Exploring Gender Discourse in "Modern Women Bali" Media

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Abstract

This study explores the construction of gender discourse in "Modern Women Bali" media. Drawing on gender theories and critical discourse analysis approach, this study aims to investigate how traditional gender roles and identities are articulated through media produced by women-based community of writers in Bali. Data were obtained from the Instagram posts of @modernwomenbali from January to July 2025, as well as five online magazine issues produced by Modern Women Bali. Utilizing qualitative method, this study analyzes the gender-related discourse that delve into how Balinese cultural values intersect with modern influences to shape gender narratives. The results revealed that Modern Women Bali actively embraces themes of women empowerment by correlating cultural expectations and modern reality. In conclusion, this study contributes to ongoing discussions in gender and media studies, especially in Bali.

Keywords: gender, discourse, media

Introduction

The correlation between media and gender has become a focal point of critical inquiry. In Bali, gender roles have traditionally been informed by local customs, religious beliefs, and communal expectations. Media, as a powerful vehicle of representation, plays a critical role in constructing and disseminating gender norms, often reflecting broader socio-cultural ideologies. Based on recent studies, digital platforms and traditional media both reflect and shape gender norms. It is emphasized that language in media carries implicit gender stereotypes, reinforcing traditional roles while also providing space for resistance. Other studies also point out that shifts toward gender-inclusive language are gaining momentum, although unevenly across regions.

The rapid expansion of digital media has opened new spaces for alternative gender narratives to emerge. Women-centered media platforms, such as Modern Women Bali, reflects a broader global trend in which marginalized voices are using digital tools to reshape dominant narratives. Through a critical discourse analysis framework, this study explores gender discourse in *Modern Women Bali.* In focusing on the interplay between Balinese cultural values and modern feminist thought, this research offers insights into how localized expressions of empowerment are formed. It contributes to broader conversations within gender and media studies, while also emphasizing the importance of context-specific analyses in understanding the dynamics of gender representation in media.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore how gender roles and identities are represented in *Modern Women Bali* media. Data were collected from two main sources, namely Instagram posts from the official account (@modernwomenbali) from January to July 2025, and five issues of *Modern Women Bali*'s online magazine. Data were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. Furthermore, by integrating insights from gender theory, this study dives into how localized media contribute to the ongoing redefinition of gender roles in contemporary society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

(1)   "It's not that men are worse in Bali than elsewhere in the world. They're just… uniquely distributed. Sometimes charming. Sometimes confusing. Sometime like dating a meme come to life."

First of all, datum (1) shows the use of various adjectives, such as "charming" and "confusing". Moreover, the repetition of the adverb "sometimes" is also present. This reflects Lakoff's notion that women are socialized to be cautious and non-threatening in how they express dissatisfaction, particularly when discussing male behavior. These short, fragmented clauses convey emotion and relatability rather than authoritative judgment. Tannen's concept of "rapport talk" also suggests that women often use this kind of language to foster connection and shared understanding, rather than assert dominance or critique.

(2) "We may not all be mothers of children – but we are all mothers of change. We are life-givers, we are truth-tellers, no-sayers, quiet-power-holders, big-change-builders. There is strength in choosing differently – in stepping beyond the roles we were handed."

Furthermore, datum (2) redefines traditional gender roles, especially around motherhood. Instead of limiting "mother" to biological parent, it expands the term to include broader roles like creating change, telling truth, and holding quiet power. According to Lakoff's theory, this reflects how women often use language that emphasizes emotion, and connection. The phrase "stepping beyond the roles we were handed" suggests resistance to societal expectations, yet it is communicated gently and inclusively rather than confrontationally. This mirrors how women's discourse often encourages connection and empowerment through shared experience rather than direct opposition. Overall, the discourse invites women to rethink their roles, but in a way that still aligns with traditional values of care, strength, and quiet leadership.

(3) "We yearn to find our way. To be seen, to matter, to live independently and successfully. To connect deeply in our own way. To stay true to who we are in whatever we are doing."

Similarly, datum (3) utilizes expressive and reflective language to address a shared desire for identity, recognition, and independence. While empowering in tone, the statement avoids

assertive or direct claims, relying instead on introspection and collective emotional experience. This reflects how women are often expected to use language that prioritizes harmony, vulnerability, and subtle self-expression over confrontation or dominance. The statement also aligns with "rapport talk". In addition, the repeated "to" constructions ("to be seen," "to connect," "to stay true") reinforces common gendered patterns where women's communication tends to highlight empathy, self-awareness, and relational depth, all while gently challenging societal roles without directly confronting them.

(4) "We often need to rebel when we're trapped in certain situations or conditions, but every rebellion has its price. We have to be ready to be slandered or even bullied. But I believe that when we find our inner self, and take charge of our lives, then we will have immeasurable happiness."

Additionally, datum (4) contains rebellious statements without sounding aggressive. Phrases like "every rebellion has its price" and "we have to be ready" reflect a cautious, indirect way of addressing power and risk. It shows strength, but through personal belief and inner transformation, not dominance or authority, which reflects how women are often expected to show quiet resilience rather than overt resistance. Moreover, it also highlights personal growth, shared struggle, and emotional insight. The phrase "find our inner self" is introspective, while "take charge of our lives" suggests empowerment through self-awareness. It builds connection through shared experience ("we"), and the message encourages deep emotional reflection rather than assertive action. This style aligns with common gendered patterns where women communicate strength through empathy, personal journey, and relational language rather than direct challenge.

(5) "Gender roles within the *banjar* are so prescribed and women have very little agency. We are not consulted on matters that require a vote and the daily offerings and religious rituals fall heavily on the women – when do they get time to work or build up their capacity to change and go forward into the world?"

Last but not least, datum (5) points out the rigid structure of gender roles in traditional community settings, expressing concern over Balinese women's lack of voice and opportunity. However, the rhetorical question at the end brings in a subtler emotional appeal, which still aligns with Lakoff's view that women often frame serious concerns in more empathetic or relational ways to be heard. Through Tannen's lens, the speaker combines both "report talk" and "rapport talk". The beginning is factual and assertive—describing unequal voting rights and labor division—while the latter part shifts toward a relational, empathetic tone. The final question is particularly reflective of rapport talk, inviting the audience to consider women's lived experiences and emotional burdens. This blending of styles reflects a gendered communication pattern where women assert critique while still grounding it in shared concern, care, and collective struggle.

Discussion

The analysis revealed that *Modern Women Bali* consistently promotes themes of women's empowerment while acknowledging the influence of traditional Balinese values. Many Instagram posts and magazine articles of *Modern Women Bali* highlight the everyday challenges faced by women, such as societal expectations around family, marriage, and femininity. However, rather than rejecting tradition, the content often reinterprets cultural

norms in ways that support women's agency and voice. A recurring pattern in the media content is the blending of modern feminist ideas with local wisdom. This approach reflects an effort to root empowerment in cultural familiarity, making it more accessible and resonant within the local context. Overall, *Modern Women Bali* emerges not only as a media platform but as a cultural space where gender discourse is actively shaped and negotiated.

The findings of this study show that *Modern Women Bali* plays a significant role in shaping a gender discourse that balances tradition with change. Rather than framing Balinese culture as a barrier to women's progress, the platform uses it as a foundation for rethinking gender roles. This approach reflects a culturally grounded feminism, not simply adopting global ideas of empowerment but adapting them to the local context. By highlighting both modern challenges and traditional values, *Modern Women Bali* creates a nuanced space where women can see themselves reflected not just as individuals, but as part of a larger cultural and historical narrative. The platform's use of local language, cultural symbols, and relatable stories strengthens this connection, making the discourse both personal and collective.

Importantly, the platform reshapes cultural expectations through storytelling, creative expression, and community dialogue. This suggests that media produced by women's communities can play a transformative role in how gender is understood and lived, especially in Bali where cultural identity is deeply valued. *Modern Women Bali* offers a clear example of how localized media can contribute meaningfully to broader gender and media discussions.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown how *Modern Women Bali* constructs gender discourse by blending traditional Balinese cultural values with modern ideas of women's empowerment. Through its Instagram content and online magazine, the platform provides a space for women to reflect on their roles, challenge norms, and celebrate identity in ways that are culturally meaningful. By analyzing this media through a critical discourse lens, the study contributes to ongoing conversations in gender and media studies. It highlights the importance of localized, community-driven media in shaping progressive yet culturally rooted narratives of gender.

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