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Challenging Isomorphism: Institutional Responses and Regulative–Professional Logical Tensions in Tourism Higher Education in the Era of Industry

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Abstract. This study examines the institutional responses of tourism higher education institutions (THEIs) in Indonesia to the evolving tourism industry ecosystem during the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. Grounded in institutional theory, this study critiques the assumption of isomorphism, which states that external pressures yield uniform responses. Employing a qualitative, multi-case study design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, institutional documents, and educational policies from three THEIs. The analysis utilized the framework of coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures, alongside the interaction between regulative and professional logic. The findings reveal that although THEIs encounter relatively uniform regulative pressures, particularly through the Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) policy, institutional responses range from symbolic compliance to substantive adaptation to regulative pressures. The predominance of regulative logic fosters a tendency toward administrative legitimacy, while professional logic derived from the industry remains fragmented and not yet strongly institutionalized. The cross-case analysis identifies three institutional adaptation profiles that underscore the role of internal capacity and adaptive leadership in mediating institutional pressure. This study contributes to the advancement of institutional theory by illustrating that institutional pressures in developing countries operate asymmetrically, reinforcing existing practices and decoupling them in higher education.

Keywords. institutional theory, institutional logics, decoupling, isomorphism, higher education governance, tourism higher education, industry 4.0, substantive and symbolic responses.

1. Introduction

The transformation of the global tourism industry in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) era presents significant challenges for tourism higher education institutions (THEI) to redesign their learning processes, curricula, and organizational systems. Technological innovations such as automation, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and smart tourism infrastructure have reshaped service delivery, operational models and workforce requirements [1], [2]. It is crucial for tourism graduates to have not only strong technological competencies

but also the ability to interpret data and apply them in a decision-making context [2]. This development requires THEI to continuously adapt to changing skill demands and professional standards [3].

Universities offering tourism and hospitality programs face growing pressure to align graduate competencies with the demands of a digitally transformed ecosystem. Studies from Europe, Australia, and East Asia [4], [5], [6], [7] emphasize the importance of digital literacy, advanced analytics, virtual service delivery, and technology-mediated guest experience management in the tourism industry. While some institutions have responded by redesigning curricula, adopting simulation technologies, and strengthening industry partnerships, others struggle to innovate because of organizational rigidities, entrenched pedagogical traditions, and uneven institutional readiness [8]. This uneven pattern of transformation points to an unresolved issue in the literature regarding how institutional conditions shape higher-education responses. Although existing studies have extensively examined curriculum modernization and digital learning innovations, far less attention has been given to how institutional conditions shape higher education institutions' capacity to adopt and internalize these changes. Tourism higher education constitutes a particularly revealing case, given its hybrid academic–vocational character and strong exposure to rapidly evolving industry dynamics.

The second global gap concerns the lack of theoretical research using institutional theory to examine how THEI institutions respond to transformation pressures. While government policy, accreditation, and professional norms are recognized in the higher education literature, few studies have analyzed how these pressures shape organizational behavior in tourism higher education. Studies rarely investigate how institutional logics, such as academic, professional, market-oriented, and state-controlled, interact to shape tourism higher education organizations. THEI institutions' response to RI 4.0 is mediated by the institutional environment that determines the legitimacy of change.

This gap is especially visible in developing countries, where centralized regulation and uneven resource conditions constrain institutional autonomy and shape organizational responses. Government control over quality assurance and policy direction often constrains institutional flexibility in systems that are heavily dependent on state regulation and funding [9]. Resource inequality further undermines learning quality through limited funding, infrastructure, and digital access [10], [11], whereas reliance on state funding restricts academic innovation [12], [13]. Despite facing similar global pressures, responses diverge from those in developed systems, and limited research on tourism higher education in developing countries constrains the understanding of local policy translation.

Indonesia is an interesting case study for exploring these issues in depth. As a country with rapid tourism growth and a developing tourism education system, Indonesia has implemented robust regulatory frameworks, such as the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), National Standards for Higher Education (SNPT), and MBKM. These frameworks are designed to align learning outcomes and ensure national quality standards; however, they also exert strong coercive pressure on higher education institutions, such as aligning curricula and assessment systems with nationally mandated structures. While these regulations promote standardization, they can limit institutional flexibility and innovation capacity in responding to Indonesia 4.0. Despite the strategic importance of the tourism industry and digital transformation in Indonesia's national development agenda, little empirical research has examined how Indonesian higher-education institutions interpret and navigate institutional pressure under these conditions.

Institutional theory provides a robust framework for analyzing these dynamics. According to the isomorphism framework [14], [15], [16], higher education institutions respond to coercive pressures (regulations, industry requirements, and accreditation), normative pressures (professional standards and the educational community), and mimetic pressures (benchmarking of more reputable institutions). These pressures shape organizational decisions and often push institutions toward similarity in their decisions. However, institutional theory also recognizes that responses vary depending on the capacity, identity, and orientation of an institution's leadership [17]. Complementing this, institutional logic theory explains why organizations adopt different strategies even under similar pressures. Regulative logic encourages compliance-oriented behavior and prioritizes adherence to rules. Professional logic emphasizes academic values, pedagogical quality, and disciplinary norms. The interaction of these logics can result in symbolic compliance, selective adaptation, and substantive transformation.

Against this background, this study examines how Indonesian THEI responds to ecosystem changes driven by Industry 4.0 and how coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures interact with regulatory and professional logic to shape institutional behavior. By examining institutions with varying characteristics, this study clarifies whether institutional responses reflect real transformations or symbolic alignment towards maintaining legitimacy.

This research is significant because few studies have examined THEI in developing countries through the lens of institutional theory, and even fewer have integrated isomorphism with institutional logic to understand organizational adaptation. These findings contribute theoretically by demonstrating how institutional pressures produce different responses depending on the institutional capacity and underlying logic. Practically, this study offers insights for policymakers, institutional leaders, and educators seeking to foster meaningful adaptation rather than compliance-driven changes.

Exploiting this gap, this study examines how THEI institutions deal with institutional pressures and evolving expectations related to Industry 4.0. To guide this investigation, this study addresses the following four main questions: (1) How do THEI respond to institutional pressures related to Industry 4.0? (2) How do coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures shape organizational adaptation? (3) How do regulatory logic and institutional professionalism shape organizational adaptation, influence decision-making processes, and bring about institutional changes? (4) To what extent do these institutional responses result in substantive transformation rather than merely symbolic compliance?

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Institutional Pressures and the Limits of Isomorphism

Institutional theory explains that organizations adapt to the external environment through coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphic mechanisms, which produce a convergence of organizational practices [14], [16]. In higher education, coercive pressures come from government policies and accreditation; normative pressures from professional associations and standards; and mimetic pressures from imitating successful institutions [14], [15], [16]. This framework explains the homogenization of higher education policies across contexts. However, the assumption that similar external pressures produce uniform organizational responses has been questioned, particularly in developing countries and sectors facing technological disruption. Studies have shown that institutional pressures often result in formal compliance without substantive changes in core practices [18], [19], [20], known as decoupling

[14], [16], [21]. Organizations comply with regulations for legitimacy while maintaining their internal practices.

Scholars have increasingly questioned this perspective for overemphasizing convergence while offering limited explanations for the persistent variation among organizations facing similar pressures [22], [23]. Empirical studies show that organizations often respond heterogeneously, simultaneously conforming to dominant norms while differentiating themselves to maintain legitimacy, competitiveness, or organizational identity [24], [25]. Critics also highlight the dynamic and context-dependent nature of isomorphic pressures, demonstrating that their effects vary across time and institutional environments. In response, scholars have proposed integrating alternative perspectives, such as field theory, to better capture power relations, agency, and nonlinear change processes.

In tourism higher education, the limitations of this isomorphism approach have become increasingly apparent in the era of IR 4.0. Rapid changes in the industrial ecosystem, driven by digital technology and market trends, demand responses that encompass not only administrative compliance but also contextual pedagogical and professional adaptations. However, strong regulatory pressures, particularly through national policies, often establish minimum compliance standards without providing detailed operational guidance on the direction and depth of the institutional transformation. Consequently, institutions face a wide latitude for interpretation in responding to these pressures.

This indicates that institutional pressures do not operate as direct determinants of institutional change but rather as structural constraints that frame possible responses. The variety of responses that emerge, ranging from symbolic compliance to substantive adaptation, suggests that the isomorphism mechanism is insufficient to explain the dynamics of institutional change fully. Therefore, a nuanced approach is required. Theoretical, which can explain how external pressures are interpreted, prioritized, and translated into organizational decisions. This study adopts this perspective by viewing institutional pressures as initial conditions mediated by internal institutional mechanisms, which are discussed further through the institutional logic framework in the following subsection.

2.2. Competing Institutional Logics in Higher Education

The institutional logic approach provides a framework for explaining how organizations interpret and respond to institutional pressures through symbolic systems and material practices. Organizations operate within multiple logics; therefore, pressures can be interpreted differently based on actors' cognitive frameworks and positions within the organization

(Lounsbury et al., 2021; Mountford & Cai, 2023). These interpretations result in strategic responses ranging from compliance, negotiation, and resistance to hybrid practices and decoupling. This approach emphasizes emotions, power dynamics, and stakeholder relations in shaping institutional stability and change [28], [29].

From an institutional logic perspective, higher education is shaped by regulatory and professional logics. Regulatory logic emphasizes managerial control, standardization, accountability, and performance indicators through policies, accreditation, and financial systems [30], [31]. Professional logic is rooted in academic autonomy, collegiality, and disciplinary norms that guide teaching and research practices [31]. Their interaction produces a hybrid form in which institutions meet regulatory demands while maintaining professional values [32]. However, this tension often triggers symbolic implementation and fragmentation of practices [33], [34], [35].

Thus, analyzing institutional responses in tourism higher education requires attention to how regulatory and professional logic interact and are prioritized by institutional actors. This

perspective explains why uniform policy pressures produce different responses and why institutional change often stops at administrative compliance level. This framework provides an analytical basis for interpreting empirical findings and discussing variations in institutional responses in the subsequent sections. This study moves beyond treating logics as co-existing by empirically demonstrating a hierarchical configuration of logic under strong regulatory regimes.

2.3. Analytical Framework: From Pressure to Institutional Response

Using the institutional logic approach, this study develops a framework that views institutional responses as an internal mediation process between institutional pressures and organizational practices. The framework starts from the assumption that external pressures define minimum legitimacy requirements, whereas institutional responses depend on how these pressures are interpreted through dominant institutional logics.

Within this framework, regulatory and professional logic bridges external pressures with institutional decisions. Higher education is shaped by these interactions. Regulatory logic emphasizes managerial control, standardization, accountability, and performance indicators through policies and systems. Professional logic centers on academic autonomy, collegiality and disciplinary norms. Their interaction creates a hybrid configuration in which institutions balance regulatory demands with professional values, often creating tensions and implementing symbolic measures.

This framework recognizes the role of internal capacity and institutional leadership in managing logical tensions. Resource capacity, decision-making autonomy, and leadership orientation influence how institutions convert regulatory pressure into professional agendas. Institutional responses are understood as configurations of pressure, competing logic, and internal adaptive capacity. Operationally, this framework analyzes data by tracing (1) the institutional pressures faced by THEIs, (2) dominant regulatory and professional logic, and (3) the resulting institutional responses. This enables the identification of response patterns and adaptation profiles for discussion.

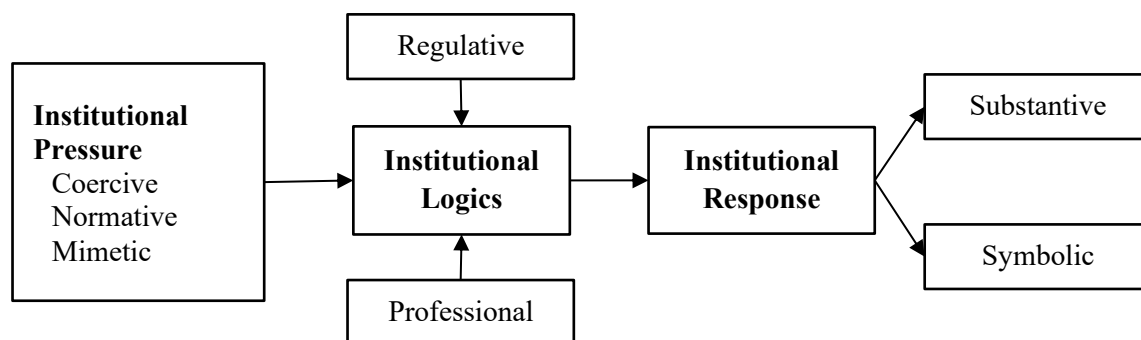


Figure 1. Analytical framework of institutional responses to Industry 4.0 in tourism higher education.

This analytical framework positions institutional pressures as the initial structural conditions that establish minimum compliance thresholds, while variations in institutional responses are explained through internal mediating mechanisms, such as the interactions and tensions between regulatory and professional logic. Thus, both symbolic and substantive responses are understood to be the result of a dynamic configuration between external pressures, the dominance of institutional logics, and institutions' adaptive capacity.

3. Methodology

3.1.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative, multi-case study design to analyze the institutional responses of higher education institutions (THEI) to changes in the tourism industry ecosystem in IR 4.0. era. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of institutional dynamics and variations in responses within the context of relatively uniform policy pressures, interpreted differently by each institution [36]. Three THEIs were selected to represent variations in institutional status, internal capacity, and position within the Indonesian higher-education tourism system. Case selection was based on theoretical principles, not statistical representation, thus enabling a cross-case comparative analysis oriented towards the development of contextual institutional theory.

Table 1. Selected Indonesian THEIs

Code	Year of Establishment	Type of College	Affiliation	Number of Study Programs	Number of Lecturers	Number of Active Students
THEI A	1987	Private	Foundation	5	77	1938
THEI B	2001	Private	Foundation	4	183	4355
THEI C	1962	State	Government	10	243	2292

Three tourism higher education institutions were selected using theoretical replication rather than statistical representativeness (Yin, 2014). The cases capture variations in public-private status, organizational capacity, and governance under a shared national regulatory regime. This multi-case design enables analytical generalization by comparing similarities and differences to explain how internal configurations mediate institutional pressures and refine the theory on isomorphism, institutional logics, and decoupling.

3.1.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through three primary sources to ensure the depth and triangulation of the findings: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) institutional documents, and (3) national education policy documents. Interviews were conducted with institutional and study program leaders involved in curriculum decision-making and human resource development. The interviews focused on the participants' perceptions of external pressures, internal policy rationalization, and concrete practices in response to industry changes.

Table 2. Research Informants

Code	Department	THEI	Gender	Education
P1	Head	A	Male	Masters
P2	Deputy Head I	A	Male	Masters
P3	Deputy Head II	A	Male	Masters
P4	Director	B	Male	Doctorate
P5	Deputy Director I	B	Female	Masters
P6	Deputy Director II	B	Male	Masters
P7	Deputy Director III	B	Male	Masters

P8	Head	C	Male	Masters
P9	Deputy Chairman I	C	Male	Masters
P10	Deputy Chairman II	C	Male	Masters
P11	Deputy Chairman III	C	Male	Masters
KP1	Head of Study Program in the field of travel and tourism business	A	Male	Masters
KP2	Head of Study Program in Hospitality	A	Female	Masters
KP3	Head of Study Program in the field of Travel and Tourism Business	B	Male	Masters
KP4	Head of Study Program in Hospitality	B	Female	Masters
KP5	Head of Study Program in Hospitality	C	Female	Masters

Institutional documents included curricula and strategic plans, and policy documents included national regulations related to higher education and the MBKM policy. All data were collected and analyzed iteratively until saturation was achieved.

3.1.3. Data Analysis and Coding Scheme

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis guided by framework analysis research (see Figure 1). This framework positions institutional responses as the result of mediation between institutional pressures and dominant institutional logics. Thus, the coding process is not purely inductive but is guided by the theoretical concept that has been set

Stage 1: Coding Institutional Pressures.

Data were coded to identify the forms of external pressure faced by institutions, including coercive pressures such as national policies, curriculum regulations, and accreditation, normative pressures originating from professional associations and expertise standards, and mimetic pressure, which refers to the practices of peer institutions. This stage maps the minimum compliance thresholds that shape institutional responses.

Stage 2: Coding Institutional Logic.

Next, the data were analyzed to identify the institutional logics that frame the decision-making process. The analysis focused on regulative logic, which emphasizes administrative compliance and formal legitimacy, and professional logic, which emphasizes industry relevance, practical expertise, and competency renewal. The dominance of this logic was traced through policy rationalizations, strategic priorities, and narratives of institutional leaders.

Stage 3: Classification of Institutional Responses.

Based on the interaction between pressure and institutional logic, institutional responses are classified into symbolic responses, characterized by formal compliance without changes to core practices, and substantive responses, which reflect structural and pedagogical changes that impact the institution's core practices.

Stage 4: Cross-Case Analysis.

The final stage involved a cross-case analysis to identify response patterns and construct institutional adaptation profiles based on the configuration of institutional pressures, dominant logic, and the internal capacities of each THEI.

The entire analysis process was supported by NVivo qualitative analysis software to ensure data traceability, coding consistency and analytical transparency.

3.1.4. Data Triangulation

To ensure trustworthiness and analytical rigor, this study applied data source triangulation by comparing interviews with institutional documents and policy texts. Analytical saturation was achieved when no new themes emerged from the data. Cross-case pattern matching strengthens robustness under similar institutional pressures. The coding decisions were iteratively reviewed for theoretical consistency, while NVivo supported transparent data management, traceability, and systematic comparison across coding stages.

4. Findings

4.1. Institutional Response of Tourism higher education to Industry 4.0

This section presents an empirical description of the forms of response taken by THEI A, B, and C in facing changes in the tourism industry ecosystem in the IR 4.0 era, before being further analyzed in relation to institutional pressures and response patterns in the following subsections.

Curriculum Adjustments and Pedagogical Changes

The three THEIs showed that curriculum adjustments were the main institutional response to changes in the tourism industry's ecosystem. These changes included curriculum restructuring, technology-based and entrepreneurship courses, and adjustments to the learning methods. THEI A and C implemented broader curriculum changes that were more radical. Both institutions added courses focused on digital technology and industry practices and adjusted credits to accommodate the MBKM Program. These adjustments included project-based learning methods, case studies, and a Learning Management System (LMS) in the regular learning process. THEI B did not structurally add any new courses to its curriculum. The curriculum response focused on updating the existing course content by adapting teaching materials and strengthening soft skills relevant to industry needs. However, the overall curriculum structure has remained unchanged. These differences show variations in curriculum adjustments among institutions, although all three acknowledge the importance of responding to changes in the technology-based tourism industry.

Human Resource Development and Faculty Strategies

Human resource development is a consistent area of institutional response across all three Indonesian THEIs. Strategies include faculty training, recruiting teaching staff with industry experience, and encouraging faculty to pursue doctoral studies. THEIs A, B, and C provided internal training on digital learning platforms, teaching media development, and LMS utilization. However, this training is incidental and lacks structure as a long-term capacity-development framework. THEI C adopted a more targeted approach through faculty participation in certified training and industry-based competency programs, including international visits. THEI A recruited faculty with IT backgrounds to strengthen its digital-based learning capacity. All three institutions recruited faculty members practicing in the

tourism industry. These practicing faculty members integrated industry experience into learning through direct instruction and mentoring student activities.

Industry, Alumni, and Association Engagement

THEI's institutional response is evident in its strengthened collaborations with industry, alumni, and professional associations. All three institutions hold discussion forums with external stakeholders to obtain input on curriculum development and industrial requirements. THEI A expanded its collaboration through on-site learning in the hospitality sector. THEI B engaged industry practitioners as instructors and discussion partners through informal channels. THEI C developed a structured collaboration by establishing advisory boards of industry representatives and lecturers for periodic curriculum review. The three THEIs facilitated student internship programs, including MBKM internship participation. This collaboration aims to increase students' industry exposure and strengthen the links between academic learning and the workplace.

Across the three cases, the responses appeared broadly similar in orientation but differed noticeably in scope, formality, and implementation mechanisms. These differences are in curriculum changes, lecturer development strategies, and formality of external stakeholder collaboration. The following subsection outlines the institutional pressures cited by actors to explain these responses. These findings resonate with prior studies that emphasize the growing importance of digital literacy, technology-mediated service delivery, and industry-aligned competencies in tourism education [4], [5], [6], [7]. However, while these studies largely assume that such competencies can be integrated through curriculum redesign, the present findings demonstrate that institutional capacity and regulatory framing significantly shape whether digital transformation results in substantive pedagogical change or remains limited to formal curriculum adjustments only.

4.2. Institutional Pressure

Institutional pressures are analytically categorized into coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures based on explicit references in the interview data and institutional documents.

Coercive Pressure

Coercive pressure was the most frequently cited form of pressure by informants across the three tourism higher education institutions (THEIs). National policies, particularly the MBKM policy, were repeatedly referenced in discussions regarding changes to curricula, learning methods, and academic management. MBKM is a national higher education reform in Indonesia that constitutes a mandatory regulatory framework for public universities, requiring greater autonomy and flexibility in the design of learning processes aligned with industry engagement, community needs, and graduate competency development. Informants from THEIs A, B, and C described these policies as formal provisions that had to be accommodated in the implementation of tourism higher education, a view consistently emphasized by the institutional leaders.

"Actually, there is an obligation for MBKM in higher education. Well, we're adapting to that, so we're adjusting the curriculum." (P6)

Similar references arise in the context of compliance with government regulations and accreditation.

"The government certainly must have the MBKM spirit, he said. That's our primary concern." (P3)

In addition to MBKM, coercive pressure is referred to in the context of institutional and study-program accreditation. Several informants stated that certain adjustments were made to ensure compliance with the standards set by accreditation bodies and relevant ministries. References to these regulations are commonly made in discussions regarding curriculum structure, academic reporting, and other administrative requirements.

Normative Pressure

Informants referenced normative pressures in the context of interactions with the tourism industry, professional associations, and communities of practice. References to industry needs, graduate competency standards, and work practices in the tourism sector emerged when the participants discussed curriculum development, faculty training, and student internships. This is evidenced by the following statement from the head of the THEI:

"The needs of today's industry have changed significantly, particularly because of technology. That's what we consistently hear from our industry partners." (KP6)

References to professional associations also appeared, although they were not always associated with formal decisions.

"We often get input from associations or fellow practitioners who are directly involved in the industry." (KP4)

However, some informants also stated that the standards used by the industry are not always fully reflected in the formal accreditation documents.

"Sometimes accreditation standards don't reflect what is actually used in industry today." (P2)

However, normative pressures tend to be conveyed through direct interactions, such as discussions with industry players, alumni engagement, or input from practitioners involved in learning. Formal references to professional associations were relatively rare compared with government policies. In some cases, the informants mentioned that industry standards did not always align with the formal standards outlined in accreditation or certification documents.

Mimetic Pressure

References to mimetic pressures are relatively limited in the data. Informants rarely mentioned other institutions' practices as direct references in institutional decision-making. When other institutions were mentioned, comparisons were more often directed at differences in context, capacity, and institutional characteristics rather than attempts to emulate specific practices. This is evident in the following statement from a THEI leader:

"Compared to other tourism campuses, I think the conditions are more or less the same, depending on the context of each." (P2)

Similar views were expressed by other participants:

"I don't see any particular campus that can really be used as a benchmark to be fully emulated." (KP3)

Several informants stated that their institutions had different characteristics and positions than other tourism higher-education institutions; therefore, the practices of other institutions were not always considered relevant as reference models. This suggests that inter-institutional comparisons are not a primary source of pressure explicitly referenced in explaining institutional responses.

Table 3. Institutional Pressure on Indonesian THEI to Respond to RI 4.0

Type of Pressure	Main Reference Sources	THEI A	THEI B	THEI C	Reference Patterns in Data
Coercive	MBKM policy, ministry regulations, accreditation	High	High	High	Often referred to in curriculum and administrative changes
Normative	Tourism industry, practitioners, alumni, associations	Medium	Medium	Medium–High	Referred to in the context of graduate competencies and training
Mimetic	Other THEI practices	Low	Low	Low	Rarely appears as a direct reference

Across the three cases, institutional actors consistently explained organizational change by referring to multiple forms of pressure, although coercive pressure clearly dominated normative and mimetic influences in their accounts. The next subsection presents the findings on how references to these pressures co-occurred with the various forms of institutional responses identified in the previous section.

5. Discussion

5.1. Institutional responses and challenges to isomorphism

Despite operating under similar institutional pressures, the tourism higher education institutions examined in this study responded to Industry 4.0-related changes in notably different ways. Cross-case findings indicate that uniform regulatory pressures produce significant variations in the form, scope, and implementation mechanisms of institutional responses. These variations complicate the core assumptions of isomorphic institutionalism, particularly the expectation that external pressures necessarily drive organizational uniformity [14], [15], [16].

In the isomorphism framework, coercive pressure is assumed to result in the convergence of organizational practices through compliance with formal rules. However, the findings of this study suggest a different dynamic relationship. Rather than determining the direction and depth of change, coercive pressure primarily establishes minimum administrative-compliance thresholds. Across THEI A, B, and C, the MBKM policy was consistently cited as the formal basis for change; however, it was translated into markedly different practices, particularly in curriculum adjustments, human resource development, and industry

collaboration. These variations demonstrate that the MBKM policy operates as a formal reference point for change rather than as a mechanism that determines the depth or direction of institutional transformation.

These findings align with the criticisms of the isomorphism approach, which overemphasizes uniform outcomes and ignores internal processes [24], [25]. Studies in developing countries show that regulatory pressures often result in symbolic compliance or partial adaptation, particularly when institutions face resource constraints [9], [10], [12], [13]. For Indonesian THEIs, the MBKM policy creates formal obligations to adapt curriculum and instruction but provides neither detailed operational guidance nor structural support, giving institutions latitude in its implementation. Furthermore, these findings suggest that response variations cannot be explained solely by institutional type (public or private) or scale (size). THEIs with different structural characteristics may show similar responses in terms of responses but differ in their scope and implementation. This indicates that institutional pressure establishes legitimacy frameworks but does not automatically produce profound transformations.

This finding strengthens the argument that institutional change must be understood as a contingent and mediated process, not a mechanism that produces linear uniformity. Strong regulatory pressures can encourage formal compliance but do not guarantee substantive changes in core practice. In tourism higher education, compliance with national policies often occurs through administrative adjustments, such as modifying credit structures or reporting MBKM activities, without profound changes in pedagogical design or learning governance.

These findings suggest that variations in institutional responses are inherent to higher-education systems under strong regulatory pressure. Institutions respond to external pressures, resource constraints, internal priorities, and perceived risk. These different responses represent rational adaptation strategies within institutional contexts rather than policy implementation failures.

By highlighting response inhomogeneity under uniform pressure, these findings refine the concept of isomorphism by demonstrating that, under strong regulatory regimes, coercive pressure primarily structures legitimacy boundaries, while institutional change remains contingent on internal organizational processes. These findings enable further analysis of how institutional pressure interacts with dominant institutional logic and shapes response variations, as discussed in the following section.

5.2. Institutional Pressures and Different Responses

This section addresses the central puzzle of the study: why do relatively uniform institutional pressures not generate uniform change outcomes in tourism higher education institutions? While classical isomorphism theory assumes that coercive pressures drive organizational convergence through compliance to maintain legitimacy [14], [15], [16], this assumption overlooks how pressures operate in practice and how institutional actors interpret and respond to them. Rather than directly determining organizational change, institutional pressures appear to define the boundaries within which institutions interpret, negotiate, and enact their responses.

The analysis revealed an asymmetric configuration of institutional pressures. Coercive pressure from government policies dominates the construction of institutional legitimacy, whereas normative and mimetic pressures exert more limited influence. In practice, coercive pressure mainly operates as a compliance threshold, setting minimum requirements for legitimacy without necessarily prompting substantive institutional change. Regulations specify

what must be complied with but leave considerable discretion regarding how and to what extent institutional change is implemented.

This pattern aligns with studies of higher education and regulation in developing countries, which show that strong state control and funding dependence often prioritize administrative compliance over academic innovation [9], [12], [12], [13]. Similar to findings in other regulated sectors, regulatory pressure in Indonesia operates as a compliance threshold rather than a transformation mechanism, reinforcing decoupling and symbolic alignment under conditions of limited institutional autonomy [18], [19].

The limited influence of normative pressure increases the pressure-outcome mismatch. While industry and professional communities provide input on competency needs, this input is not institutionalized as binding standards. Normative pressures serve as references rather than control mechanisms. Professional input does not automatically create consistent institutional change but is curated by each institution's priorities and capacities.

The absence of strong mimetic pressure also contributes to variations in response outcomes. The absence of a clear reputational hierarchy or widely recognized institutional model weakens the benchmarking process and imitation of practices. Without incentives to imitate practices perceived as superior, institutions tend to develop fragmented and contextual responses rather than move toward practice convergence.

Conceptually, these findings suggest that institutional pressure is best understood as a mechanism that sets the boundaries of compliance, rather than as a direct driver of substantive change. Pressure defines what must not be violated, but does not explain how institutions prioritize change or the extent to which it will be implemented. Internal factors begin to play a decisive role in shaping response outcomes. Variations in institutional responses arise from how institutions navigate existing pressures rather than from differences in the pressures themselves. By distinguishing between the intensity of institutional pressure and its functional role as a compliance boundary, this study refines isomorphism theory by explaining why convergence at the regulatory level coexists with persistent divergence in organizational practice. To understand this process more deeply, the next section analyzes the interactions and tensions between the regulatory and professional logics that frame internal institutional decision-making.

5.3. Interaction and Tension between Regulatory and Professional Logic

This section explains why tourism higher education (THEI) exhibits different responses despite facing similar institutional pressures. While external pressures establish minimum compliance requirements, they do not directly determine outcomes. Instead, institutional responses are mediated by the interaction between regulative and professional logics.

Regulatory logic functions as the dominant framework in institutional decision-making, emphasizing compliance with government policies, accreditation standards, and performance indicators as the primary sources of legitimacy. This dominance directs institutional attention toward administrative alignment rather than deep pedagogical or organizational transformation [26], [27].

Professional logic, stemming from industry practices, norms of expertise, and applied knowledge, emerges fragmentarily and is not strongly institutionalized in the curriculum. This logic emerges from practitioner input, industry collaboration, and faculty with professional backgrounds [26], [27]. Its influence on decision-making depends on its recognition of the decision-making structure. In THEI, the logic proportional function complements regulative logic rather than acting as an autonomous determinant of change.

The tension between these logics explains the variations in institutional responses. When regulative logic dominates without a counterbalance, responses remain at the level of

administrative compliance. Professional logic is curated to support regulatory demands, rather than to drive pedagogical innovation. When institutions provide greater articulation of professional logic, industry input and expertise can translate into integrated changes in core practices.

Institutional leadership plays a crucial role in navigating such tensions. Research shows that leaders act as recipients of external pressures and as actors who mediate the competing institutional logics. Adaptive leadership can use regulative logic for legitimacy while integrating professional logic into the strategic agenda. Leadership focused on compliance tends to reproduce the dominance of regulative logic and limits institutional experimentation.

An institution's internal capacity shapes how tensions between institutional logics are managed. This capacity encompasses human resources, organizational competencies, and the infrastructure required to support change. Consistent with studies on organizational rigidity and uneven institutional readiness in tourism and higher education, limited capacity constrains institutions' ability to translate professional input into practice and narrows the available response options [37]. Institutions with stronger capacities, therefore, possess greater flexibility to mobilize professional logic and implement substantive changes [8]. Conversely, capacity constraints encourage risk-minimizing strategies, leading institutions to prioritize symbolic compliance to maintain legitimacy under regulatory pressure.

This finding extends the institutional logics literature by showing that logics can be hierarchically structured under certain conditions. In the Indonesian THEI context, regulative logic occupies a dominant position that frames the institutional logics. Variations in institutional responses stem from differences in institutions' abilities to negotiate hierarchies through leadership and internal capacity. Thus, institutional change emerges from dynamic interactions between pressures, dominant logics, and institutional agency.

This section shows that symbolic compliance and substantive adaptation result from different internal configurations, not merely from levels of commitment to change. These findings demonstrate that understanding the transformation of tourism higher education towards Industry 4.0 requires a focus on how institutions build capacity and leadership to balance regulatory and professional logics. By examining these internal mechanisms, this study explains the variation in institutional responses under uniform institutional pressures.

These findings extend prior research on competing institutional logics in higher education, highlighting the tensions between managerial-regulatory demands and professional-academic values [31], [33], [34], [35]. While previous studies emphasize the coexistence or hybridization of logics, this study demonstrates a hierarchical configuration in which regulatory logic systematically dominates professional logic under strong state regulation, shaping both symbolic and substantive response pathways.

4

5.4. Symbolic and Substantive Responses

The findings indicate that the responses of tourism higher education to Industry 4.0 cannot be understood through a simple dichotomy between compliance and innovation. Instead, institutional responses fall along a continuum, reflecting varying depths of implementation, ranging from symbolic alignment to substantive adaptation. These response forms are therefore better understood as contextually rational strategies shaped by structural constraints, internal capacity, and legitimacy concerns rather than as simple indicators of institutional success or failure.

Substantive responses are characterized by changes in core organizational practices, including curriculum restructuring, integration of digital and entrepreneurial competencies, and

strengthened industry collaboration within academia. Symbolic responses manifest through administrative compliance, adjustments to learning content without structural changes, and limited technology adoption for support functions, such as basic Learning Management Systems. However, symbolic responses often represent minimal compliance to maintain legitimacy amid resource constraints and policy uncertainty.

Persistent symbolic responses, despite regulatory pressure, can be explained by structural and institutional factors. A policy that emphasizes administrative compliance leads institutions to prioritize formal indicators over institutional transformation. Limited financial and human resources restrict institutions' ability to implement profound changes, such as those delivered [8], especially when policies do not consider variations in institutional readiness. Under these conditions, symbolic compliance serves as a protective measure, allowing institutions to appear compliant without incurring excessive operational risks. This aligns with decoupling [14], [21], where formal policy adoption may not change core practice. However, this study views decoupling as an adaptive strategy rather than an institutional deviation.

Substantive responses emerge when institutions possess the enabling conditions to transform external pressures into internal change agendas. Adaptive leadership bridges regulatory demands with professional logic; thus, policies are interpreted as opportunities to strengthen institutional relevance rather than administrative obligations. Adequate internal capacity in human resources and infrastructure enables institutions to invest in curriculum development and industry-based learning toward embeddedness with tourism industry professionals, enriching institutional decision-making and strengthening the legitimacy of change. Substantive responses emerge not only from pressure intensity but also from the institution's ability to mobilize resources and align various organizational logics.

The variation between symbolic and substantive responses suggests that implementation differences are predictable institutional patterns, not anomalies. These variations reflect differences in institutional positions, the dominant logic hierarchy, and leadership capacity to manage regulatory demands and professional aspirations. The relationship between external pressure and institutional change is mediated by strategic choices that are contextual and constrained. These findings show that the transformation of Tourism Higher Education 4.0 cannot be assessed solely by formal policy compliance but by how changes are internalized in core practices.

By understanding symbolic and substantive responses as legitimate modes of institutional adaptation, this study provides an analysis to realistically assess response variations. This approach enables context-sensitive policy evaluations and reinforces the notion that sustainable institutional change requires more than regulatory pressure. The implementation variations highlight the importance of policies and leadership approaches that enable meaningful institutional learning beyond compliance.

6. Conclusion

The findings suggest that institutional responses in Indonesian tourism higher education cannot be explained by the linear assumption that external pressures automatically generate deep organizational transformation. From an institutional theory perspective, the findings show that regulatory pressures, particularly those associated with the MBKM policy, primarily establish minimum compliance thresholds rather than determining the direction and depth of change. The observed variation in institutional responses, ranging from symbolic compliance to substantive adaptation, reflects the interaction between external pressures and institutional logics, internal capacity, and leadership.

This study advances institutional theory by refining the concepts of isomorphism and decoupling in the context of higher-education institutions in developing countries. Symbolic responses constitute rational adaptive strategies for maintaining legitimacy under conditions of regulatory dominance, resource constraints, and policy uncertainty rather than institutional failure. Substantive transformation emerges when institutions mobilize professional logic, adaptive leadership, and sustained engagement with industry actors to translate regulatory demands into internal change agendas. Therefore, apparent convergence at the policy level can coexist with significant divergence in implementation and organizational practice.

From a governance perspective, these findings highlight the limitations of reform approaches that consider administrative compliance as the primary indicator of institutional transformation. Progress toward Tourism Higher Education 4.0 is shaped not only by the intensity of policy pressure but also by institutions' capacity to navigate tensions between competing institutional logics and strategically mobilize internal resources. Policy frameworks that support institutional learning, leadership development, and context-sensitive capacity building are essential for enabling sustainable and internalized institutional change, beyond symbolic alignment.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that open up opportunities for future research. First, the study focuses on three higher education institutions in Indonesia; therefore, the findings reflect the context of a developing country with dominant regulatory pressures and are intended for contextual theory development, not statistical generalization. Second, the analysis focuses on the interaction between regulatory and professional logics; therefore, the role of other logics, such as academic or global market logics, has not been explored in-depth. Third, the time-snapshot design limits the understanding of the longitudinal dynamics of logic change. Future research could examine the configuration of institutional logics across countries using a longitudinal approach and the role of leadership and actor agency in managing logical tensions toward more substantive institutional adaptation.

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