



# Overtourism: Instagram's language and images consequence as an instrument for commodifying tourism sites in the Indonesian Archipelago

Merry Andriani

Faculty of Cultural Sciences, University of Gadjah Mada, Indonesia  
Corresponding author. Email: [merry.andriani@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:merry.andriani@mail.ugm.ac.id)

## Abstract

This study is a preliminary study of phenomena that are often found in various archipelago areas in Indonesia related to tourist attractions that are popular thanks to being promoted through Instagram social media. Frequently this popularity causes various impacts that can be categorized in several sectors. This study uses the concept of overtourism proposed by UNWTO with a post-structural discourse analysis approach. These two perspectives are needed to examine data consisting of Instagram threads and online media news regarding new tourism sites as well as those in the Super Destination category that are experiencing overtourism in several regions of the archipelago. The method used is descriptive-qualitative by utilizing intertextuality and interdiscursivity techniques. The results found were Overtourism led to increased commodification of tourist sites in the Indonesian Archipelago; Instagram is one of the media which is the most effective tourism commodification instrument; the positive impact of overtourism on increasing the income of local residents at tourist sites; negative impact on the environment and the quality of tourism sites.

**Keywords:** *Overtourism; archipelago; Indonesian Tourism; Instagram; commodification*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the many economic sectors that has been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and has experienced a total suspension of activities for approximately three years. So after the pandemic ended, there was a surge in tourist visits in several destinations, until experiencing another Overtourism in Indonesia, (Yamin, 2023). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) report, Overtourism is a term that was first proposed by Rafat Ali, Skift (UNWTO, 2018) in 2018 and later trademarked this term. Overtourism according to Skift is a new construct that needs to be considered as a potential threat to the consequences of world-famous tourist destinations that can be uncontrollable, to the economy, environment and sociocultural influence on local communities (Ali, 2018). The phenomenon of overtourism has grown very rapidly in the last five years, but was briefly stopped during the Covid pandemic. This can also be observed in Indonesia, for example in Yogyakarta. The number of post-pandemic tourist visits has matched, even for certain destinations has exceeded the number of visits before the pandemic.

New destinations in some tourist destination provinces are emerging and becoming popular quickly due to the trend of social media conversations with the use of linguistic features as keywords, hashtag tagging and geo-tagging features. These features help travelers to find recommendations for interesting places to visit in a tourist destination city. Many scholars have examined the issue of overtourism from various perspectives. For the Indonesian context, from the perspective of tourism management, which believes that overtourism is a necessity that must be faced in tourism management in Indonesia, which has a high population growth (Sutanto

& Setiadi, 2020). Popular tourist sites are also not spared from this phenomenon, for example, Borobudur temple. The increase in the number of tourist visits can endanger the structure of the temple building so that the government must make new regulations to better regulate visits, a penta helix analysis of the overtourism situation in Borobudur was researched by Rachmat et al. (Ersya Fadilla Rachmat et al., 2021). The outbreak of the overtourism phenomenon was then felt by the local population, albeit temporarily (Purwandani & Pakan, 2022). They are forced to experience difficulties traveling in their own city if it is during the weekend, or there is a long holiday.

The impact of overtourism on local residents also occurs in various other major destinations in the world, such as in Brazil, Barcelona, Venice, and many others. Despite the statement that it is only occur in a minority number of destinations, it is unavoidable happening now at regional scale accordingly to the rapid growth of birth in Indonesian Archipelago. Socio-economic studies on this construct are also carried out by involving various parties such as stakeholders, governments and communities, such as the analysis conducted by Loverio with the Sagada case study in the Phillipines (Loverio et al., 2023). Then Pareira also analyzed demographics and their relationship with socio-economic factors for local residents in the coastal areas of Brazil which are the main tourist destinations to the country (Pereira et al., 2022).

Various uses of information technology that have an impact on overtourism have also been researched by several scholars, such as O Regan who examines social movements on twitter with the hastag overtourism (O'Regan & Choe, 2023). Then Youjeong Oh examined the use of Instagram, especially the aesthetic aspects that are popular through Insta-gaze to the contestation of changes in the city of Woljeong in South Korea (Oh, 2022). The connection between the use of Instagram and tourism promotion in the Indonesian context has also been widely studied (Handayani & Adelvia, 2020; Santoso et al., 2022). However, the majority of this research comes from studies in the humanities which tend to validate the effectiveness of social media such as Instagram as an effective tourist destination promotion instrument to attract tourists. In the search for preliminary research of this studies, no studies from the field of Linguistics have been found that examine the role of linguistic components as instruments of commodification of tourist sites in Indonesia.

Overtourism lead or caused over-commodification at certain tourism site or beautiful site in the region of Indonesian archipelago. This phenomenon lately aggravate by the massif used of Instagram and the Geo-tagging among millennial generation or Z generation. This research is trying to describe the linguistic aspects as cause and consequences of the tourism promotion on Instagram, notably those that lead to cause overtourism on the archipelago.

## **2. METHOD**

In the early stages of this preliminary research, observations were made of several cities that have tourist destinations that are popular and visited by tourists. Observations made include not only tourist destinations, visitors, visiting times, but also the reactions of local residents to tourists or visitors who travel at certain times. Based on the observation data, several destinations were selected that were not only popular but also widely reported in the press and social media. The choice of social media used was determined to be Instagram, with the consideration that this media has a more aesthetic visual aspect than other social media platforms, and is widely popular in Indonesia. Instagram through influencer accounts or travel agent bureaus are more widely used as tourism promotion instruments.

Through Instagram media, the data filter used is the hastag feature and geo-tagging of popular tourist destinations such as Bali, Borodubur and Labuan Bajo. The data collected through social media is then classified according to the categories of types of linguistic features used and the discourse that dominates online conversations related to tourist destinations identified as experiencing overtourism. This data was then analyzed using the Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity methods by crossing the texts from the social media with Press Media articles relevant to the discourse theme. The analysis of all the data resulted in a classification of linguistic features that correlated with various indications of overtourism, which will be presented in the next section of this article.

### 3. DISCUSSION

The people of Yogyakarta experienced a social phenomenon that attracted a lot of public attention, with many local tourists visiting a flower garden after an Instagram social media posts featuring aesthetic photos of the place in 2016. The story behind this temporary flower garden is an important socio-cultural and socio-economic study, especially for tourism studies. The flower garden was located in someone's yard and was not intended as a tourist attraction. However, with the many uploads of selfie photos that later trended as aesthetic photos, more and more young people, especially from generation Z and millennial, come there just to take pictures. The crowds of visitors and the absence of management and regulation of the flow of visits made the owner of the house overwhelmed, and found the flower garden damaged by trampling visitors. Until soon this flower garden was forced to close. At that time, many articles and national media coverage also wrote about this phenomenon. But none of the media used the term overtourism to refer to or name this phenomenon. The following data from media press show the reality of the flower garden after it was crowded and trampled (left picture), and the right photo shows the aesthetic side of the picture, and people taking selfies for social media uploads.

#### Data 1



Sources :

<https://www.goodnewsfromindonesia.id/2017/11/01/in-gat-taman-bunga-di-gunungkidul-yang-hancur-diinjak-injak-tahun-lalu-ini-kondisinya-kini>



Sources :

<https://www.antarafoto.com/id/view/736097/wisata-kebun-bunga-amarilis>

**Figure 1.** People are taking selfie in some photo spots.

But a year later, in 2017, the owner of the flower garden reopened his yard to visitors with flowers in bloom. Having learned from the previous years' experience, the garden owner began to commodify it by utilizing the crowds of visitors as a source of income, not only for himself, but also for the community around the house, neighbors who were involved in arranging visitors, parking vehicles, and selling small food or drinks in the vicinity. Some promotional posts on social media are also more visible in term of the management and marketing strategy. This story is one example of managing a tourist site that is experiencing overcrowding with a local wisdom approach in the strong Javanese cultural tradition in collective community life, always prioritizing socio-cultural harmony. As we can see the solution to this phenomenon of overtourism, in a small scale, could benefit to the stakeholders, society, environment, and also not to forget the tourists.

As stated by (Peeters et al., 2018) in a study on Overtourism in Europe for the European Union, the solution to the problem of overtourism is not merely how to organize overcrowding better. It is more important to note that there is an urge to make the tourism education more responsible and sustainable. In practice, what is empirically found in the field is the lack of clarity of public policy on this matter in tourist destinations. Likewise, in general, it is rare to find educational discourses needed by tourists. Often in every tourist

destination, local people complain about the behavior of visitors who are outside their daily routines. These tourists often feel the euphoria of the holiday atmosphere and do things that they cannot do in their place of origin. For example, in Bali, it is often reported that drunken foreign tourists do things that can damage the atmosphere and the surrounding environment. Travelers who have good or bad experiences in a tourist destination, with the ease of information technology such as through social media, can easily and quickly share their experiences with various narratives and language devices. Sometimes the Instagram posts do not match the reality that actually happened at the location, as described in the following data:

## Data 2



Image source:  
<https://news.detik.com/berita-jawa-tengah/d-4517562/long-weekend-ini-penampakan-wisatawan-jejali-gua-pindul-gumungkidul>



Image source:  
<https://instagram.com/#guapindulyogyakarta>

**Figure 2.** Social media feeds do not always tell the actual condition.

In addition to uploads using photos and captions, Instagram users usually also include several keywords by combining them with the hashtag feature, which is useful for expanding access to uploads, opening them up to all users of the social media platform around the world. The following data shows the lexical component as the linguistic feature with the highest occurrence rate on Instagram, which contains at least 1 million posts.

**Data 03:** Lexical components founds in Instagram with the greatest number of posts are as follow:

Hastags #+destination; Instagramable: #instagramable+city; Photospot: #Photospots+city; Hidden Gem: #hiddengem (1,533,158 posts) #hidden+city; Explore: #explore+city; Destination : #destination+name ; Hits, Kekinian, Jelajah, Info ; Pesona, Trip; Wisata : #wisata+city; Sea, Beach; Pantai : +city, +Indonesia; Glamping : +city; Liburan : +asik, +seru, +hemat, +murah, +anak, +yuk, +keluarga, +city; Travel : #+city

Another linguistic component character that is commonly found is the syntactic element that dominantly uses persuasive sentences. The narrative used involves a storytelling strategy in the photo caption, as is often used by influencers. Detailed visual descriptions are also found in photo uploads and captions on Instagram. Some accounts even include links to blog posts as can be seen in the data below:

**Data 04**

Image sources :  
<https://news.detik.com/berita/d-1771167/borobudur-terancam-dicabut-dari-warisan-dunia-warning-bagi-pengelola>



Image sources :  
<https://taliasbucketlist.blog/my-ultimate-java-6-day-itinerary/>

**Figure 3.** Aesthetic photo uploads on Instagram are very far from the reality.

In the data above, it can be seen that the aesthetic photo uploads on Instagram are very far from the reality that is likely to be encountered at tourist sites, such as Borobudur. The case of overtourism and overcrowd that continues to increase until it is threatened with revocation of its status as a world heritage site, has made the government issue a new tariff regulation in 2022. The increase in the price of Borobudur ticket tariffs from 50 thousand rupiah to 750 thousand rupiah for local tourists, and 25 USD to 100 USD for foreign tourists, had become a polemic (Polemics over Borobudur Temple Tariff Increase, Tuai Pro Kontra Berujung Ditunda Page All - Kompas.Com, n.d.). The same thing happened in Labuan Bajo, the picture can be seen in the data below:

**Data 05**

Image sources :  
[https://www.routard.com/photos/indonesie/1523875-randonnee\\_sur\\_l\\_ile\\_de\\_palau\\_padar.htm](https://www.routard.com/photos/indonesie/1523875-randonnee_sur_l_ile_de_palau_padar.htm)



Image sources  
<https://www.la-croix.com/environnement/Indonesie-Labuan-Bajo-menace-devenir-nouveau-Bali-2023-03-05-1201257807>

**Figure 4.** The image uploads do not always relevant to overall grounds condition.

The discourse found through Instagram posts generally seeks to project the beauty and comfort of a travel experience. This is different from reviews through the Google platform which sometimes still display a critical discourse of experience. Posts on social media also display a representation of the social capital of its users. The upper middle socio-economic class is identical to displaying the luxury side of tourism, for example in Labuan Bajo, which also like Borobudur has experienced extraordinary commodification after being popular on social media as a luxury destination. This can also be seen as a promotional effort and marketing tool on the one hand, and on the other hand creating realism that does not reflect the real reality. In some cases, it is even used to cover up the reality on the ground, which is not always beautiful and comfortable, as shown in the list of discourse elements found on the data as follow:

**Data 06:** Discourse elements: Projection of beauty and wellbeing; Social capital representation; Promoting and marketing tools; Creating imaginary realism that is not relate to the reality itself; Conceiving “ugly” reality.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The results found were Overtourism led to increased commodification of tourist sites in the Indonesian Archipelago; Instagram is one of the media which is the most effective tourism commodification instrument; the linguistics features use in Instagram consist of lexical component and syntax persuasive component. The positive impact of overtourism on increasing the income of local residents at tourist sites; negative impact on the environment, the quality of tourism sites and the gentrification.

#### 5. REFERENCES

- [1] Ali, R. (2018, August 14). *The Genesis of Overtourism: Why We Came Up With the Term and What's Happened Since*. Skift. <https://skift.com/2018/08/14/the-genesis-of-overtourism-why-we-came-up-with-the-term-and-whats-happened-since/>
- [2] Ersya Fadilla Rachmat, Sutono, A., & Renalmon Hutahaean. (2021). Overtourism Phenomenon at Borobudur Temple Based on The Penta Helix Perspectives. *Jurnal Kepariwisata: Destinasi, Hospitalitas Dan Perjalanan*, 5(1), 48–57. <https://doi.org/10.34013/jk.v5i1.263>
- [3] Handayani, F., & Adelvia, K. (2020). Instagram Tourism: Menciptakan Hype Pada Destinasi Wisata (Studi Pada Akun @Indoflashlight). *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi dan Media*, 24(2), 105. <https://doi.org/10.31445/jskm.2020.2856>
- [4] Loverio, J. P., Chen, L.-H., & Shen, C.-C. (2023). Stakeholder collaboration, a solution to overtourism? A case study on Sagada, the Philippines. *Tourism Geographies*, 25(4), 947–968. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2021.2023209>
- [5] Oh, Y. (2022). Insta-Gaze: Aesthetic representation and contested transformation of Woljeong, South Korea. *Tourism Geographies*, 24(6–7), 1040–1060. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2021.1974931>
- [6] O'Regan, M., & Choe, J. (2023). #overtourism on Twitter: A social movement for change or an echo chamber? *Current Issues in Tourism*, 26(7), 1082–1095. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2022.2047161>
- [7] Peeters, P., Gössling, S., Klijs, J., Milano, C., Novelli, M., Dijkmans, C., Eijgelaar, E., Hartman, S., Heslinga, J., Isaac, R., Mitas, O., Moretti, S., Nawijn, J., Papp, B., & Postma, A. (2018). Research for TRAN Committee—Overtourism: Impact and possible policy responses. *European Union*.
- [8] Pereira, T., Berselli, C., Pereira, L. A., & Limberger, P. F. (2022). Overtourism: An Analysis of Demographic and Socioeconomic Factors with the Evasion Indicators of Residents in Brazilian Coastal Destinations. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 19(6), 526–549. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2022.2027510>
- [9] *Polemik Kenaikan Tarif Candi Borobudur, Tuai Pro Kontra Berujung Ditunda Halaman all—Kompas.com*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 2, 2023, from

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2022/06/11/10541241/polemik-kenaikan-tarif-candi-borobudur-tuai-pro-kontra-berujung-ditunda?page=all>

- [10] Purwandani, I., & Pakan, S. P. (2022). Local habitus and temporal overtourism in Yogyakarta. *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*, 17(4), 544–560. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CBTH-07-2021-0177>
- [11] Santoso, A., Sulistyawati, A. I., & Vydia, V. (2022). Instagram as Social Media and His Role in The Tourism Promotion. *Indonesian Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*. <https://doi.org/10.17358/ijbe.8.3.415>
- [12] Sutanto, H., & Setiadi, N. J. (2020). Overtourism Sebagai Keniscayaan Dalam Pengelolaan Pariwisata di Indonesia. *Jurnal Altasia*, Vol. 2, No. 2.
- [13] UNWTO. (2018). 'Overtourism'? – *Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions, Executive Summary*.
- [14] Yamin, M. (2023). Overtourism in Indonesia after the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sociología Y Tecnociencia*.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

