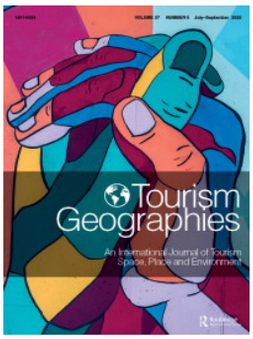

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Commodification of photogenic sites and rise of 'selfie parks' as tourist enclaves

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**ABSTRACT**

The spatial practices of tourists have been reshaped by the rise of smartphones and social media, prompting new geographies of tourism that respond to the visual imperatives of the digital era. This paper explores the emergence of 'selfie parks' as purpose-built, enclavic spaces designed to accommodate social media-induced tourists. Positioned at the intersection of visual culture and spatial production, selfie parks represent a novel form of place-making driven by the aesthetics and performativity of Instagrammability. Drawing on empirical fieldwork in Bali, this study examines how these photographic enclaves reconfigure tourism space by concentrating visual consumption into managed, commodified zones. Contrary to earlier critiques of tourist enclaves, which highlight issues such as socio-spatial segregation and high economic leakages, this research demonstrates how selfie parks can enable local communities to effectively manage the economic opportunity that social media-induced visitors may offer, as well as providing a safe and convenient atmosphere. Furthermore, it considers how spatial interventions such as controlled entry schemes can help mitigate the pressures of overtourism in destinations experiencing high demand from social media-induced tourists. This study is the first to consider selfie parks as tourism enclaves, while contributing to literature on visual production and management of tourists.

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## 1. Introduction

Spaces have emerged in recent years that cater specifically to travelers seeking photographic opportunities that enable the curation and manipulation of their appearance and identity in accordance with dominant stylized aesthetics as perpetuated across social networking sites (SNSs) such as Instagram. More recently, SNSs have inspired highly mimicked travel behaviors within destinations where travelers seek to imitate travel images created and posted by influencers and peers (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019; Oh, 2022; Siegel et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2024). To this end, travel practices

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have morphed. Selfies have emerged as a ubiquitous practice and the risks that some take to capture the perfect photographs have become extreme as they dangle over cliffs and hang off trains amongst other risk-taking behaviors to capture the perfect selfie. Such behaviors, according to Bansal et al. (2018), have led to 259 deaths between 2011 and 2017 alone.

Such is the demand and desire to curate one's own alternative, aestheticized identity, that dedicated spaces like 'selfie museums' have emerged that not only to facilitate the curation of desirable identities and social relationships at 'home' and experienced first-hand, but importantly, in desirable, harder to reach destinations. For instance, Leaver et al. (2020) describe a café in Shenzhen that provides visitors with a luxurious bathrobe and a photo backdrop from the view of a high-rise hotel in Hong Kong or the skyline of Osaka for RMB88 per half-hour slot. It is important to recognize the breadth and depth of influence that SNSs (in particular, Instagram) have in relation to the drive towards achieving the aestheticized travel self and the practices that some will undertake to achieve this through 'Instatravel'; a form of virtual travel that is undertaken principally for SNS kudos.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of tourism is the economic benefits a destination receives in the form of tourism expenditures. However, there is a moral gap if a place is solely used for photographic purposes and there is little other interaction between the visitors and the place (Deery et al., 2012). Bruner (2005, p. 192) discusses 'tourist borderzones' as the spaces where natives and tourists come to interact.

Although these spaces cater to modern demand for 'Instagrammable' selfie-style content, there are additional potential sensitivities that should be considered including commodification of space, safety and social impacts on local communities, which this study will investigate. Saarinen and Wall-Reinius (2019) call for more research that analyzes linkages and flows of labor goods, scales of capital, planning and regulations, and locals' land and resource access in the respect of bordering and privatization of tourist enclaves.

This paper is structured around a cause-and-effect scenario that explores two main areas: 1) the impetus to develop dedicated spaces for social media-induced tourists, and 2) tourism enclaves for photography (and content creation) as a potential solution in relevant places. The study will also illuminate why spaces for social media-induced tourists are increasingly necessary and will then explore a variety of tourist borderzones as a salient solution in certain places in the form of tourism enclaves. Within tourist photography, borderzones can unfold as selfie parks, which are defined as dedicated spaces (indoor or outdoor) that provide visitors with visually appealing backdrops perfect for photography, especially photos of the self. This paper will explore the affordances of selfie parks that separate them from other types of tourist enclaves. Past arguments against tourist enclaves will be reexamined against the unique functions of selfie parks, along with the potential benefits that these spaces can offer local communities.

## 2. Literature review

### *2.1. The tourist gaze and social media-induced tourism*

Urry's concept of the 'tourist gaze' argues that visual consumption and tourism are inherently connected by social relations (Urry, 1990, 2002; Urry & Larsen,

2011). Tourists seek out and consume visual images and the means by which the tourism industry organizes and directs this consumption (Smith et al., 2010). Places are not seen as authentic entities with clear boundaries that are merely there waiting to be visited, but rather are intertwined with people through various systems that generate and reproduce performances in and of that place (Bærenholdt et al., 2004).

The search for the extraordinary through tourism is socially constructed, and the mass media creates the social needs for visual consumption of foreign places through photography (Urry, 2002). Photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at, with the most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise being a way of certifying experience—by converting experience into an image, a souvenir (Sontag, 1977). Many tourist sites have already been designed to provide good photo opportunities and frame particular viewpoints (Jansson, 2007), and having a photo of oneself in front of a landmark represents the act of 'having been there' (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). Tourists consume places through selecting, framing, and representing places in the visual media and content they create during and post-trip (Urry, 1990, 2002). As Larsen (2008) notes, the changes in travel photography that digitization brought with the convergence of travel images with new media like the internet, email, and mobile phones have revolutionized the hyper circulation of images in the travel industry, and therefore the tourist experience. In the age of social media, tourists are gazing with their own eyes as well as the eyes of their imagined audience (Liu et al., 2023; Lo et al., 2011; Mostafanezhad & Norum, 2018).

In 2018, the term 'Instagrammable' officially became a part of the Merriam-Webster, Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries (Heathman, 2018) and describes preconditions of especially photogenic spaces that serve as an aesthetically perfect backdrop for images intended for the Instagram platform. Instagrammability has foundations within the travel industry—people have always wanted to travel to picturesque places (Adler, 1989; Andrews, 1990; J. Berger, 1980; Sontag, 1977). Seeking out visually appealing destinations to photograph is nothing new, however social and cultural norms provide a 'visual' script for travelers to follow (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012); however, Instagram has come to exemplify a new era of mobile photography (Manovich, 2017). There is a *strong visual style* that accompanies the Instagram platform, which Manovich (2017) refers to as 'Instagramism'. Such image cultures usually emerge alongside technological media, past examples of which include the popularization of postcards as the first travel souvenirs, which encompassed a certain visual style that was most desired by consumers (Albers & James, 1983; Gregory, 2003).

The success of Instagram has led to a reverse flow of inspiration whereby the digital has become the stimulus for engaging in experiences (Leaver at al., 2020; Tang et al., 2024). Furthermore, tourists become producers themselves through producing and circulating their own content on SNSs (Månsson, 2011). There are certain views, landscapes or aesthetics that have a greater likelihood of garnering more 'likes' on the Instagram platform, and the quest for Instagrammable places has become one of the most important factors in choosing travel destinations (Asdecker, 2022; Boley et al., 2018; Li et al., 2023; S.P. Smith, 2021).

### 2.2. Changing photographic practices in tourism

As technology has advanced so have the practices of capturing travel images and the social norms that accompany these practices. The digital camera brought with it the potential to see your photos on-screen immediately, as opposed to having to wait days or weeks for film to be developed. It is because of this affordance of digital photography, tourists of today spend more time taking photos to get 'the perfect shot' than ever before.

Smartphones have enabled new self-performances whereby people represent their own narratives in playful ways and act to mediate new visual social conventions and everyday practices (Lüders et al., 2010; Kim & Lee, 2011). Photography and communication technologies have transformed the relationship between the traveling self and the audience, as tourists now have a larger sphere of viewers in mind when they are away from home (Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013; Liu, 2021; Lo & McKercher, 2015).

To achieve the idealized types of photos that now circulate on social media, there has been a shift in performative behavior that has onsite implications (Pearce & Wang, 2019). Lo and McKercher (2015) define some of the practices that accompany travel photography including framing photographs, choreographing posing bodies for the camera and taking photos. Caldeira et al. (2021) discussed the painstaking processes in which users engage to generate the type of posts that are considered 'successful' on SNSs, including engaging in extensive grooming and makeup rituals. Furthermore, Siegel et al. (2022) found that social media-induced tourists exhibit nuanced travel behaviors and bring along props, costume and extensive photography equipment. There is '*aesthetic labor*' required to produce and compose content for SNSs creates new constructions of digital tourist geography (Guo et al., 2024). Subsequently, many spend substantially more time and effort to achieve a 'perfect photo' in that place and time. These behaviors may lead to negative impacts such as foot trails becoming eroded, extensive traffic congestion, blockage of daily life, increased rubbish, and noticeably increased pollution (Butler, 2019; Siegel et al., 2023).

Various solutions have been explored to help mitigate the impacts of social media-induced tourism from softer approaches like asking travelers to sign a pledge of good behavior to much harsher restrictions like a ban on travel photography in Kyoto, Japan (Siegel et al., 2023). This study will explore the concept of the dedicated spaces for tourist photography (i.e. selfie parks) as a potential solution in some situations.

### 2.3. Tourism borderzones and spaces for consumption

Our relationship with society is mediated by consumption and therefore consumption spaces provide a primary means of reasserting a particular vision of what our society is about (Miles, 2010). As research has shown, younger generations increasingly look to experiences, over physical possessions, to fuel their consumerist desires (Hajli et al., 2018; Khamis et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2023; Siegel & Wang, 2019). Thus, it is a natural byproduct that the spaces that exist in which to engage in experiential consumption become representative of the demand for the 'experience economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Miles (2010) noted that consumerism causes a '*reinvention of the public realm*'

(p. 9), where spaces are developed and choreographed around the consumer demand in which the space will be designed to exist around. In tourism, gazing or looking constitutes consumption (Crouch, 1999; MacCannell, 1976) and in the digital age, tourists are no longer just consuming external sights; they are increasingly producing and consuming representations of themselves. In the act of taking selfies at tourist locations, tourists turn themselves into the sights—they 'consume the self' visually, engaging in a reflexive process where the body and image become the central tourist products (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016).

Judd and Fainstein (1999) argued that many cities that welcome large numbers of tourists have been reinvented to accommodate such visitors and, in doing so, carve out 'tourist bubbles' for the consumption of tourists. Thus, these bubbles become a stage that disguises the less desirable city that sits beyond. These spaces include strict environmental and aesthetic monitoring and reduce tourists' visual and functional forms to a few key images.

Bruner (2005, p. 192) discusses 'tourist borderzones' as the spaces where natives and tourists come to interact; 'the natives have to break out of their normal routines to meet the tourists: to dance for them, to sell them souvenirs, or to display themselves and their cultures for sale.' Additionally, tourist borderzones are 'fluid, they may shift over time' (ibid).

This study will explore a spectrum of enclavic spaces (see Figure 1) as they apply to tourist photography. By definition, some enclaves and their borders are formed loosely, while others are more firmly and visibly established, bordered and sometimes even physically walled (Saarinen, 2017). Ek and Tesfahuney (2019) argue that tourism is already always enclavic as it is separated from everyday life, a space where norms are spatiotemporally 'suspended'.

While non-tourist space is defined as wholly residential and largely devoid of any tourists whatsoever, heterogenous spaces are somewhat mixed-purpose between tourist facilities and local businesses, street vendors, public and private institutions and domestic housing. Heterogeneous tourist spaces are 'weakly classified' and involve the co-existence of tourist facilities with local daily life. This type of space usually emerges unplanned, and the unintentional bricolage of structures and designs provides a contrasting aesthetic context. In many ways, heterogeneous tourist spaces provide stages where transitional identities may be performed alongside the everyday undertakings of residents, passers-by, and workers.

The original Disneyland is a commonly used example as a touristic enclave creating a safe, clean, aesthetically appealing entertainment environment separating itself from


**Figure 1.** Spectrum of enclavic spaces as touristic borderzones.

criminals or shady characters (Weinstein, 1992). Disney theme parks are highly lauded for the way they process large numbers of people in a highly predictable, calculable, circumscribed, clean and safe environment (Ritzer & Liska, 1997).

Tourist enclaves or 'bubbles' provide a shield from unintended atmospheric elements (sights, sounds, smells, people) that do not belong and do not conform to the 'ideal' that travelers seek to capture photographically (Judd, 1999; Saarinen, 2017). Tourists are subject to a 'soft control', in the form of guards, guides and security cameras that monitor their behavior (Edensor, 2000). Although tourism enclaves have been explored in much past research, to date, there is limited existing research on enclave tourism as it pertains to tourist photography.

Much like tourism enclaves, spaces that exist for tourist photography can range from exclusive and closed off to 'outsiders' to wholly coexistent alongside residential spaces without any designation at all. Generally, in the past, enclavic tourism spaces have been associated with mass tourism and are usually used to describe areas like resort complexes or areas with many businesses that cater exclusively to tourist demand (Prayag, 2015). Additionally, the concept of tourism enclaves has been accompanied by much debate. Past negative arguments on tourism enclaves include power inequalities, material and/or separation from surrounding socio-cultural realities, weak linkages to host communities and local economy with negative impacts on local socioeconomic development, offering limited opportunity for meaningful social discourse (Miles, 2010).

Scarles (2012) outlines the moral dilemmas in creating enclavic spaces for travel photography: there can be tensions among divided locals, some who consider these activities unethical and disrespectful to traditional culture, and others who consider the easy money to be made and legitimate employment that these types of businesses provide. However, Scarles (2013: 906) also describes tourists expressing that these types of staged encounters with locals for photo taking felt inauthentic and gimmicky, and there was a visceral awareness among travelers that these spaces were staged only for tourists and did not represent the real life of the locals.

In extreme cases, tourism enclaves can propel segregation between locals and tourists, representing a form of 'neo-colonization' (Hall & Tucker, 2004; Manuel-Navarrete, 2016). Furthermore, enclave tourism can lead to high economic leakages and limited benefits for local communities if not planned and managed properly (López-López et al., 2006; Saarinen, 2017; Weaver, 2005). However, the nature of social media-driven or selfie-seeking tourists is especially nuanced and therefore these arguments against enclaves might not necessarily apply in the same ways.

According to Saarinen (2017), there can also be reason for the existence of enclavic spaces in tourism as they are an efficient way to manage tourism. Dewailly (1999) points to how enclavic tourist spaces form a way to manage mass tourism in limiting the number of entrants by having to buy tickets, and by providing financial benefits to host communities. There is also a line of research that finds enclavic environments to suit tourists, as many enjoy spaces like all-inclusive resorts (Anderson et al., 2009; Butler, 1990; Wong & Kwong, 2004). Henceforth, this paper will explore whether selfie parks can potentially be a salient solution to manage travelers that are motivated by social media while assessing the experiential benefits that these types of spaces can provide.

In undertaking this reconceptualization, it will explore the emergence of contemporary enclavic spaces, the infrastructures, practices and performances underpinning these and the implications these have on touristic photographic practice. In doing so, the paper also recognizes that as photogenic places experience popularity for travel photography for self-presentation, it becomes increasingly important for local communities and the destination as a system to identify opportunities to benefit from the influx of visitors that accompany this phenomenon. From a practical perspective, Prideaux and Coghlan (2010) suggested that tourism operators remain aware of the changing photographic technologies associated with tourism experiences, empowering them to establish opportunities to capitalize on the potential word-of-mouth opportunities as well as more effective destination management.

## 3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach combining a period of onsite ethnographic fieldwork, visual data and interviews with relevant stakeholders. Ethnography is used to develop deep understandings of how people perceive their social realities as reflected in how they act within the social world (McLeod, 2017). This approach is particularly suitable for exploring the practices and flows of photography because it allows 'naturalistic' and situated observations and captures how 'networked-camera-tourists' do photography (Larsen, 2008).

The onsite ethnographic period took place over five weeks in November-December, 2019. The islands of Bali and Gili Trawangan, Indonesia, were identified as key locations for data collection because of their as reputation of one of the most Instagrammable places in the world (Big Seven Travel Media 2019, 2020) and because of the known existence of selfie parks around the islands prior to the fieldwork. In total, eight sites were visited within Bali and Gili Trawangan encompassing a mixture of existing sites like temples and rice terraces, self-contained selfie parks, and hotels considered Instagrammable. Ethnographic observations and semi-structured, in-person interviews with management stakeholders were conducted at each site. A translator accompanied the researcher for increased access and for when there were difficulties with translation. Consistent with field research, field notes/journals were kept by the researcher, as well as visual data (photos and videos) and audio recordings of conducted interviews. Additionally, discussions among the researchers were held each day after the observations took place and any additional records were added to the field notes.

### *3.1. Participant observation*

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally (Brewer, 2000). Ethnography seeks to comprehensively describe and analyze rather than simplify complex social events (Blommaert & Jie, 2010), and to develop deep understandings of how people perceive their social realities as reflected in how they act within the social world (McLeod, 2017).

Participant observation has been used to study tourist photography in several reputable studies (Kimber et al., 2019; Larsen, 2008; Markwell, 1997; Noy, 2014; Scarles, 2013). Although observations are among the most effective ways to collect qualitative data and analyze social phenomena (Flick, 2018), there has been an 'upturn' in visual methodologies in social science research (Rakić & Chambers, 2010, 2012; Scarles, 2010). It is almost inevitable that ethnographers will encounter and benefit from digital visual technologies and images during their research and scholarly practice. Pink (2013) advocated that visual images, objects or descriptions should be incorporated when it is appropriate, opportune or enlightening to do so.

### 3.2. Stakeholder interviews

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted onsite with seven stakeholders (see Table 1) at sites that were deemed appropriate for this research to provide an alternative perspective from business owners and managers who oversee the daily operations of the selected sites. These stakeholders come from a variety of businesses, including hotels, selfie parks, a tour company, and the tourism board, and they have witnessed the changes in behavior engendered by recent increases in visitors. During in-depth interviews, or conversations with a purpose, the researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses. In ethnographic research, it is critical that the native view of reality is obtained (Creswell, 2007), and the use of interviews is based on the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective) rather than according to the researcher's views (the etic perspective) (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The interviews were conducted at each respective site and audio recorded for later transcription, which were analyzed for themes. Throughout the findings section, the interviewees will be referred to in correspondence with the monikers denoted in Table 1 ('OM' refers to onsite manager).

### 3.3. Analysis

Brewer (2000) has recommended that to bring skillful analysis and structure to the data, so that the patterns categories and relationships can be discovered, steps for ethnographic analysis include data management, coding, qualitative description and establishing patterns in the data. NVivo was used to thematically analyze the research transcripts and inductively generate coding labels as directed by the content of the data. All findings were then subject to triangulation to authenticate results across all collected data. After the codes were generated and the data was organized accordingly, the researchers then began to build on the data with reflections that mirrored

**Table 1.** List of interviewed stakeholders.

| Participant | Site | Role |
|---|---|---|
| OM1 | Selfie Park | Head Manager |
| OM2 | Selfie Park | Groups Manager |
| OM3 | 'Instagrammable' Hotel | Social Media Manager |
| OM4 | Tourism Board | Vice Chairman |
| OM5 | 'Instagrammable' Hotel | General Manager |
| OM6 | Local Tour & Travel Company | Founder & COO |
| OM7 | Bali App | Public Relations Manager |

the patterns found within the coding schema. This process helped to qualitatively build on the concepts and theories that fundamentally underpinned the research design, aims and objectives.

### 3.4. Ethical research in the field

Producing quality research entails delineating the ethical implications of the research and how ethical integrity will be maintained (Tracy, 2013). As this study had an overt research design, audio consent was given by all interviewees, by means of interview recording and later transcription. The researchers never attempted to apply any pressure to gain access to the intended participants (Robson & McCartan, 2016). It is important to note that this study did not aim for participants to reveal overly personal information. Permission to use personal data and access to participants hinges upon transparent and un-coerced consent. Before agreeing to participate, the researchers explained the study and how participants would be involved in clear and unambiguous language.

## 4. Findings and discussion

The findings of this study will first address the underlying drivers of *demand* for photographic tourist enclaves in Bali and the conditions that prompted their emergence. The spectrum of spaces that exist within Bali for tourist photography will then be described including newly erected enclavic spaces and existing spaces that have been reorganized to match modern tourist consumption. Finally, issues of commodification and arguments against tourism enclaves will be revisited within the context of this study with consideration of the benefits of such spaces can provide for its visitors and local communities alike.

### 4.1. Constructing spaces for tourist photography: demand and dynamics in Bali

The changing behaviors of tourists to Bali post-social media was described by the interviewees. OM7 described several situations where tourist behavior was inappropriate and caused inconvenience including:

> It gets annoying, especially…when you're like come on you've got the photo! You've got to be joking. There was one time…there were these two girls…and they were taking one shot for so long it was ridiculous, and we were sort of moving around there and they were asking us to move. I'm like, no! You've been here an hour…why can't you just bugger off? Why can't you just enjoy yourself here? Like I understand getting a photo, I get it. Everyone wants to get a nice photo but are you even enjoying the place at all?

OM3 also described the backlash from paying hotel guests which was impetus to build an entirely new pool exclusively for photo-taking at the hotel property:

> Like two years ago. Our staying guests were told, 'can you get out of my picture?' by non-staying guests. After experiencing many complaints and getting bad reviews we decide we have to do this.

These findings reconfirm earlier studies that found nuanced behaviors attached to social media-induced tourists (Caldeira et al., Guo et al., 2024, Siegel et al., 2023) and, thus, the new geographies of tourism have emerged. Social media-induced tourists have a particular travel *style*, and they look for specific features in potential destinations that can enhance their picture-taking. As a byproduct, more importance may be placed on '*getting the shot*' than any meaningful cultural exchange between hosts and guests, as the behaviors of social media-induced tourists have found to be more irresponsible than other types of travelers (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Siegel et al., 2022). Place change is a consequence of this, especially overcrowding, commodification and deterioration of local quality of life (McKercher et al., 2015; Siegel et al., 2023). OM7 told of how one temple has evolved to accommodate the impacts of place change due to social media-induced tourism in Bali:

> Like a good example is Pura Lempuyang, often known as the Gates of Heaven. It went from no one having known about it, it's been there forever, to a few photos on Instagram and now it's absolute chaos. You have to queue up down the bottom. They run a car up. Only a certain amount of people are allowed up at a certain time. They created a new entrance. It's just absolute chaos.

#### *4.1.1. Three types of tourist enclaves for photography*

Once demand was established at varying tourist spaces around Bali, dedicated spaces were erected to specifically accommodate social media-induced tourists in an attempt to manage visitor behavior and minimize negative impacts. The Balinese sites studied are categorized into three main types of spaces which were consistent with the literature on tourist borderzones: non-tourist spaces, heterogenous spaces and wholly enclavic spaces dedicated to tourist activity. The spatial distribution of each will be outlined in this section.

The non-tourist spaces for tourist photography exist as aesthetically desirable landscapes, scenery or any other type of photogenic space that exists outside of a tourist area and has not instituted a ticketing scheme or any other type of management strategy. In Bali, non-tourist spaces existed as active, working rice terraces (as opposed to Tegalalang which has fully transformed into a tourist-facing space), temples or architectural structures where tourists congregate for photos and do not have ticketing schemes, security, or entrepreneurial opportunities in the form of refreshment or souvenir sales.

The heterogenous spaces had existed before the phenomenon of Instagrammability and had subsequently adopted a ticketing scheme to manage the overwhelming increase in recent visitor numbers. Alternatively, there were the dedicated and self-contained selfie parks (Figure 2).

Existing sites that are popular for Instagram photography have had to integrate a management infrastructure to help manage the influxes of visitors who seek to photograph and create content while onsite. These management solutions included incorporating ticketing systems to take photos in places like Tegalalang Rice Terraces, Handara Gate and other hotels or heritage sites considered especially Instagrammable.

The Tegalalang Rice Terraces were a popular destination for tourists long before the existence of social media; however, the site has undergone significant changes in more recent years response to demand of social media-induced tourists, including


**Figure 2.** Selfie tickets at existing Balinese sites.
Source: Author

the introduction of 'photo spots' in the form of nests, swings, and overall frames for photography littered throughout (see Figure 3). The 'photo spots' all charged a small fee and were locally created and managed (Figure 4).

Another one of the heterogenous sites explored was a hotel located in northern Bali that has been labeled one of the most Instagrammable in the world in the media. This hotel introduced several specially designed packages for social media-induced visitors, some even without inclusion of an overnight stay at the hotel property, as OM3 described:

> So we decide to offer two type of vouchers – the blue and green. The blue one you can just visit and have lunch and join our complimentary activities here. Then the green one you can use the pool for taking pictures and then have lunch here.

### *4.1.2. Selfie parks*

Selfie parks embody the elements of enclavic spaces for modern tourist photography. This section will connect the characteristics of selfie parks to how enclavic space is defined within tourism systems. Figure 5 shows the general layout of the selfie parks visited in Bali.

Selfie parks are self-contained spaces, much like most amusement or theme parks, except in this case, the sites' purpose is for visitors to take pictures of themselves in specifically designed frames to serve as the backgrounds for the selfies (Figure 6). There were found to be a multitude of similar selfie-catering businesses dotted around the island of Bali of varying sizes, prices, and breadth; however, all selfie parks that were investigated had the same aesthetic 'sceneography' and general schematic operations.

**Figure 3.** Selfie photo spots in Tegalalang Rice Terraces.
Source: Author

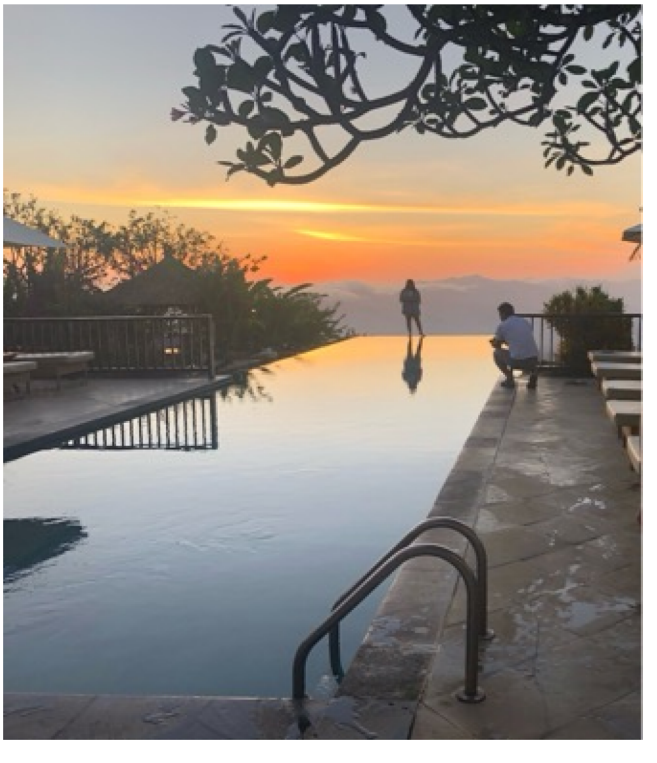

**Figure 4.** 'Instagrammable' Hotel in northern Bali.
Source: Author

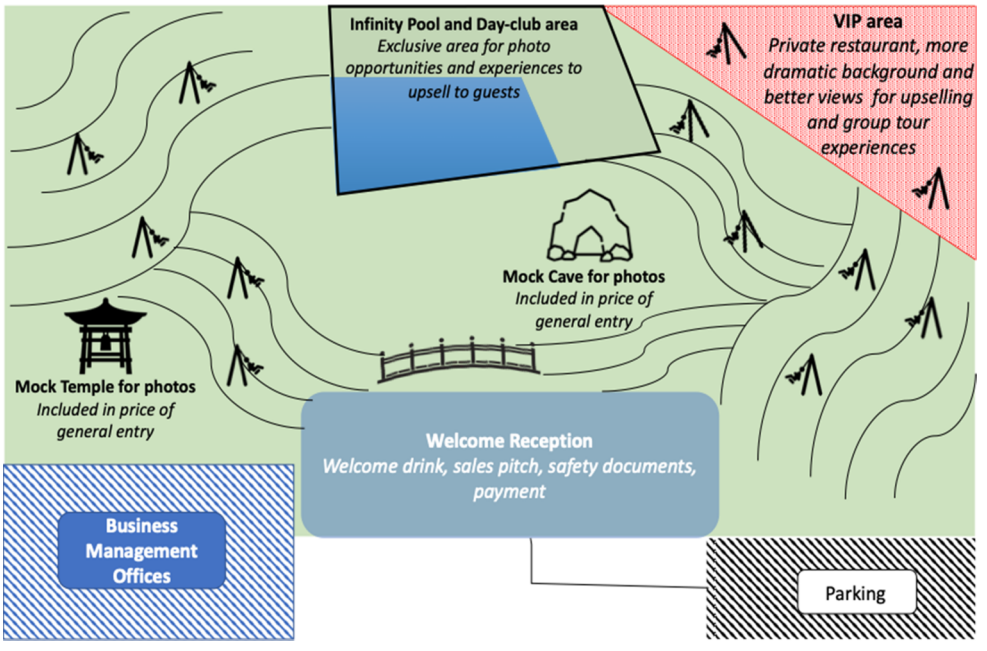


**Figure 5.** Mapped selfie park.

The selfie parks offered professional photographers to take visitors' photos, which were later available for purchase. Many visitors were using their smartphones to take their photos, but by the park providing an option to hire professional photographers, there was an added element of credibility. As interviewee OM2 stated:

> [Many of] the visitors with more money will pay extra fee to have a private hire photographer to take pictures for them around the park. They love this! They always take many, many photos and are so happy with the results. We also help them to choose the best ones and help to edit them.

In and around the parks, there were many photographic opportunities available that provided value for the price of the entrance ticket including an imitation temple, a footbridge, and more extensive faux rice terraces to walk along for photographs (Figure 6). The aspirational aesthetics of the selfie parks are a major characteristic of why these spaces are in demand; there is significant recent research that links aesthetic perception of place to travel motivations (Du et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2024; Guo et al., 2024 ; Hauser et al., 2022; Li & Lee, 2024; Poulsen & Kvåle, 2018). Social media-induced tourists seek certain aesthetic conventions that have become standardized and templated over time (Caldeira et al., 2021; Hauser et al., 2022; Leaver et al., 2020; Oh, 2022). There is a visceral importance of aesthetics in placemaking (Breiby, 2014; Li & Lee, 2024; Maitland & Smith, 2009), and Balinese aesthetic standards are reproduced in the nests, swings, temples and rice terraces that make up the backdrops of the selfie parks (Figure 7).

### *4.2. Reconsidering tourist enclaves for photography*

This research sought to revisit past arguments against tourist enclaves, which have been criticized as promoting segregation between locals and tourists, high economic

**Figure 6.** Faux temple and rice terraces for photo backdrop in selfie parks.
Source: Author

leakages and limited opportunity for meaningful social discourse (Hall & Tucker, 2004; López-López et al., 2006; Miles, 2010; Saarinen, 2017; Weaver, 2005). The study revealed that the tourist enclaves as they exist for photography and other content creation serve as salient solutions for locals to exercise a 'soft control' over visitors while maximizing benefits that accompanies tourism.

### *4.2.1. Local community impacts and opportunities*

OM2 indicated that the selfie parks were a highly coveted source of employment for Balinese people, and that many travel from all around Bali to work here. The selfie parks are also all locally owned and managed, which is contrary to Shaw and Shaw (1999)'s criticism of tourism enclaves for limited opportunities for entrepreneurship among locals. Additionally, Mshenga and Richardson (2013) suggested that encouraging local entrepreneurs to participate in tourism is an important factor in maximizing the potential for the sector to contribute to regional economic development. These findings stress the importance of keeping potentially marginalized communities involved in shaping tourism enclaves, which should preserve heritage and the emotional geography of the land (Manuel-Navarrete, 2016).

The selfie parks were also a salient avenue for local community development in several ways. One of the selfie parks has been able to send 120+ local children to school through community investment from the park revenue. At another site, guests are invited to donate clothes, books, pencils and other supplies to the local schools.

**Figure 7.** 'Editing center' and some private areas on offer in selfie park.
Source: Author

> Our business is not only gaining revenue, we support local village. We open wide opportunity for work, for job and also we support children. We educate young people studying English. We work closely with the charity in the village. So there is a part of the progress for the project with our group. We invite all the children in the village to study English and we organize for teacher on certain days.

As Roekaerts and Savat (1989) assert, there is an important need for charity in tourism to support and preserve the originality and equality of local peoples and culture, and these initiatives are effective means of doing so.

### *4.2.2. Tourist benefits*

As opposed to past research on tourism enclaves, this study found that there is demand for these types of spaces when they come to tourist photography. Convenience and safety were the most prominent forces that drove demand among visitors to the selfie parks and other enclaves for tourist photography.

On holiday we tend to gaze and photograph differently than we do at home (Urry, 1990). Siegel et al. (2022) found that social media-induced tourists like the use of props and exaggerated costume for the '*hidden performances of image creation*' (p. 2346). Thus, selfie parks offer a locally-managed space that obviates the need to seek out photographic opportunities a la carte while relieving the burden of bringing along one's own costumes, props and photographic equipment.

This research found that having a ticketing system in place is a salient element to the management of social media-induced tourists. It is evident that many tourist sites

are designed to provide good photo opportunities and there is a desire from tourists to experience these photo opportunities without having to confront any problematic situations (Jansson, 2007). Social media-induced tourists reveal their desire for convenience and a sense of comfort and certainty. By choosing a highly controlled travel experience, a traveler can maximize their time by eliminating inconveniences such as learning the layout of a city or an attraction and having to navigate independently. Thus, the concept of selfie parks offers this chance at a cost that many travelers, especially those who are social media-induced, are willing to pay in exchange for the ease and opportunity to obtain desired photo opportunities and, furthermore, to do so in a controlled setting that provides ease and convenience.

Selfie parks offer a purpose-built environment that provides backdrops, lighting, props and professionalized equipment that have been pre-perfected for visitors. This reduced the time needed to '*get the shot*' and the organized layouts and intuitive flows of these parks also ensure that visitors can move efficiently between one photo opportunity to the next without the need for extensive planning or local knowledge. Selfie parks obviate the need to seek out photographic opportunities a la carte and relieve the burden of bringing along one's own costumes, props and photographic equipment. Additionally, the selfie parks included rentals for costumes and other props (see Figure 8), which is consistent with existing research that suggests social media contexts are highly influential on costume rentals in tourist settings (Wang & Guo, 2024) (Figure 9).

The safety of the selfie parks was also found to be one of the most notable differentiating factors from other photographic hotspots around Bali. Visitors are also expected to sign a safety release prior to entry and there are strict health and safety protocols in place. This 'soft control' is also what separates enclavic tourist spaces

**Figure 8.** Selfie park staff and costume rentals.
Source: Author

**Figure 9.** Selfie park reception area, menu of services and safety release.
Source: alohaubudswing.com

from uncontrolled heterogenous spaces. OM1 highlighted the importance of safety in the selfie parks:

> Safety is very important. We would like to make sure everybody is safe when they do the swing. We have our safety people look after them. They get looked after by our team. Our safety is very, very important. Also we have our daily check from our safety team which is led by me every morning before we open the park. The nest, the swings, the carabiner, everything is checked. And also we have a schedule when we should change the rope swing.

In the setting of Bali, instead of wandering around rice terraces independently, risking getting lost, falling or some other type of injury, these consequences are now eliminated in the enclavic selfie park environment. In other social media-induced destinations, a space like a selfie park might be welcome for visitors to obtain the desired destination imagery without putting themselves or others in danger.

### *4.2.3. Commodification*

There may be concerns around the commodification that spaces like selfie parks can cause, which is not without merit. From the tourists' perspective, there can potentially be a negative value in seeing an amusement park-like atmosphere that is disconnected from local culture. For example, OM7 told of the dilution of Balinese culture that this type of tourism can comprise:

> It's a shame a lot of people are not appreciating what that's all about. Balinese architecture has all this symbolism behind it, there are certain levels and whatnot. There's a lot of people just not appreciating any of that. It doesn't mean you have to go and learn the whole history of it, but you can a little bit just to appreciate it and understand what you're doing. Then there's issues of tourists posing half naked on sacred sites.

According to Edensor (2001, p. 330), '*a paradox of the production of tourist space concerns the intensification of attempts to design and theme space, and the increasingly promiscuous nature of tourism, whereby tourist stages proliferate*'. Although the selfie parks can serve as successful models for streamlining influxes of social media-induced

tourists, there are questions pertaining to the loss of authenticity and the power inequalities these spaces can create within local communities.

Scarles (2013) noted in a study of interactions between tourists and photographed local people, she recounted how some tourists voiced hesitancy over the perceived commodification of the experience and expressed a feeling of being 'tourees' participating in a business exchange. In contrast, the current study found much subtler and more limited degrees of ethical concern related to local commodification among social media-induced tourists. The extreme success and demand for expansion of the selfie parks in Bali demonstrate that tourists are not hesitant to engage in a business of this kind for fear of commodifying their travel experiences, but rather prefer the convenient and safe environment of the selfie parks. OM2 revealed that the selfie park receives 1,500 visitors daily in low season and, furthermore, construction was underway to add a day club to their property:

> We hope the day club will be very successful. We think it will. The people need to come from social media! Instagram! [laughing]

Thus, these types of enclavic spaces for tourist photography do not have to be completely devoid of local culture and customs and can actually provide a means to incorporate local culture into the experience design. Regardless, the success and planned expansions of Bali's selfie parks demonstrates travelers' lack of resistance towards the perceived commodification that a selfie park may represent. Indeed, there are modes for selfie park architects/designers/managers to include elements of local culture within the infrastructure of the park. OM1 describes:

> Our owner really got inspired by his childhood and then to maintain, the real experience in Bali that is done by all the children in Bali in the past. I used to do the swing also in the past when I was at home in elementary school. Maybe I was like 5 years or 10 years old. But we didn't know how to put safety so it's kind of just playing. So it was a lot of fun. So we have a lot of chance to interact with many children from our village and even outside village who see what we are doing So it's really the inspiration for the Bali Swing, this concept.

### *4.3. Post-COVID-19*

This research was initially conducted mere months before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down international travel and businesses worldwide, with the hospitality industry being one of the most harshly impacted (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Thus, returning to the study's findings was important to consider whether the same conclusions would still apply post-pandemic. Social media content that was posted in the sites studied was reexamined to assess whether the same behaviors were still unfolding post-pandemic.

Tourism in Bali has indeed bounced back from after the COVID-19 pandemic: new hotels have opened, and new visitors are arriving in record numbers (Elliott, 2023; Williams, 2022). The same type of content is still circulating at the most photogenic spaces around Bali; posts from the selfie parks are circulating as much as ever and the posts include the same aesthetic sceneography described in sections 2.3 and 4.1. There are even specialized albums for various photo points within the park like the nests and swings. There is a new Balinese-style gate available for photos, similar to the Handara Gate described in section 4.1 (Figure 10).

**Figure 10.** Uploaded images of Balinese-style 'gate' at selfie park introduced post-pandemic.

A different selfie park visited as part of the research has significantly expanded since the pandemic, and now offers an infinity pool and additional viewing platforms that offer increased backdrops for self-focused content creation.

The aspects mentioned throughout this study including safety, charity and local ownership and management are all mentioned on the website. The ownership and management of the parks are still locally owned and is a featured aspect. Additionally, the park still sponsors local schoolchildren to attend school and is more prominently featured on the website.

There are also still a multitude of Instagram tours of Bali which include the existing sites like the Handara Gate, Lempuyang Temple and the Tegalalang Rice Terraces. In fact, more selfie enclaves have emerged in Bali including a selfie museum, Wild Selfie Bali, offering 15 themed 'selfie boxes' that serve as photographic backdrops and a large choice of costumes available (Wild Experiences, 2024). These updates confirm that the study's findings are still relevant alongside the continued demand for these photographic spaces. Furthermore, the expansions indicate an increase in the behavior and demand described in this study.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine enclavic spaces that have emerged to cater to modern travel practices of photography and content creation. Through empirical evidence. this paper also provides more insights into the infrastructures, practices and performances within Instagrammable places finding that there has been a surge in demand for dedicated spaces in which to create visual content for SNSs. These spaces also contribute to the normalization of Balinese visual standards and aesthetics.

This is the first study to consider enclavic spaces for travel photography as a strategy to manage and maximize revenue from social media-induced tourists in response to changing photographic practices. Findings include description of various spaces for tourist photography including newly created infrastructure at existing sites as well as self-contained enclavic selfie parks, which have never been explored in literature. The impacts and benefits of these spaces on local communities and travelers themselves are identified including commodification, convenience, safety, charity, expansion and employment opportunities. Beyond the creation of dedicated selfie spaces to cater to social media-induced tourists, this paper also found that a ticketing scheme in existing sites can help to create additional revenue and crowd management from visitors that are quickly passing through to snap photos without any intention to otherwise spend money or engage with the destination or local community.

As compared to past criticism of tourism enclaves, the spaces now emerging for selfie-seekers can be feasible opportunities for visitor management, economic growth, and local employment, which is significant for destinations that are struggling to manage an influx of visitors due to being highly photogenic. The selfie park model provides the ability to safeguard visitors against unwanted atmospheric elements and the convenience however the negative aspects normally associated with tourist enclaves or borderzones may not directly apply in these circumstances. The segregation between locals and tourists, if it exists in these spaces, is by design due to proper planning. The study also examined issues of convenience and safety for social media-induced tourists, with indications that these factors hold significant gravity within highly photogenic spaces. The findings of this study reconfirm Blano-Moreno et al.'s (2024) suggestion for destinations to create selfie points at their most photogenic spots, however this study affirms the need to keep these spaces locally managed to best mitigate future negative impacts like cultural dilution, loss of employment and economic leakages.

Practically, destinations that are struggling the most with the negative impacts of social media-induced tourism should consider establishing locally-managed dedicated spaces for tourists to create content in. For example, the isle of Santorini has been nicknamed Greece's 'Instagram Island' in recent years as there have been reports of extreme overcrowding alongside other negative impacts of social media-induced tourists (O'Hare, 2024; Rudd, 2024; S. Smith, 2024). Thus, creating tourist enclaves for tourist photography may prove an effective solution for this type of destination.

The positive findings of this study do not preclude that negative aspects may not emerge over time without proper local management of the selfie parks. Chalfen (1979) notes that the best circumstance for tourist photography is one when the use of tourist cameras is on terms explicitly dictated by the host community so that the host community can attempt to regain a sense of private life out of the camera range while simultaneously providing visitors with 'expected and authentic scenes of local environment' (p. 444).

This study contributes to existing literature in several areas: tourism enclaves, photographic practices and management. Stakeholders involved in management in a destination receiving an increased number of social media-induced visitors may choose to reevaluate their tourist-facing spaces and create enclavic spaces for visitors to obtain their desired destination imagery in a convenient and safe way.

Despite the contributions, this study is limited to Bali, and although this behavior may be internationally standardized, the context in which the data exists may vary by location. Bali has been studied widely in tourism, as it has been a hugely popular holiday destination for many years. Thus, the scenario there is unique in which selfie parks unfold, and it may not be the same in other destinations. More specifically, the enclavic space for tourist photography may not be feasible in every destination facing similar issues due to the varying nature of each tourism system and complications from relevant stakeholders (Morrison et al., 2018). This study is predominantly focused on Instagram, which is frequently identified as a prominent social networking platform among travelers within the contemporary digital milieu (Blanco-Moreno et al., 2024; Hauser et al., 2022; Jansson, 2018; Yu & Egger, 2021). Nonetheless, in recent years, platforms such as TikTok, along with Chinese social media ecosystems including

Xiaohongshu, WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin, have also become salient digital arenas in which these behaviors are enacted (Du et al., 2022; Li & Lee, 2024). Accordingly, the phenomenon of selfie parks warrants examination through the lens of the distinct affordances embedded within these evolving platforms.

This study also creates several more opportunities for future research; selfie parks or museums are still an early concept and therefore more research in this area would be beneficial in various disciplines. The same empirical research can be conducted in other highly photogenic destinations or using alternative research methods. Additionally, this concept would benefit from applying various research approaches.

## Authors' contributions

Conceptualization: LS, IT, CS. Data Curation: LS. Investigation: LS. Methodology: LS, IT, CS. Visualization: LS. Writing—original draft: LS, IT, CS. Writing—review & editing: LS.

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