, or practising it as cultural agents. The distinction between carrying and knowing is epistemically significant because it positions women as vessels of cultural meaning rather than as producers of cultural knowledge.

The Batik Jlamprang Dance entry on the Central Java tourism platform provides a partial counter-case. The page states that "Batik Jlamprang Dance is a traditional dance portraying activities of batik tulis making processes" and explains that "the dancers are wearing batik with Jlamprang pattern in performing the dance because this pattern is the signature pattern of Pekalongan batik" (visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id/en/art-and-culture/batik-jlamprang-dance). This page identifies women's practice, namely batik-making, as the subject of the dance and presents the dance as a mode of cultural preservation. However, the entry is brief, consisting of approximately 80 words. Its brevity and its placement within the Art & Culture subsection, rather than within higher-status heritage narrative sections, mean that this acknowledgement of female productive practice remains marginal within the broader architecture of the corpus.

Gender roles in tourism are rarely invented by tourism itself; rather, tourism tends to amplify, repackage, and circulate existing social hierarchies for visitor consumption (Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). The Borobudur–Prambanan corpus demonstrates this dynamic clearly. Among the units examined, no instance was identified in which a promotional text directly attributed ritual or spiritual authority to a named woman within the heritage tradition. This exclusion has historical and social roots beyond the promotional corpus. What the promotional materials do, however, is reproduce those exclusions without commentary or contestation, thereby presenting them as natural features of the culture being marketed.

3. Narrative Authority

Narrative authority refers to the question of who speaks, who is quoted, who is identified as an expert, and whose account of cultural significance is presented as definitive. In the corpus, narrative authority is constructed predominantly through male-coded voices, named authorities, and institutional framings. This pattern extends across all three promotional platforms and across different content types, including site histories, event descriptions, cultural explainer texts, and heritage narrative pages.

The Borobudur History page opens its historical account by attributing the monument's construction to the Sailendra Dynasty and its discovery to British troops under the leadership of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. These two sources of authority are separated by approximately a millennium, yet both are male-coded. The structural description that follows states that "Borobudur was built in the Mandala style, reflecting the universe in Buddhist belief" and that "The Kamadhatu consists of 160 reliefs explaining the Karmawibhanga Sutra, the law of cause and effect." This explanation is delivered through an authoritative institutional voice without an attributed speaker. Such impersonal authority is itself gendered by context because it follows immediately after the naming of Raffles and the Sailendra Dynasty, thereby locating institutional knowledge within a male-coded lineage of historical authority (injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Borobudur/history/; BH-03).

The Prambanan History page similarly grounds interpretive authority in male-coded sources. The page states that the temple complex is "estimated to have been built in the mid-9th century by the Sanjaya dynasty" and is dedicated to the Trimurti, namely Shiva as the primary deity, along with Brahma and Vishnu. The three deities are male, while the only female figures that appear within the interpretive register are positioned as consorts and apsaras. In this structure, female figures function as attendants rather than originators of cultural or spiritual meaning. No female scholar, ritual specialist, or community knowledge-holder is quoted or named across either history page (injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Prambanan/history/).

This absence is discursively productive. When a domain of knowledge is consistently narrated by and attributed to male-coded sources, the knowledge itself comes to appear male-authored, regardless of the actual distribution of expertise within the culture. Feminist critical discourse analysis emphasises the need to examine not only what is present in a text, but also what is absent. From this perspective, the systematic exclusion of female voices from authoritative heritage narration constitutes a form of discursive marginalisation that operates through omission rather than through explicit denigration (Lazar, 2005).

The cumulative effect across the cited units is significant. The repeated absence of female interpretive authority in the heritage narrative pages, most clearly in BH-02 and PR-02, normalises that absence and presents it as a natural feature of the cultural landscape rather than as an institutional representational choice. This pattern is most evident in the history and cultural-significance pages, which carry the greatest institutional weight in defining what these sites mean.

Access to discourse is itself a dimension of social power. Those who are allowed to speak in institutional contexts, whose words are treated as authoritative, and whose accounts frame public understanding of cultural events exercise power through that discursive access. In the corpus, the discourse of heritage significance, including

explanations of why Borobudur matters, what the Prambanan reliefs mean, and what the Bedaya dance expresses, is structured in such a way that women appear primarily as subjects of description rather than as sources of meaning (van Dijk, 1993).

The pattern, however, is not absolute. The *visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id* platform includes a limited number of promotional features focused on individual cultural practitioners. The Laweyan Batik Village page acknowledges that residents, most of whom are described as being engaged in buying or making batik, can be contacted to arrange hands-on batik workshops. The Pati Batik Tour promotional text also refers to visits to artisans in order to observe “the process of making handwritten batik, from drawing patterns, writing, scribbling, coloring, and boiling.” These pages position women’s productive knowledge as accessible to tourists (*visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id/en/shopping/laweyan-batik-village*).

However, two features limit the analytical weight of this exception. First, these pages appear under the Shopping and Art & Culture sections rather than under Heritage or History. This categorisation assigns craft authority a lower institutional status than the historical and spiritual authority attributed to male-coded sources on the Heritage and History pages. Second, neither page names an individual female artisan nor quotes a woman as a speaking authority on the meaning of the practice.

These instances are also confined to the domain of textile craft, an area of practice that is culturally coded as female in Javanese society. The limited grant of narrative authority to women is therefore patterned by a prior gender categorisation, in which women are more readily authorised as craft experts than as interpreters of temple heritage, court history, or spiritual culture. Table 3 provides representative examples of how narrative authority is distributed across the corpus.

Table 3. Narrative Authority across Promotional Platforms and Content Types

Platform / Content Type	Representative Pattern	Authority	Analytical Function
Borobudur heritage descriptions	Historical accounts, scholarly references, and interpretive framing are presented through male-named authorities and male-coded institutional narratives.	Male-coded authority	Positions heritage knowledge within male-associated structures of historical and interpretive authority.
Prambanan promotional pages	Cultural explanation and interpretive framing are organised through an authoritative explanatory voice that privileges male-coded historical, religious, and symbolic references.	Male-coded authority	Links heritage meaning to male-associated knowledge and reinforces male-coded interpretive legitimacy.
<i>visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id</i> craft pages	Female batik makers are represented as skilled producers and holders of	Female-coded craft authority	Provides a limited exception in which women are acknowledged as cultural

Platform / Content Type	Representative Pattern	Authority	Analytical Function
	craft-based cultural knowledge.		knowledge holders within craft-related content.
Keraton-related promotional content	Court culture is narrated through sultans, scholars, ceremonial officials, and royal institutional traditions.	Male-coded authority	Positions women more as carriers, performers, or embodiments of court heritage than as interpreters of its meaning.

Source: The table presents thematic patterns rather than quantitative frequencies.

4. Cultural Commodification

Cultural commodification in heritage tourism involves the repackaging of cultural practices into forms that can be consumed by visitors as tourism products (Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1976). In the corpus, this process is gendered in ways that intensify the representational patterns identified in the previous sections. The commodification of heritage culture in the promotion of the Borobudur–Prambanan cultural region does not apply uniformly to all cultural practices. Rather, it operates differentially according to a logic shaped by the existing gender associations attached to each practice.

In the corpus, practices coded as female-associated are commodified primarily through visual spectacle. Unit PR-03, the Ramayana Ballet experience page, provides the most sustained example of gendered commodification in the corpus. The page’s lead image, *RAMAYANA-1200x1659-1-768x1062.jpg*, is a vertical portrait-format photograph showing a female dancer who occupies the frame from approximately the waist upward. She wears an elaborate gilded headdress, a red and gold ceremonial costume, and positions her hands in a classical *mudra* gesture. Her face appears in three-quarter profile, with her gaze directed away from the camera.

The Prambanan temple towers are visible but blurred in the background, making the dancer’s body, rather than the temple, the primary visual focus. The image carries no caption. The accompanying text states that “Every movement, costume, and gamelan melody blends tradition and story in stunning harmony” and that “the dancers’ expressions made each scene touching and meaningful.” The descriptors applied to the female performers—movement, costume, expression, and harmony—belong to the aesthetic and affective register.

By contrast, the male figures in the narrative, particularly Rama and Rahwana, are characterised through action: “As the story of Rama’s quest to rescue Sita from Rahwana unfolded, the audience felt the emotion, tension, and beauty of the story as if they were there.” Rama undertakes the quest, Rahwana acts, Sita is rescued, and the female dancers express emotion and atmosphere. At the level of a single page, this unit enacts the broader pattern identified across the corpus: female figures are made visually prominent and affectively available, while male figures carry the narrative action (injourneydestination.id/en/experience/Ramayana-Ballet/; PR-03).

Unit PR-04, the Ramayana destination information page, confirms this structure. Its gallery section contains eight photographs, all of which show performers in costume. The photographs that can be identified as featuring Sita or female court dancers use full-

body or three-quarter compositions in which the performer faces either toward the camera or slightly away from it, with body and costume fully visible. These images are captioned only with the platform logo. No description of the dancers' training, their role in transmitting the tradition, or their artistic expertise accompanies any of the images. The gallery therefore functions primarily as a visual display, presenting the performance as an aesthetic product rather than as a complex field of embodied knowledge and cultural transmission (injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Ramayana/; PR-04).

The Ramayana Ballet at Prambanan is marketed through a combination of dramatic narrative and visual imagery of costumed female dancers set against the temple backdrop. This promotional logic positions the female dancer's body as a tourism commodity: she is beautiful, costumed, visually framed by heritage architecture, and presented as an object of aesthetic attention. This argument is not a critique of the dance itself, which is an artistically complex and historically significant performance form. Rather, it is a critique of the promotional reduction of that complexity into visual spectacle.

The commodification of culture may be understood as the construction of "staged authenticity," in which cultural performances are presented as genuine expressions of cultural life while being organised for touristic accessibility and consumption (MacCannell, 1976). In the corpus, this staged authenticity is gendered. Female performers in the Ramayana Ballet are framed as authentic bearers of tradition, but the promotional materials emphasise aesthetic display more strongly than the intellectual, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions of the performance. By contrast, male-associated content, such as Borobudur's architectural symbolism, keraton genealogy, and Javanese philosophical framing, is more often presented through an explanatory or interpretive register.

This differential commodification has a clear distributional logic. Female cultural contributions are made highly consumable by being reduced primarily to their visual dimension, whereas male cultural contributions are made prestigious by retaining their intellectual and interpretive dimensions. Within the units examined, male-associated heritage content tends to be framed through explanatory and intellectual language, while female-associated content is more frequently framed through aesthetic and performative descriptors.

This tendency is most clearly visible in the contrast between BH-02 and PR-03, which suggests the presence of a representational hierarchy within the analysed corpus. This hierarchy is not only representationally unequal; it also narrows the cultural product offered to visitors. When the intellectual, spiritual, and pedagogical dimensions of female-associated practices are removed from promotional discourse, the cultural richness embodied in those practices becomes invisible to visitors before they even arrive. Within the corpus examined, heritage tourism promotion presents a version of culture that foregrounds aesthetic and performative dimensions while marginalising the intellectual, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions associated with female-coded practices, even though these dimensions are present within Javanese cultural tradition.

One additional pattern warrants attention. Several promotional pages across the three platforms use the figure of the traditionally dressed Javanese woman as a generic signifier of cultural authenticity. She appears in batik, sometimes with ceremonial headdress, and is often framed against temple stonework or traditional architecture. She

is not named. Instead, she functions as a visual shorthand for “Javanese culture,” becoming an abstraction without individual identity. This representational convention reflects the feminisation of place, in which women’s bodies are made to stand for the cultural identity of a destination, reducing individual women to symbols while their symbolic value serves tourism marketing (Swain, 1995). This convention was observed across units on all three platforms, although its frequency and framing varied by content type.

Taken together, the four thematic patterns—gendered visibility, role construction, narrative authority, and cultural commodification—form a coherent representational logic rather than a set of isolated choices. This logic repeatedly associates cultural prestige, intellectual depth, and interpretive authority with male-coded heritage figures, while more often associating aesthetic surface, performative spectacle, and symbolic atmosphere with female-coded figures. The consistency of this logic across three institutionally distinct promotional platforms suggests that the representational patterns identified are not idiosyncratic features of a single platform’s editorial choices. Instead, they reflect a shared promotional orientation within the analysed corpus. Whether this orientation results from coordinated institutional policy or from independent convergence cannot be determined from the corpus alone and would require further analysis of production processes beyond the scope of this study.

CONCLUSION

This study examined gendered representation in official heritage tourism promotion across the Borobudur–Prambanan cultural region, based on a corpus of state and state-affiliated digital platforms. The analysis shows that both men’s and women’s cultural contributions are represented, but on systematically unequal terms within the corpus. Within the analysed corpus, women are more consistently associated with visual presence, performance, and cultural display, while men are more consistently associated with narrative authority, historical agency, and interpretive expertise a pattern documented across the coded units as described in the findings. These patterns are not absolute, but they recur consistently and are only partially disrupted in craft-related content.

The study contributes to feminist analyses of tourism representation by demonstrating how gendered visibility operates within a specific promotional corpus. It also indicates that cultural commodification in heritage tourism can be understood in gendered terms, with different dimensions of cultural practice foregrounded or reduced depending on their gender association. Practically, the findings suggest that more balanced representation may be supported by attributing narrative authority to female cultural practitioners, naming them as knowledge holders, and presenting the intellectual and pedagogical dimensions of female-associated practices alongside their visual representation.

The study is limited to official digital promotional materials from three platforms and does not examine audience reception or production processes. It does not treat provincial boundaries as analytically decisive, which may limit direct comparability with studies strictly defined by administrative regions. The full corpus of 87 analytical units is documented in a retrieval log held by the corresponding author; only the 12 units cited directly in the analysis are listed individually in Appendix A.

A pattern was treated as recurrent only when it appeared consistently across units drawn from at least two of the three platforms and across more than one content type, ensuring that the findings reflect systematic patterns across the corpus rather than isolated examples. The corpus is documented through structured extraction records rather than stored visual page captures. Each record contains the source URL, page title, retrieval date, extracted text or visual description, and coding summary across the seven categories. The absence of a pixel-level visual archive is a limitation of the study's data collection procedure, which is acknowledged in the Trustworthiness subsection.

Partial compensatory verification is possible because the primary pages cited in the analysis remain publicly accessible, and the verbatim quotations reproduced in the findings can be checked against the live pages at the URLs listed in Appendix A. Future research may extend this analysis comparatively or examine the institutional conditions shaping promotional discourse.

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Appendix A

Corpus Reference Table: Analytical Units Cited in the Findings

Table 2. Cited analytical units by platform, content type, section of origin, and primary coding categories activated

Code	Platform	Section/page title	Content type	Primary coding categories activated
BH-01	Borobudur (InJourney)	Destination information: Welcome to Borobudur Temple	Text block + full-width hero image	Visibility/invisibility; symbolic positioning; narrative voice
BH-02	Borobudur (InJourney)	History: Origin of Development	Text narrative	Narrative voice; cultural authority; agency vs. passivity
BH-03	Borobudur (InJourney)	History: Zone descriptions	Text + architectural images	Cultural authority; descriptive language; gender roles
BH-04	Borobudur ticket platform	Visitor activity description	Text + banner image	Narrative voice; symbolic positioning; agency vs. passivity
PR-01	Prambanan (InJourney)	Destination information: Welcome to Prambanan Temple	Text block + hero image + Ramayana Ballet experience tile	Visibility/invisibility; symbolic positioning; gender roles
PR-02	Prambanan (InJourney)	History: Origin and zone descriptions	Text narrative	Narrative voice; cultural authority; agency vs. passivity
PR-03	Prambanan (InJourney)	Ramayana Ballet experience page	Text description + lead portrait image	Gender roles; descriptive language; agency vs. passivity; cultural commodification
PR-04	Prambanan / Ramayana (InJourney)	Ramayana destination information + gallery	Text + 8 uncaptioned performance images	Visibility/invisibility; symbolic positioning; cultural commodification
CJ-01	VisitJateng	Ramayana Ballet (Art & Culture section)	Short text entry + single image	Gender roles; narrative voice; agency vs. passivity
CJ-02	VisitJateng	Batik Jlamprang Dance (Art & Culture section)	Short text entry + single image	Gender roles; cultural authority; visibility/invisibility

Code	Platform	Section/page title	Content type	Primary coding categories activated
CJ-03	VisitJateng	Laweyan Batik Village (Shopping section)	Text description + lead image	Cultural authority; narrative voice; gender roles
CJ-04	VisitJateng	Pati Special Batik Tour (Art & Culture section)	Short text entry + two images	Visibility/invisibility; cultural authority; gender roles

Note. Platform codes: BH = Borobudur heritage platform; PR = Prambanan and Ramayana heritage platform; CJ = Central Java provincial tourism platform (visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id). Units are numbered in the order they were catalogued within each platform. This table lists the 12 units cited directly in the Results and Discussion as illustrative cases. The remaining 75 units contributed to pattern identification across all seven coding categories and across all three platforms. Their consistent alignment with the patterns documented in the cited units confirms the systematic rather than selective character of the findings. The complete corpus log, including all 87 units with retrieval dates, source URLs, content type classifications, and unit-level coding summaries, is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The Borobudur and Prambanan platform domains transferred from borobudurpark.com to injourneydestination.id during the study period following corporate restructuring; both domain addresses are treated as continuous official sources within the corpus. All URLs listed above were accessible at the time of retrieval and are provided as locators for the source family.

Source URLs by unit code

BH-01: <https://injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Borobudur/>
 BH-02 & BH-03: <https://injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Borobudur/history/>
 BH-04: <https://ticket.borobudurpark.com/en/borobudur-temple/>
 PR-01: <https://injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Prambanan/>
 PR-02: <https://injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Prambanan/history/>
 PR-03: <https://injourneydestination.id/en/experience/Ramayana-Ballet/>
 PR-04: <https://injourneydestination.id/en/destinations/Ramayana/>
 CJ-01: <https://visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id/en/art-and-culture/ramayana-ballet>
 CJ-02: <https://visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id/en/art-and-culture/batik-jlamprang-dance>
 CJ-03: <https://visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id/en/shopping/laweyan-batik-village>
 CJ-04: <https://visitjawatengah.jatengprov.go.id/en/art-and-culture/pati-special-batik-tour>