

# Empirical Analysis of Destination Image Through Tiktok Video Comments

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## **Abstract**

*This study examines the role of comments on the TikTok social media platform in shaping the image of tourist destinations, focusing on Borobudur Temple, a world heritage site in Indonesia. A thematic analysis of comments on TikTok reveals the public's perception of Borobudur Temple as a historical destination enriched with spiritual values and myths. Terms such as "myth" and "belief" predominate, highlighting the temple's uniqueness and religious backdrop. Social media, particularly TikTok, plays a crucial role in shaping these perceptions. By understanding and addressing these perceptions, marketing strategies on digital platforms can be more effective, enhancing the global appeal of Borobudur Temple. The overall findings underscore the power of social media in shaping the image of tourist destinations and provide recommendations for stakeholders in the tourism industry.*

*Keywords: TikTok, Borobudur, tourist perception, social media, destination image*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourist destinations are places or areas tourists visit for recreation, vacation, and other temporary purposes (Cronjé & du Plessis, 2020; Mazanec et al., 2007). Tourists have several preferences before visiting tourist destinations, including attractions, accessibility, facilities, costs, availability of information, and reviews or recommendations (Humagain & Singleton, 2021). Reviews, attractions, and recommendations are closely related to the image of tourist destinations (Segota, Chen, & Golja, 2022). According to (T. T. Li, Liu, and Soutar, 2021), the destination image influences tourist decisions and expectations. In the digital era, social media has become one of the most influential instruments in forming destination images (Garay, 2019; M. S. Lin, Liang, Xue, Pan, & Schroeder, 2021). Previous research explains that the extensive and dynamic network makes information in social media spread quickly (Song, Park, & Park, 2021). Every post, tweet, or story can influence tourists' perceptions of a destination (M. S. Lin et al., 2021; Song et al., 2021).

The evolution of social media has redefined how we access and share information. TikTok has become one of the most used social media platforms for seeking various information (Social, 2023). According to (Social, 2023), TikTok is the primary choice because it presents personalized content based on the application's interactions, preferences, and user behavior. Users can interact with each other by utilizing duet features, comments, and videos. This makes the conveyed information spread quickly. According to (Farrukh et al., 2022), tourists pay close attention to comments in the decision-making process about tourist destinations.

Comments on TikTok content, whether videos or posts, often reflect public perceptions and responses to TikTok content (Roostika & Yumna, 2023). (Abbasi et al., 2023) explain that comments can be indicators of emotional and cognitive responses to content. Comments and reviews from tourists significantly impact tourist expectations and decisions (Lam, Ismail, & Lee, 2020). Positive comments can increase trust and interest in visiting a tourist destination, as can negative

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comments (Setiawan et al., 2021). (Goyal & Taneja, 2023) state that tourists tend to trust peer reviews more than advertisements or promotions. This indicates that comments and reviews have authentic power in influencing tourist perceptions. By analyzing comments on TikTok social media, researchers can identify positive and negative aspects of the perceived destination image (Garay, 2019; M. S. Lin et al., 2021).

Previous research found that on the TripAdvisor website, online reviews and recommendations significantly impact tourists' perceptions of a destination (Abbasi et al., 2023; Marine-Roig & Huertas, 2020). This indicates that positive reviews enhance a positive image (Setiawan et al., 2021). Digital word of mouth on social media can influence destination image and visit intentions (Abbasi et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2021). Previous research found that comments from friends or family have a greater influence than comments from strangers (Goyal & Taneja, 2023). Therefore, comments play an important role in shaping the destination image. However, there is still a research gap in the context of social media (Nautiyal, Albrecht, & Carr, 2022). With the emergence of new social media like TikTok, similar research needs to be conducted on different social media platforms. This aims to understand how TikTok can influence the destination image.

Most previous research has focused on comments on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter (Goyal & Taneja, 2023; Nautiyal et al., 2022). Research on TikTok has received less attention. The phenomenon in Indonesia is that TikTok has become a popular social media platform (Social, 2023). In addition, TikTok has a unique content format that is expected to influence destination image formation uniquely. The dynamics of TikTok's virality are interesting to note. Therefore, this research aims to identify the relationship between comments on TikTok and the destination image. On the academic side, this research will expand knowledge about the influence of comments on social media on the formation of destination images. On the practitioner side, this research will provide recommendations to tourism industry stakeholders on utilizing feedback from TikTok comments to enhance the destination image.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Destination Image and Social Media***

The destination image is a concept that has been widely researched related to tourism and marketing (M. S. Lin et al., 2021; Song et al., 2021). Therefore, the concept is complex and multifaceted, with many variables influencing its formation and impact on tourist behavior (Pan, Rasouli, & Timmermans, 2021). One of the early studies on destination image explains that there are two main components of the destination image: organic attributes and induced attributes (Crompton, 1979). Organic attributes refer to information or perceptions formed without being influenced by marketing efforts (Crompton, 1979; Karri & Dogra, 2023). With technological advances, these attributes can come from online reviews (Song et al., 2021), travel blogs (Gholamhosseinzadeh, Chapuis, & Lehu, 2023), and social media content (Lam et al., 2020) created by tourists. Meanwhile, induced attributes refer to information or perceptions formed due to marketing efforts (Hsu & Scott, 2020). The use of influencers and travel content creators is an effort to combine both elements (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2023). In addition to conveying personal and authentic experiences, they also collaborate with tourism bureaus. Examining the destination image on social media is important because it can shape perceptions and tourist decisions (Nautiyal et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2021). This will provide knowledge for destination managers to design authentic, targeted, and effective marketing strategies (Lam et al., 2020).

Social media plays a key role in shaping the destination image through various ways, such as User-Generated Content (UGC), eWOM, and influencer marketing (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2023). In addition, social media communicates and manages destination images through Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) (Xiao, Fang, Lin, & Chen, 2022). In social media, the comment feature allows for exchanging information and forming more dynamic and interactive perceptions (Song et al., 2021). As a result, websites like Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor, Twitter, and TikTok impact how people perceive a trip. This makes it essential to develop and manage sites with social media profiles. Recent research has not explored tourist engagement in comments to create destination image perceptions on social media (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2023). Hence, this study aims to examine the role of comments in TikTok content in forming destination images, considering hashtags.

### ***Tiktok and Hashtag***

TikTok is known for its engaging short video content, often easily recognizable by social media users (Zhou, Sotiriadis, & Shen, 2023). Like other social media, TikTok has significant potential to influence tourist perceptions and promote tourist destinations (Y. Li, 2021). Its unique characteristics and broad user base allow tourist destinations to shape their image in the minds of tourists (Social, 2023). Hashtags are key elements that

can make a video or content go viral (Zhang, 2021). The hashtag feature allows TikTok users to categorize, search, and participate in content trends (Merga, 2021; Zhang, 2021).

Generally, the function of hashtags on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter serves to (1) assist users in finding and interacting with content that is relevant and appealing to them; (2) Enable users to participate in global challenges and trends, creating unity and cohesion in shared content; (3) Connect users with similar interests and preferences, facilitating the formation of virtual communities and discussions (Nautiyal et al., 2022; Zhang, 2021). Based on these functions, hashtags can assist tourist destinations in promoting positive attributes and unique experiences offered by the destination (Chenchen, Yurong, Die, & Zhenqiang, 2020; Sheng, Zhang, Shi, Qiu, & Yao, 2020). Considering the vital role of hashtags in forming and managing destination images by connecting tourist experiences and perceptions with marketing communication strategies, in-depth research is needed to understand how tourists and marketers interact through the use of hashtags and how the role of hashtags can be optimized (Nautiyal et al., 2022; Wengel et al., 2022).

### ***Hashtags and Destination Image***

According to Nautiyal et al. (2022), hashtags serve as a "tag" for meta-communicative that categorizes and organizes information, allowing users to navigate content more efficiently and find relevant topics. The relationship between hashtags and tourist destinations is closely knit (Merga, 2021). The use of hashtags can assist in building awareness and creating a positive image of a destination (Y. Li, 2021). Another crucial role of hashtags is that they can be used to encourage local community participation in promoting tourist destinations (Tiago, Couto, Faria, & Borges-Tiago, 2018). Hashtags have become an essential tool in digital marketing strategies and communication on social media (Nautiyal et al., 2022; Tiago et al., 2018). However, research on the use of hashtags in creating the image of tourist destinations is still limited and has not received enough attention, especially on the TikTok social media platform (Wengel et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023). Research with this focus can provide valuable insights into how tourists interact with destination content on social media and how DMOs can utilize hashtags to promote their destinations effectively.

### **METHODS**

This study conducts a hashtag analysis or content analysis used in publicly available TikTok videos to track the destination image of Borobudur Temple. This study refrains from using the online site to limit any potential impact on TikTok users. As a social media platform, TikTok is known for its ability to allow users to create and share short videos instantly (Wengel et al., 2022). First, TikTok emphasizes creativity and visual expression, allowing users to express their information and opinions through video content (Zhou et al., 2023). Second, TikTok has become a popular platform among researchers. Therefore, further research is needed better to understand the dynamics and social issues through visual media. Lastly, TikTok is unique in its creation approach; users can showcase various aspects of a destination, positive or negative (Roostika & Yumna, 2023). This differs from other platforms like Instagram, which only focuses on positive images.

The data analysis consists of video content uploaded within 2023, with the data retrieval process conducted from October 15 to November 15, 2023. By registering for TikTok, agreeing to its Terms and Conditions, and utilizing TikTok, users have consented that their videos are in the public domain for an unspecified period. Users of TikTok can make brief films that last from a few seconds to three minutes, and hashtags are used to emphasize points, summarize the entire message, and facilitate text and video mining. With its focus on visual and audio content, TikTok provides a platform that allows users to communicate their messages and stories through a medium different from text, often creating a more direct and emotional narrative that can be a rich data source for further research analysis.

However, there is still a limited understanding of the qualitative interpretation of hashtags in the context of tourism. Hashtags have been investigated quantitatively across several fields utilizing data retrieval software. Compared to quantitative studies, data analysis can be done with a relatively small sample to understand the in-depth qualitative interpretation of tourism and TikTok. Additionally, hashtags might be considered sufficient if you use a practical strategy and inductive coding for your qualitative study. The "pre-processing" phase motivated the methodology utilized in this case. Currently, hashtags are normalized for easier categorization by comprehending acronyms, punctuation, spelling mistakes, and unclear terminology. Subsequently, summative content analysis is used to quantify findings that have been interpreted qualitatively. Data collected in the form of comments will be analyzed using qualitative methods, which may include coding or thematic analysis. This analysis will search for themes or patterns emerging from user comments to provide

further insight into their perceptions and experiences, which can be used further to understand the destination image in the context of TikTok.

The keyword for data search used is #Borobudur. More than 50 video contents uploaded between 2022 and 2023 were found. On average, the data collected were comments in Indonesian. Additionally, 30 videos were selected based on high engagement levels, encompassing more than 500 likes and 300 comments on each video. The researcher considers this to be the level of engagement indicating active users interested in the shared content (Roostika & Yumna, 2023; Wengel et al., 2022). Therefore, the total sample used in this study is 2,000 comments from 20 videos about Borobudur. The collected comment data will be analyzed using the thematic analysis method in the data analysis stage. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify, analyze, and report specific theme patterns within data. In this study, the thematic analysis will examine TikTok users' comments related to videos about Borobudur Temple concerning destination images. The NVivo 12 application will assist the thematic analysis process. This application enables a comprehensive analysis process and a level of validity that can be accounted for.

## RESULT

### *Destination: Candi Borobudur*

Borobudur temple is located in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia. Borobudur temple is the largest Buddhist monument in the world and has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site (Hermawan, Salim, Rohman, & Rahayu, 2016). This building was constructed in the 8th to 9th centuries during the Shailendra dynasty era (UNESCO, 2012). This majestic structure is beautifully carved, featuring over 2,600 relief panels and 504 Buddha statues (UNESCO, 2012). This tourist destination has become a center of attention and admiration from domestic and international tourists. The main attractions of Borobudur temple include destination architecture, reliefs depicting the Lalitavistara story (the life of Buddha), and mesmerizing sunrise views (Hermawan et al., 2016). Every year, the Borobudur temple becomes a place of worship for the waisak religious event. This attracts many tourists and pilgrims (Hermawan, Salim, Rohman, & Rahayu, 2019). Accommodations around the destination continue growing and are divided into various options, from economical to luxurious. The role of social media has enhanced the visibility and appeal of Borobudur temple. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok become media for sharing visual and narrative tourist experiences (Yuliarti et al., 2021). The presence of social media ensures that promotional activities and maintaining interest in cultural heritage continue to grow (Garay, 2019). Contains theories, concepts, and conclusions from other studies that support and are needed in writing articles

### *World Cloud Analysis*

The word cloud analysis results indicate that Borobudur Temple is perceived as a historical destination imbued with spiritual value and mythological significance. Dominant terms such as "dulu," "jaman," "naik," and "nyentuh" highlight the active interactions and explorative experiences tourists feel when visiting Borobudur Temple. Moreover, "mitos" and "percaya" reveal the religious background and mythological narratives associated with Borobudur Temple. Terms such as "stupa," "stone," and "statue" underscore specific aspects of Borobudur Temple that captivate tourists.

Comments on the TikTok platform regarding Borobudur Temple demonstrate the active role of social media in shaping the perceptions and image of tourist destinations (Chenchen et al., 2020; Wengel et al., 2022). The term "cool" signifies positive appreciation, confirming that Borobudur Temple is an appealing destination to visit. Consequently, marketing and promoting Borobudur Temple on digital platforms should consider these nuances to enhance visitor interest and understanding of the richness and uniqueness of this world heritage site.

Previous research suggests that Borobudur Temple is recognized as the world's largest Buddhist monument, boasting magnificent architecture and profound relief narratives (Damanik & Yusuf, 2022). Traditional visitors tend to understand and appreciate the historical and cultural facets of the temple (Ghassani, Rahadi, & Jatmika, 2020). Positive or negative reviews can influence an individual's decision to visit a destination (Pandey & Sahu, 2020; Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Hall, & Hatamifar, 2021). In the context of Borobudur Temple, comments on TikTok emphasizing aspects like "cool," "myth," and "exploration" have contributed to promoting a positive image of the temple as an attractive place to visit.



Figure 1. World Cloud Analysis

**Thematic Analysis**

Table 1 elucidates various aspects focused upon in comments regarding the tourist destination of Borobudur Temple. Within the realm of history and cultural heritage, numerous comments spotlight the classical era of the destination. This underscores the significant role of its unique architecture and exemplifies how dominant culture shapes the image of the said destination (Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019). Furthermore, the perspectives of spirituality and religiosity, myths, legends, and religious values significantly influence the construction of the destination's image. This suggests that history, folklore, and spiritual beliefs appeal strongly to tourists (Boz, 2020). Calvi and Hover (2022) expound that tourist destinations succeeding in integrating and promoting these elements in marketing will attract a larger number of tourists.

**Table 1. Thematic Analysis**

| Description                          | Frequency |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>History and Cultural Heritage</b> |           |
| Classic Era                          | 41        |
| Unique Architecture                  | 15        |
| Cultural Relics                      | 65        |
| <b>Spirituality and Religiosity</b>  |           |
| Myths and Legends                    | 32        |
| Religious Values                     | 16        |
| <b>Tourist Experience</b>            |           |
| Interaction and Exploration          | 55        |
| Overall Experience                   | 46        |
| Challenges                           | 31        |
| <b>Environment and Atmosphere</b>    |           |
| Natural Beauty                       | 44        |
| Tranquillity                         | 12        |
| Preservation                         | 9         |
| <b>Social Interaction</b>            |           |
| Local Interaction                    | 10        |
| Tourist Community                    | 43        |

Source: research data, 2023

In the context of tourist experiences, direct interactions and exploration of destinations are highly valued by tourists (Domínguez-Quintero, González-Rodríguez, & Paddison, 2020; H. Lin, Zhang, Gursoy, & Fu, 2019; Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019). The overall experience is crucial in forming profound impressions (Bec et al., 2019). Moreover, challenges related to accessibility or weather conditions are of concern to tourists. This indicates that tourists seek a holistic and comprehensive experience when visiting Borobudur Temple. Therefore, service providers are expected to deliver satisfying experiences. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that tourists pay

attention to minute details and potential obstacles they might encounter. Hence, destination managers must ensure that all aspects of the tourist journey are optimized to provide the best experience for tourists.

Comments from TikTok users hold immense power in influencing the perceptions of potential tourists. Positive comments can solidify a favorable image, while negative remarks can have the opposite effect (Setiawan et al., 2021). By understanding recurrent topics in comments, insights can be gleaned about what visitors value most, aiding in future marketing strategies and the development of tourist destinations. The section contains the analysis results and an interpretation or discussion of the analysis results. A structured, detailed, and concise explanation allows readers to follow the flow of analysis and researcher thinking (Shafiee, Rajabzadeh Ghatari, & Hasanzadeh, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

Social media shapes perceptions about tourist destinations such as Borobudur Temple. This indicates that digital platforms have become the primary choice for sourcing information (Chenchen et al., 2020; Wengel et al., 2022). This coincides with tourists seeking active interactions and immersive experiences when visiting destinations (Ghassani et al., 2020). The presence of historical elements, myths, and spirituality in tourist destinations is an attraction for tourists. Additionally, challenges like accessibility and weather conditions necessitate effective destination management. (Damanik & Yusuf, 2022; Pandey & Sahu, 2020). Positive and negative reviews significantly influence tourists' decisions (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). These findings provide valuable insights for academia.

Based on analysis outcomes, Borobudur Temple emerges as a tourist destination enriched with historical heritage, spiritual values, and myths. This is reinforced by the dominance of specific terms in the Word Cloud, such as "dulu" (past), "jaman" (era), and "mitos" (myth). Interactive and exploratory elements are primary attractions for tourists, as evidenced by words like "naik" (ascend) and "nyentuh" (touch). Social media, especially TikTok, plays a key role in framing the public's image and perception of Borobudur Temple. With increasing positive appreciation for this destination, stakeholders must ensure effective marketing and promotional strategies on digital platforms, highlighting the wealth and uniqueness of Borobudur Temple.

Moreover, aspects like history, myths, and spirituality are the primary attractions for tourists. Service providers need to recognize and address this by offering holistic and satisfying experiences for visitors. In conclusion, comments and reviews on social media hold immense power in influencing potential tourists' perceptions, and by appropriately understanding and responding to these findings, tourist destinations like Borobudur Temple can continue to grow and enhance their global appeal.

This study aims to examine the role of comments on TikTok's social media in shaping the image of tourist destinations. The research focus is Borobudur Temple, a world heritage site in Indonesia. Comments on TikTok content often reflect public perceptions and responses, indicating emotional and cognitive reactions to the content. The methodology employed includes a thematic analysis of comments collected from these videos. The word cloud analysis reveals that Borobudur Temple is viewed as a historical destination with spiritual values and myths. Dominant terms such as "myth" and "belief" highlight the religious backdrop and mythological stories associated with Borobudur Temple. Marketing and promotion of Borobudur Temple on digital platforms should consider these perceptions to enhance visitors' interest and understanding. This research also underscores the importance of understanding how social media, especially TikTok, can influence tourist destination perceptions and provides recommendations to tourism industry stakeholders on leveraging insights from TikTok comments to enhance destination imagery. The conclusions of the findings of this study are written briefly, concisely, and concisely without additional new interpretations. This section can also contain the novelty of the research, its advantages and disadvantages, and recommendations for further research.

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