



Ethical Analysis of Alcohol Advertising in Public Spaces in Denpasar City

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ABSTRACT

As the cultural and tourism center of Bali, Denpasar faces tensions between the economic interests of the tourism industry and the moral obligation to uphold socio-religious values rooted in Balinese Hindu culture. Previous studies have tended to emphasize regulatory aspects or the impacts of alcohol advertising from utilitarian and public health perspectives, while research that explicitly situates Kantian ethics within the context of culturally grounded public spaces remains limited. This study aimed to analyze the practice of alcohol advertising in public spaces in Denpasar City from the perspective of Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics and to examine its implications for Balinese local cultural values as well as the existing advertising regulatory framework. The research employed a qualitative method, with in-depth interviews, field observations, and policy document analyses as data collection techniques. The informants were policymakers, representatives of the advertising industry, cultural experts, academics, legal practitioners, graphic designers, traditional community leaders, and tourism business actors. The findings indicated that the majority of stakeholders perceive alcohol advertising in public spaces as unethical because it conflicts with prevailing moral values, cultural norms, and regulatory provisions, although younger generations demonstrate limited tolerance under certain conditions. Theoretically, this study contributes by extending the application of Kantian deontological ethics within communication studies and culturally grounded advertising ethics. From a policy perspective, it recommends strengthening advertising regulations and ethical codes that are responsive to Balinese cultural values.

Keyword: Alcohol Advertising, Deontological Ethics, Public Space

INTRODUCTION

Advertising constitutes a form of public communication that functions not only as an instrument of economic promotion but also as a medium for the construction of meaning, values, and the normalization of social practices within society (Aiello & Parry, 2022). In the context of public space, advertising carries significant ethical implications because it reaches broad, heterogeneous audiences without mechanisms for selective exposure. Therefore, advertising in public spaces cannot be understood merely as a market activity; rather, it represents a communicative act that entails moral implications and social responsibility (Drumwright & Murphy, 2021). Ethical concerns become increasingly critical when the advertised object involves controversial products, such as alcoholic beverages. A number of international studies indicate that exposure to alcohol advertising correlates with more permissive attitudes toward alcohol consumption and a construction of particular lifestyle images, especially among younger age groups (Scully et al., 2023). Consequently, alcohol advertising is debated from either a public health perspective or the standpoint of communication ethics and moral justice within shared public spaces (Noel et al., 2021).

In Denpasar City, the issue of alcohol advertising in public spaces is complex. Denpasar functions not only as an administrative and economic center but also as the cultural and tourism hub of Bali, imbued with symbolic, spiritual, and collective identity values of Balinese Hindu society. The principle of *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasizes harmony between humans and God (*Parahyangan*), among fellow humans (*Pawongan*), and with the environment (*Palemahan*), positions public space as a representation of moral and cultural values that must be collectively safeguarded (Ardika & Putra, 2021b). Within this framework, the presence of alcohol advertising in public spaces (Figure 1) is often perceived as conflicting with values of sacredness, self-restraint, and social harmony (Sutarwiyasa et al., 2024).



Source: Author's Documentation

Figure 1. Alcohol Advertisement in Public Space in Denpasar City

Normatively, Indonesian regulations have restricted and, in certain contexts, prohibited alcohol advertising in public spaces, as stipulated in Government Regulation Number 80 of 2019 concerning the Control of Alcoholic Beverages (Indonesia, 2019). Nevertheless, various studies indicate that alcohol advertising practices persist through indirect visual communication strategies, such as the use of brand symbols, associations with cosmopolitan lifestyles, and media placement in strategic tourism areas (Noel et al., 2021). This suggests that the issue of alcohol advertising cannot be adequately understood solely through a regulatory approach, but it requires a deep and normative ethical analysis.

Based on this context, this study aims to analyze the practice of alcohol advertising in public spaces in Denpasar City from the perspective of Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics, and to examine its implications for Balinese local cultural values as well as the prevailing advertising regulatory framework. From an academic perspective, the urgency of this study lies in the fact that research on alcohol advertising has predominantly been dominated by utilitarian approaches, which assess advertising primarily on the basis of its social and public health consequences (Smit et al., 2022). Normative approaches grounded in deontological ethics, particularly Immanuel Kant's philosophy, which emphasizes moral duty, universal principles, and respect for human dignity, remain relatively underutilized in contemporary communication and advertising studies (Hughes, 2022b). Practically, this research is relevant in providing an ethical foundation for the formulation of advertising policies and codes of ethics that are sensitive to Balinese local cultural values. In this way, the governance of public spaces is guided by moral responsibility and cultural sustainability.

Previous studies have generally focused on three main aspects: (1) the impact of alcohol advertising on consumption behavior and public health, (2) the effectiveness of regulatory frameworks and alcohol advertising policies, and (3) the socio-economic benefits and harms of advertising (Smit et al., 2022). Research that explicitly employs Kantian deontological ethics as a moral evaluative framework for alcohol advertising in public spaces is highly limited. Moreover, the current research integrates the theory with the local philosophical values of *Tri Hita Karana*. This integrated approach is expected to give a novel theoretical contribution to communication ethics and maintain strong policy relevance.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach within an interpretative paradigm to understand the meanings, moral judgments, and ethical considerations of social actors regarding the practice of alcohol advertising in public spaces in Denpasar City. A qualitative approach was selected because the research did not focus on

measuring impacts quantitatively but providing a normative and contextual interpretation of visual communication practices within public spaces (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research subjects consisted of 20 participants, who were systematically determined and selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance, experience, and direct involvement with the issue of alcohol advertising in public spaces. The number of participants was established according to the principle of data saturation, when additional interviews no longer generated substantively new information (Hennink et al., 2017). Participants were divided into two categories. The first category comprised key informants (10 individuals), including regional policymakers (Department of Communication and Information/DPRD/Municipal Police), representatives of the advertising industry, academics in communication and ethics, cultural experts or Balinese traditional leaders, and legal/advertising practitioners. The second category consisted of supporting respondents (10 individuals), including members of the general public, youth (aged 17-25 years), traditional or local community leaders, and tourism business actors.

Data collection was conducted through three primary techniques to ensure the depth and comprehensiveness of information. First, interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online to explore participants' perspectives regarding the ethical, regulatory, and cultural dimensions of alcohol advertising practices in public spaces. The interview guide was designed flexibly to allow in-depth exploration of moral and normative issues (Rustandi, 2018). Second, observations were conducted at strategic public locations in Denpasar City where alcohol advertisements were currently displayed or had previously appeared (Figure 2). The focus was on their visual design, communication strategies, and socio-cultural surroundings. Third, document analysis examined national and regional regulations and advertising ethics codes as normative institutional frameworks (Wibawa, 2020).



Source: Author's Documentation

Figure 2. Documentation of Alcoholic Advertisements in Public Spaces in Denpasar City

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six phases developed by Braun and Clarke: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the analytical narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The resulting themes were subsequently examined through a normative-philosophical lens by situating the empirical findings within the framework of Kant's deontological ethics, particularly the principles of moral duty, universality of action, and respect for human dignity. The analysis was further contextualized within Balinese local cultural values to generate an ethical evaluation.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the study applied several criteria. First, credibility was achieved through source triangulation (key informants and supporting respondents), methodological triangulation (interviews, observations, and document analysis), and member checking by confirming interview summaries with selected participants. Second, dependability was maintained by systematically documenting all stages of the research process, including interview guides, field notes, and data analysis procedures. Third, confirmability was ensured by clearly distinguishing empirical data from the researcher's interpretations, and by grounding the analysis in participant quotations and explicit theoretical frameworks (Guest et al., 2023).

This research was conducted in accordance with social research ethics principles. All participants were informed about the objectives, procedures, and potential benefits of the study and provided informed consent prior to data collection. Participant confidentiality was safeguarded through the use of codes or initials, and all data were used exclusively for academic purposes (Sari & Hidayat, 2023). The study employed Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics as its primary theoretical framework. In Kantian ethics, the morality of an action is determined not by its consequences or utility but by its conformity to moral duty and universal rational principles (Hughes, 2022b). This approach is relevant in contemporary communication studies because it offers a normative foundation for evaluating advertising practices that may be instrumentalistic in nature (Hughes, 2022a).

Kant's categorical imperative is formulated into three principal maxims that serve as analytical tools in this research. First, the principle of universality holds that an action is morally permissible only if its guiding maxim can be willed as a universal law without contradiction (Chairiawaty, 2019). In this context, the normative question becomes: can the practice of displaying alcohol advertisements in public spaces be accepted as a universalizable principle applicable to all members of society? Second, the principle of human dignity requires that individuals be treated as ends in themselves, never merely as means.

Alcohol advertising may violate this principle if it exploits audiences as consumption targets without due consideration for their dignity, health, and moral autonomy (Critchlow et al., 2023). Third, the principle of moral autonomy asserts that morally valid actions must align with rational moral laws that can be accepted by all individuals. Here, advertising practices are examined to determine whether they reflect moral responsibility or merely conform to economic interests. Unlike utilitarian approaches, which evaluate advertising based on economic benefits or contributions to the tourism industry, Kantian ethics rejects moral justifications that sacrifice ethical duties for the sake of perceived collective gains (Sayers, 2020).

The theoretical novelty of this study lies in the integration of Kantian ethics with the Balinese local philosophical value of *Tri Hita Karana*. Recent scholarship suggests connecting universal ethical principles with local cultural contexts in communication and public policy studies (Widana et al., 2023). *Tri Hita Karana* promotes harmony among *Parahyangan* (human-God relations), *Pawongan* (human-human relations), and *Palemahan* (human-environment relations).

Within this framework, alcohol advertising in public spaces is evaluated not only at the individual moral level but also at the collective level, whether it preserves social, spiritual, and cultural harmony within Balinese society. This integration enables an ethical assessment that is normatively universal and culturally contextual. Conceptually, this study positions alcohol advertising practices in public spaces as its primary object of inquiry, analyzed through a dual ethical lens: universal normative ethics (Kantian deontology) and contextual local ethics (*Tri Hita Karana*).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview findings with representatives of policymakers, including the Department of Communication and Information (Diskominfo), the Municipal Police (Satpol PP), and members of the Denpasar City Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), demonstrate a relatively uniform stance: alcohol advertising in public spaces is inconsistent with the existing regulations and incompatible with Balinese cultural values.

An official from Diskominfo emphasized the local government's adherence to national regulations:

"Regulations clearly prohibit it. Government Regulations 109 and 80 are our main references. The problem in practice is that the advertisements are often not explicit; only logos and colors are displayed." (Informant 1, Diskominfo)

Satpol PP confirmed the practical challenges of monitoring and enforcement due to the proliferation of billboard locations and competing

economic interests:

“We conduct routine enforcement, but there are often competing interests involved. The challenge is not only technical but also political.” (Informant 2, Satpol PP)

Meanwhile, a member of the DPRD highlighted the moral dimension of public space in Bali:

“Public space in Bali is not merely a business space, but a moral and cultural space. If alcohol advertisements are allowed, it violates the government’s moral responsibility.” (Informant 3, DPRD)

Actors within the advertising industry expressed an ambivalent position. On the one hand, they acknowledged the ethical implications of alcohol advertising; on the other hand, they remained bound by client-driven business interests:

“We are in a difficult position. Alcohol clients are major clients, but we are also aware of the social impact. Because the regulations are ambiguous, we are often asked to display symbolic advertisements.” (Informant 4, Advertising Agency)

They advocated for clearer and more consistent regulations to prevent unfair competition among advertising agencies.

Cultural experts and traditional leaders viewed alcohol advertising as a threat to the sacredness of public space. A cultural figure stated:

“Public space in Bali carries spiritual meaning. Alcohol advertisements undermine sacredness and the value of modest living.” (Informant 5, Cultural Figure/Traditional Leader)

He argued that alcohol promotion in public spaces potentially disrupts the moral balance of younger generations.

Academics emphasized that advertising is a persuasive practice that is not value-neutral:

“Public space advertising does not select its audience. Children and adolescents are inevitably exposed. This is an issue of communication ethics.” (Informant 6, Academic)

A legal practitioner added that weak law enforcement contributes to the trivialization of violations, despite their long-term impact. From a deontological ethical perspective, academics argued that alcohol advertising in public spaces

does not align with universal moral principles. Kantian ethics asserts that an action is morally permissible only if it can be universalized. If alcohol advertising in public spaces are accepted as a universal norm, society may gradually normalize alcohol consumption despite its harmful consequences. Therefore, they concluded that such advertising practices are ethically problematic.

Graphic designers interviewed in this study suggested the aesthetic and visual communication strategies of alcohol advertisements. According to them, alcohol advertising typically employs attractive designs, contrasting colors, bold typography, and imagery associated with glamorous, masculine, or modern lifestyles. These visual strategies are deliberately crafted to capture the attention of young people who are still forming their social identities. One designer remarked:

“Alcohol advertising presents little informative. What is emphasized is a glamorous lifestyle image. It is visually manipulative.” (Informant 7, Graphic Designer)

Within the Balinese cultural context, such visual communication strategies are perceived as contradicting values of modesty, sacredness, and communal harmony. Thus, alcohol advertising is considered problematic both legally, aesthetically, and morally.

Results of interviews with public perceptions, based on questionnaire data distributed to approximately 100 residents around Denpasar area, several patterns emerged. Young people demonstrated a more permissive attitude. Many students acknowledged that alcohol advertisements appear cool and modern, even though they are aware of the health risks associated with alcohol consumption. For some, alcohol advertising in public spaces is perceived as comparable to other lifestyle or entertainment advertisements. However, others expressed concern that such advertisements might influence peers who are more susceptible to persuasion.

“The advertisement looks cool and modern. But yes, we also know alcohol carries risks.” (Respondent 1, Student)

This finding reveals a clear ambivalence between risk awareness and visual attraction. On the one hand, young people possess knowledge about the dangers of alcohol; on the other hand, they tend to accept alcohol advertising as part of modernity. This aligns with previous research indicating that exposure to alcohol advertising may strengthen consumption intentions among adolescents, even when they are aware of associated risks (Karimah et al., 2021).

In contrast, adults, particularly parents and workers, tended to adopt a more critical stance. They argued that alcohol advertising in public spaces is harmful

because it normalizes alcohol consumption among adolescents:

“Public space is for all ages. Alcohol advertising can normalize alcohol to children.”
(Respondent 2, Parent)

Many respondents argued that public space is a shared space; therefore, advertisements displayed within must consider their impact on all segments of society. Several expressed concern that the government lacks firmness in regulating alcohol advertising. Health communities and NGOs working in anti-drug and anti-alcohol advocacy demonstrated strong opposition. They argued that alcohol advertising in public spaces contradicts public health campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles. According to them, permitting such advertisements creates a policy inconsistency: on one hand, the government promotes health awareness; on the other, it allows alcohol advertisements to be publicly displayed.

“The government should not only enforce regulations but also strengthen public education about the dangers of alcohol. Without strong education, regulation alone is insufficient.”
(Respondent 3, Local Community Representative)

Tourism business actors adopted a more pragmatic yet ethically reflective position:

“Alcohol is part of tourism, but its promotion should be in private spaces, not on public roads.” (Respondent 4, Business Actor)

Tourism stakeholders acknowledged that alcohol consumption forms part of the tourism industry, particularly given the habits of many international visitors. However, they suggested that alcohol promotion should not occur in public spaces. Instead, promotion could take place through social media, collaborations with hotels, or within private adult-oriented venues, such as bars, cafés, and restaurants. Such approaches are perceived as more ethically appropriate and culturally sensitive, as illustrated in Figure 3.



Source: Author's Documentation

Figure 3. Placement of an Alcohol Advertisement in Front of a Bar

Based on field findings, in-depth interviews with community members and stakeholders, as well as observations conducted at several strategic public locations in Denpasar City, this study affirms that the practice of alcohol advertising in public spaces cannot be ethically justified when analyzed through the framework of Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics. The findings indicate that the issue of alcohol advertising cannot be reduced merely to matters of economics, tourism, or regulatory compliance; rather, it constitutes a moral problem that concerns the relationship between individuals, public space, and cultural values.

In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant asserts that the morality of an action is determined not by its consequences or benefits, but by the intention and moral duty underlying the action (O'Neill, 2020). Accordingly, the ethical acceptability of alcohol advertising cannot be measured by its contribution to regional revenue or the tourism industry, but by whether such practices align with universal moral principles and respect human beings as rational agents endowed with dignity. This approach stands in clear contrast to the utilitarian logic frequently employed in advertising policy and creative economy studies (Drumwright & Murphy, 2021).

The Perspective of Immanuel Kant's Deontological Ethics on the Practice of Alcohol Advertising

The first formulation of Kant's categorical imperative, the principle of universality, requires that an action be undertaken only if its underlying maxim can be willed as a universal law without generating moral contradiction. In the context of alcohol advertising, the fundamental ethical question is whether the practice of displaying alcohol advertisements in public spaces can be accepted as a universal norm applicable across societies and cultures.

The findings of this study indicate that if such practices were normalized, public spaces would lose their moral and educational functions. Public space, which ought to serve as an arena for the encounter of values, social learning, and cultural expression, would instead be reduced to a commercial domain that normalizes alcohol consumption. This finding is consistent with research by Scully et al. (2023) that exposure to alcohol advertising in public spaces increases social acceptance of alcohol consumption, even in cultural environments that traditionally discourage it. In Denpasar, this moral contradiction becomes more significant because public space in Bali functions as not only a social arena but also a symbolic and spiritual domain. Main roads, town squares, and urban areas frequently intersect with ritual spaces and expressions of cultural identity. The commercialization of these spaces through alcohol advertising thus creates

tension between economic interests and the moral duty to preserve sacredness and social harmony (Santika, 2020).

From a Kantian perspective, actions that generate such contradictions cannot be accepted as universal moral laws. Therefore, even if alcohol advertising produces short-term economic benefits, it remains morally illegitimate because it fails to meet the requirement of universalisability (Hughes, 2022a). The second formulation of the categorical imperative asserts that human beings must always be treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means to an end. This principle establishes human dignity as an absolute moral value that cannot be subordinated to economic or commercial interests (Getliff & Barker, 2025).

In the practice of alcohol advertising, this study finds that consumers are frequently positioned as objects of visual and emotional persuasion. Advertisements are constructed using symbols that associate alcohol with freedom, masculinity, modernity, and social status. Such strategies are not designed to provide rational information but to shape perceptions and stimulate consumer desire (Oldham et al., 2023). These findings align with studies by Critchlow et al. (2023) and Hughes (2022b), which argue that alcohol advertising often operates in manipulative and ethically problematic ways.

From a Kantian ethical standpoint, such practices violate the principle of human dignity because they instrumentalize individuals for high profit. Human beings are reduced to market targets whose emotional responses are strategically manipulated. In this sense, alcohol advertising undermines the moral foundation of the relationship between producers and society. The third formulation of the categorical imperative shows moral autonomy, the capacity of individuals to act according to moral laws determined by reason. Moral autonomy constitutes a fundamental condition of ethical freedom; without it, human action becomes merely a reaction to external stimuli.

The findings of this study suggest that alcohol advertising systematically weakens moral autonomy, particularly among younger generations. Repeated, symbolic, and emotionally charged exposure to alcohol advertisements fosters positive associations with alcohol. McAllister et al. (2023) demonstrate that exposure to alcohol advertising contributes to impulsive decision-making and weakens individuals' moral reflection. From a Kantian perspective, this condition is ethically problematic because individuals no longer act as moral legislators for themselves. Instead, their will is shaped by the symbolic and economic structures of the advertising industry. Consequently, alcohol advertising in public spaces may be viewed as a practice that systematically erodes human moral freedom.

The Integration of Kantian Deontological Ethics with Balinese Local Values and Its Implications

The primary novelty of this study lies in its integrative effort to synthesize Kant's deontological ethics as a universal normative framework with Balinese local values rooted in the concept of *Tri Hita Karana*. This approach positions alcohol advertising in public spaces as a moral issue that concerns the relationship between human beings, culture, and public space. This integration is significant because advertising ethics studies have often been trapped in a dichotomy between Western universal ethics and local wisdom, as if the two were inherently incompatible. This research demonstrates that Kantian ethics and the values of *Tri Hita Karana* can complement one another in evaluating commercial communication practices in public spaces.

Tri Hita Karana represents a socio-cosmological ethical principle of Balinese society that emphasizes balance in three relationships: the relationship between humans and God (*Parahyangan*), among humans (*Pawongan*), and between humans and nature or the environment (*Palemahan*). These three dimensions form the collective moral foundation of Balinese society and function as guidelines in managing public space, social activities, and economic practices (Ardika & Putra, 2021b). Public space is not understood as neutral space, but it is imbued with symbolic, spiritual, and cultural values.

The findings indicate that alcohol advertising practices in the public spaces of Denpasar disrupt the balance of these three dimensions of *Tri Hita Karana*. In the dimension of *Parahyangan*, alcohol is viewed as a substance that potentially obscures spiritual awareness and undermines self-restraint, which is highly valued in Balinese Hindu teachings. The display of alcohol advertisements in public spaces that also carry religious symbolic functions, such as areas near temples, ceremonial routes, or locations frequently used for customary activities, represents a process of profanation of sacred values. Suarka (2020) explains that the commodification of sacred symbols and spaces constitutes a value shift that can damage the spiritual order of Balinese society. From a Kantian perspective, such actions are also morally problematic because they fail to respect the rationality and collectively acknowledged values of a particular moral community.

In the *Pawongan* dimension, alcohol advertising can encourage consumption patterns that contradict values of togetherness, self-control, and social harmony. This study finds that alcohol advertisements frequently represent individualistic, hedonistic, and masculine lifestyles, implicitly normalizing alcohol consumption as a symbol of status and modernity. Anderson et al. (2021) demonstrate that exposure to alcohol advertising correlates with more permissive attitudes and stronger consumption intentions, particularly among adolescents and young adults. In the Balinese context, such tendencies may trigger social conflict and the weakening of customary value-based social control mechanisms.

From the standpoint of Kantian deontological ethics, such practices violate

the principle of human dignity. Kant asserts that human beings must always be treated as ends in themselves, never merely as means to achieve other ends, including economic objectives (O'Neill, 2020). Alcohol advertisements that exploit cultural symbols and audience emotions to stimulate consumption treat individuals as objects of persuasion rather than autonomous moral subjects. Thus, violations of the *Pawongan* dimension of *Tri Hita Karana* align with violations of the Kantian principle of respect for human dignity.

Within the *Palemahan* dimension, this research finds that alcohol advertising contributes to the commodification of public space. Public spaces, which should function as cultural arenas and symbolic environments, are reduced to market spaces dominated by commercial interests. Santika (2020) emphasizes that the commodification of public space in Bali affects not only the visual landscape but also the meaning of space itself. In this context, alcohol advertising functions as a practice that shifts spatial orientation from harmony-based values toward market logic. Reducing public space to an economic instrument contradicts the principle of universalizability. If alcohol advertising in public spaces were to become a universal law, public spaces everywhere would lose their moral and educational functions. Kant rejects actions that cannot be universalized without moral contradiction (Hughes, 2022a). Therefore, the normalization of alcohol advertising in public spaces cannot be ethically justified, either in universal or local contexts.

Theoretically, the findings reinforce the argument that Kantian universal ethics can synergize with local ethical systems. Kohn (2021) argues that universal ethics should not be understood as an abstract system detached from cultural contexts. Kantian principles of moral duty, human dignity, and rational autonomy resonate with the values of *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasize collective responsibility and social harmony. To date, advertising ethics has often been evaluated through utilitarian approaches that weigh economic benefits and social impacts quantitatively. Such approaches tend to neglect normative moral dimensions and local cultural contexts (Sayers, 2020).

Overall, this study affirms that alcohol advertising in the public spaces of Denpasar cannot be morally justified. Economic benefits, whether for the advertising industry or the tourism sector, cannot serve as justification for violations of human dignity, erosion of moral autonomy, and disruption of cultural balance. These findings promote socially responsible advertising ethics and the protection of public space as a shared domain (Scully et al., 2023).

The Regulatory Framework of Alcohol Advertising

The regulatory framework governing alcohol advertising in Indonesia is normatively designed to protect the public from the social, health, and moral harms associated with alcohol consumption. Government Regulation No. 109 of

2012 and Government Regulation No. 80 of 2019 explicitly restrict, and in certain contexts prohibit, the promotion and advertising of alcoholic beverages in public spaces (Government of Indonesia, 2019). These regulations demonstrate that the state does not adopt a neutral position toward commercial communication involving potentially harmful products. Instead, it assumes a moral responsibility to safeguard public welfare, particularly vulnerable groups such as children and adolescents, from persuasive messages that may normalize risky consumption.

From the perspective of Kant's deontological ethics, the regulation of alcohol advertising is not merely a technical or administrative task but an expression of the state's moral duty. Kant maintains that the state is obligated to establish juridical conditions that enable individuals to exercise their external freedom in accordance with universal law (Ripstein, 2020). Thus, restrictions on alcohol advertising can be interpreted as protective measures that preserve citizens' rational autonomy from manipulation by powerful economic actors. Regulation, in this sense, supports rather than undermines moral freedom.

Public law functions as an embodiment of universal rational principles intended to safeguard human dignity. If alcohol advertising circulates freely in public spaces, citizens risk being treated primarily as instruments for economic gain. It contradicts Kant's categorical imperative, particularly the formulation that humanity must always be treated as an end in itself and never merely as a means (Zijlstra et al., 2025). Therefore, prohibiting alcohol advertising should not be understood as an arbitrary restriction of liberty but as a legitimate protection of moral agency and dignity.

However, empirical findings in Denpasar reveal a significant gap between regulatory norms and actual practice. Despite formal prohibitions, surrogate advertising persists through the use of brand logos, distinctive colors, lifestyle imagery, and symbolic associations that do not explicitly display alcohol products. This strategy allows advertisers to avoid direct legal violations while maintaining brand visibility (Noel et al., 2021). Such practices illustrate that formal regulation alone is insufficient without ethical internalization among industry actors. Boddewyn & Kunz (2021), argue that advertising regulations lacking embedded ethical commitment are particularly vulnerable to circumvention in industries with strong financial incentives.

From a Kantian standpoint, compliance motivated solely by fear of sanctions does not constitute moral action. Moral worth arises only when actions are performed from duty, based on recognition of a rule's rational legitimacy (Kohn, 2021). Advertising actors may comply superficially with legal provisions while undermining their moral purpose.

In the Balinese context, the issue becomes more complex because public space carries profound cultural and spiritual significance. Public areas in Denpasar

are symbolic arenas reflecting Balinese Hindu identity. The philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* conceptualizes harmony among humans, God, and the environment as the ethical foundation of social life (Ardika & Putra, 2021a). Consequently, violations of alcohol advertising restrictions affect not only legal order but also cultural balance and spiritual values. The gap between law and practice also exposes the limitations of top-down regulatory approaches. Advertising increasingly operates through subtle visual regimes and aesthetic strategies that are difficult to control through textual prohibitions alone (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2022). Strengthening the regulatory framework, therefore, requires a comprehensive communication ethics perspective that addresses symbolic and cultural dimensions.

A Kantian approach suggests the cultivation of collective moral responsibility. The state, industry, and civil society share the duty to preserve public space as a moral sphere. The state must act as a moral agent promoting ethical internalization through consistent enforcement, policy refinement, and public education (Drumwright & Murphy, 2021). Advertising codes of ethics can function as professional moral standards extending beyond minimal legal requirements. However, existing codes in Indonesia remain relatively weak and insufficiently contextualized within Balinese cultural values (Sari & Hidayat, 2023). Accordingly, strengthening alcohol advertising regulation requires integrating positive law, Kantian deontological ethics, and local cultural principles. In Kantian terms, ideal regulation enables individuals and institutions to act from a rational sense of moral duty. Integrating *Tri Hita Karana* enriches universal ethical principles with contextual depth (Widana et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the practice of alcohol advertising in public spaces in Denpasar cannot be morally or culturally justified. The empirical findings indicate that such advertising contradicts the Kantian principles of universalizability, respect for human dignity, and moral autonomy. At the same time, it disrupts the harmonious relationships between humans and God (*Parahyangan*), among fellow humans (*Pawongan*), and between humans and the environment (*Palemahan*), which form the ethical and cosmological foundation of Balinese society. These findings confirm that alcohol advertising in public spaces should not be reduced to a matter of regulatory compliance or economic interests. Rather, it constitutes a fundamental issue of public ethics, as it directly concerns the moral character of public space as a shared cultural and symbolic domain.

Theoretically, this research extends the application of Kantian deontological ethics to communication and advertising studies. By integrating universal normative ethics with *Tri Hita Karana*, the study demonstrates that Western ethical philosophy and local wisdom are not inherently oppositional, but they can be mutually reinforcing in evaluating commercial communication practices. This

approach enriches contemporary advertising ethics discourse, which has largely been dominated by utilitarian, regulatory, and public health perspectives. Practically, the study recommends strengthening regulatory frameworks and professional advertising codes to move beyond legal compliance toward the internalization of moral duties and local cultural values. The state should function as an active moral agent through consistent law enforcement and public education. Meanwhile, advertising and tourism stakeholders should redirect alcohol promotion to restricted private spaces intended exclusively for adult audiences.

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