

The Impact of Illegal Porter Services on Tourist Safety and Comfort at Pemenang Harbour, North Lombok Regency

Taufan Handika Putra¹, Rahman²

^{1,2}Universitas Mataram

e-mail: taufan@unram.ac.id¹, rahman@unram.ac.id²

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Abstrak

This study aims to analyse the impact of the existence of illegal porter services on the safety and comfort aspects of tourists at Pemenang Port, North Lombok Regency, as one of the main gateways to the tourist destinations of Gili Air, Gili Meno, and Gili Trawangan. The method used was a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with tourists, porters, and port managers, as well as documentation studies of regulations and reports related to port management. The results showed that the presence of illegal porters has a negative impact on the tourist experience. Tourists feel unsafe due to coercion of services, unclear rates, and verbal intimidation by porters who do not have legal authority or service training. In addition, the unorganised port conditions and lack of information cause tourists to feel uncomfortable and confused when arriving at the location. The absence of a control system, weak institutional coordination, and the absence of strict regulations are factors inhibiting the handling of this problem. This research suggests the need for formal regulations, community-based porter training, and a transparent information system for tourists to realise port services that are safe, comfortable, and support a positive image of tourism destinations.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is widely recognized as one of the strategic sectors in both regional and national economic development due to its multiplier effect on various sectors, including transportation, hospitality, and small businesses (UNWTO, 2023). The success of a tourist destination is not solely dependent on its natural beauty or cultural heritage but is also strongly influenced by the quality of services and the perception of safety and comfort experienced by tourists (Lai & Hitchcock, 2017). Among the key service components at a tourism gateway is porter service, especially at port areas, which serves as a logistical

support for tourists in handling their luggage and ensuring a smooth mobility process (Cohen & Gössling, 2015).

However, in some tourist gateway areas such as Pemenang Port in North Lombok Regency, the uncontrolled emergence of illegal porter services presents serious challenges. Pemenang Port serves as one of the main access points to the popular Gili Islands—Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, and Gili Air—receiving between hundreds to thousands of domestic and international tourists daily. This high tourist traffic opens significant economic opportunities for the local community, including informal and formal porter service provision. Nevertheless, not all porter activities are managed legally. Many operate outside official regulations, lacking both legal recognition and professional standards (Beirman, 2016).

Illegal porters are often untrained, unregistered, and not integrated into the port's official service management system. This informality has implications beyond administrative issues. Empirical observations and tourist testimonials indicate that some of these porters engage in coercive behavior, such as forcing tourists to use their services or demanding unregulated fees. In certain cases, these encounters escalate into verbal disputes or physical confrontations, ultimately tarnishing the image of North Lombok as a tourist destination (Jang, Lee, & Lee, 2018).

The existence of illegal porter services not only affects tourists but also contributes to social tensions within the local community. The lack of regulation and supervision has created an unequal playing field between legal and illegal service providers. Moreover, the absence of training and proper organizational structure undermines the delivery of quality services, which are essential components of sustainable tourism (UNEP, 2021). According to Weaver (2006), tourist safety and service quality are vital pillars of sustainability in tourism destinations, and any threats to these elements can compromise both tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty.

Although the North Lombok Regency Government has attempted to regulate porter services through various local policies and initiatives, enforcement remains weak. Factors contributing to the persistence of illegal porter practices include insufficient human resources, lack of monitoring systems, and the absence of strict and consistent implementation of regulations (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Understanding the impacts of these illegal activities is crucial because tourist safety and comfort are fundamental to destination competitiveness and sustainability (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). This research is therefore relevant and timely, as it explores the dynamics between informal porter services and tourist experiences, while aiming to provide evidence-based recommendations to local authorities and stakeholders.

From an academic standpoint, the topic remains underexplored in Indonesian tourism literature. Most tourism studies emphasize the 3A framework: Attractions, Accessibility, and Amenities but tend to neglect informal services that shape tourist perceptions and

destination image (Cooper et al., 2008). Thus, this study contributes to broadening the scope of tourism research by addressing non-structural and informal factors that influence service quality and tourist trust.

On the practical side, the research findings are expected to inform the development of human-centric and lawful port service policies at Pemenang Port. By creating a more structured and inclusive system, economic opportunities can still be preserved for local residents without compromising the quality of services or violating tourists' rights. Ultimately, the study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of how illegal porter services affect tourist safety and comfort, and to support the creation of a sustainable, safe, and welcoming tourism environment in North Lombok

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to understand and describe in depth the perceptions and responses of tourists to the presence of illegal porters and their impact on the safety and comfort aspects of tourists at Pemenang Harbour, North Lombok Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is suitable for studying social phenomena in a natural and complex context, and allows researchers to explore the meanings formed by research subjects through their direct experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The descriptive design in this approach serves to present a factual description of social phenomena systematically and accurately, without manipulating the variables under study (Neuman, 2014).

Location and Time of Research

This research was conducted at Pemenang Harbour, which is located in North Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province. This location is one of the main entrances to the leading tourist destinations, namely Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, and Gili Air. The location selection was based on the intensity of interaction between tourists and porters in the area, as well as the high social dynamics related to illegal porter practices. The research took place over two months, from April to May 2025, which is also the high season for tourist visits to the Gili area.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies.

1. Participatory Observation

This technique was used to directly observe the activities of porters, both official and illegal, and their interactions with tourists in the Pemenang Harbour environment. Observations were made by recording porter work patterns, tourist responses, and the social dynamics that occur. Direct observation is considered important in a qualitative

approach to capture contextual and non-verbal data that is often not revealed through interviews (Spradley, 1980).

2. In-depth Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with several key informants, including tourists, port officials, legal porters, illegal porters, and local government officials. This technique allows researchers to explore more comprehensive information related to perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced in managing porter services. Interviews in qualitative research are useful for gaining an in-depth understanding of the subjective perspectives of informants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3. Documentation Study

Secondary data was collected from various official and unofficial documents, such as port management reports, regulations related to porter services, mass media coverage, and policy documents from the local government. Documentation studies help strengthen empirical findings and provide a contextual framework for the phenomenon under study (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted in a descriptive-qualitative manner using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion-drawing techniques, as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The first stage was data reduction, which is the process of sorting, selecting, and focusing on relevant data. Next, the data were presented in the form of thematic narratives that described patterns of findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. Finally, conclusion drawing was conducted inductively based on the analysed data, to formulate an in-depth understanding of the impact of illegal porters on tourist safety and comfort. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods to ensure the reliability and credibility of the findings (Patton, 2015).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research was conducted at Pemenang Harbour, North Lombok Regency, which is the main entrance to leading tourist destinations such as Gili Air, Gili Meno, and Gili Trawangan. This research aims to identify and analyse the impact of the presence of illegal porters on the comfort and safety aspects of tourists.

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with a number of tourists who use porter services at Pemenang Harbour, it was found that most tourists are not aware of the difference between official and illegal porters. They tend to use the services of the first porter who offers assistance, regardless of whether the porter has an official identity or not. Tourists' ignorance of the existence of legal porters is due to the lack of information available at the port, the

absence of signboards or visual markers explaining the existence of official porters, and the absence of a queue system or special counters for porter services.

Furthermore, tourists admitted to having unpleasant experiences when interacting with illegal porters. Some travellers reported that the porters took their belongings without prior permission or tariff agreement, and then asked for an unreasonable amount of money. In some cases, travellers felt intimidated by the aggressive attitude and high tone of voice of the porters who insisted on being paid high amounts. This situation creates a sense of insecurity and discomfort for tourists, especially those who are visiting the area for the first time.

Through direct observation, researchers noted that porter activities are not organised systematically. There is no clear division of zones, no standard service procedures, and no visible presence of officers to regulate the flow of porters in the harbour area. Illegal porters can freely move in the dock area, terminal, and even into the area of newly docked ships. There are no official attributes such as uniforms, identification marks, or registration numbers, that can distinguish between legal and illegal porters. This creates confusion and uncertainty in the eyes of tourists.

Meanwhile, interviews with harbour officials and managers show that the phenomenon of illegal porters is not a new problem. In fact, some of the illegal porters are local residents who do not have permanent jobs. They run porter services as an alternative livelihood without going through training or certification processes. The manager admitted that the handling of illegal porters is still weak, due to the absence of legally binding regulations and weak coordination between the transportation agency, port management, and security forces. Control efforts that have been carried out are temporary and have not touched the root of the problem such as job training, tourism education, or the provision of alternative employment for communities around the port.

Discussion

The results of this study reinforce the importance of comprehensive tourism service management, including informal elements such as porter services. In tourism service theory, the tourist experience is influenced not only by attractions and amenities but also by accessibility and social interactions that occur during the trip (Cooper et al., 2008). The existence of illegal porters in Pemenang Harbour, which is often coercive and unorganised, is a form of irregularity in accessibility services, which ultimately affects the overall quality of service.

The phenomenon of intimidation and forced tariffs perceived by tourists can be related to the concept of perceived risk in tourism. According to Reisinger and Mavondo (2005), perceived risk includes various aspects such as physical safety, emotional comfort, and trust in local institutions. In the context of Pemenang Harbour, tourists' risk perception increases due to the lack of supervision, the irregularity of the system, and the absence of the

presence of authorities who provide a sense of security. This reduces tourist trust, which is one of the important indicators in the sustainability of tourist destinations (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

In terms of comfort, the situation at Pemenang Harbour shows a failure in creating a visitor-friendly environment, which in tourism service theory must fulfil the basic principles of safety, accessibility, comfort, and hospitality (UNWTO, 2020). The absence of a queuing system, visual cues, or standard service procedures shows that the port has not implemented the basic principles of inclusive and efficient tourism destination management.

In addition, this finding also reflects the fragmentation of destination governance. As noted by Dredge and Jenkins (2011), effective tourism governance should involve synergies among stakeholders, including local governments, the private sector, local communities, and tourists. The lack of coordination between the harbour manager, the transport agency, and the security forces shows the lack of institutional integration in managing basic issues in the field.

Furthermore, the presence of illegal porters also has social impacts on local communities. Despite providing economic opportunities, this unregulated informal economic model has the potential to create social inequality, conflicts between porter groups, and negative perceptions of the local community as a whole. In the perspective of sustainable tourism economics, economic activities in tourist destinations should not only provide financial benefits, but also pay attention to aspects of social justice and community development (Moscardo, 2008).

To overcome this problem, a policy-based approach and tourism human resource management are needed. Training and certification of porters is the first step to ensure that porter services are within the corridors of professionalism. In addition, the preparation of strict local regulations regarding porter service standards at the port, a community-based recruitment system, and integrated supervision are important components in realising a safe and comfortable port. Local governments can make porter service management part of the destination management plan by involving local MSMEs and local tourism organisations.

This research also has an academic contribution by expanding the scope of tourism studies that have tended to focus on the aspects of attractions and amenity. The study of informal service practices, such as illegal porters, enriches the understanding of non-structural components in the tourist experience, and shows the importance of microservices in shaping destination image.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion that have been presented, it can be concluded that the existence of illegal porter services at Pemenang Port has a significant negative impact on two crucial dimensions of the tourist experience, namely the safety and comfort aspects. The practice of porters who do not have legality, are not trained, and operate without

supervision causes tourists to experience unpleasant experiences, such as unclear rates, pushy attitudes, and even intimidation. This situation directly damages the destination's image, creates a bad initial impression for tourists, and has the potential to reduce the level of satisfaction and loyalty of tourists to the destination.

The existence of illegal porters is not only an administrative issue in port management, but also an indicator of failure in sustainable and inclusive tourism governance. The irregularity of porter services reflects the weakness of the basic tourism service system, the lack of coordination between institutions, and the absence of regulations and technical policies that are able to regulate community-based tourism services professionally.

From an academic point of view, this research makes an important contribution to the development of tourism science, especially in understanding the dimensions of informal and non-structural services in the tourist experience. So far, many tourism studies have focused more on attractions and amenities, while micro aspects such as porter services have received less attention. This research opens up space for further studies on how informal elements affect tourists' perceptions, satisfaction, and overall experience of a destination.

Based on the findings in the field, the author provides several strategic recommendations that can be used as a basis for improving policies and practices of porter service management in tourist destinations, especially in Pemenang Harbour:

1. Formulation and Enforcement of Firm Regulations

Local governments, together with related agencies such as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Tourism, need to immediately develop technical regulations governing the operational standards of porter services. These regulations must include recruitment systems, training, official identification (ID cards, uniforms), and sanctions for illegal practices that harm tourists.

2. Strengthening the Supervision System and Inter-Agency Coordination

The establishment of an integrated supervisory task force involving elements of the local government, port management, security forces, and local communities is important to create collaborative governance. This system should be equipped with an easily accessible traveller complaint mechanism.

3. Community-based Porter Training and Certification

The government and tourism training institutions should provide basic education on hospitality, service ethics, traveller communication, and work safety for local people who want to become porters. This certification will improve the professionalism of the service and give legal recognition to the service providers.

4. Provision of Transparent Information for Travellers

Posting information boards at ports about official porter rates, procedures for using the service, and the identity of official porters will help tourists feel safer and more comfortable. This information can also be provided in digital form through local tourism apps.

5. Development of Alternative Economic Schemes for Neighbouring Communities

To reduce the community's dependence on illegal porter practices, the government needs to open up other business opportunities and skills training based on the creative economy and sustainable tourism. This strategy can reduce unemployment and create economic transformation for coastal communities.

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