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“Selfie Parks”: Enclaves for social media-induced tourist photography

Introduction

Selfies are an integral part of a contemporary visual culture based on practices facilitated by social networks and digital photography (Gómez-Cruz, 2012). Taking photos of oneself while traveling to share on social media is increasingly a primary objective of self-presentation (Dedeoglu et al., (2023); Lo & McKercher, 2015; Lyu, 2016; Siegel, Tussyadiah & Scarles, 2022). Thus, spaces have emerged over 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) like Instagram. The preoccupation with performing a curated aesthetic self has fueled the rise of "selfie museums" which are appearing around the world (Chicago's wndr Museum, London's Selfie Factory, Selfie House in Prague, etc.). These selfie museums and parks demonstrate a new era of space commodification as they offer dedicated spaces whose sole purpose is to provide the opportunity for travelers to mirror the experience of traveling to highly photogenic destinations.

Ritzer (1996) introduced the "McDonaldization of society," whereby the world is growing increasingly efficient, calculable, predictable, and controlled. Likewise, in reference to the tourism industry, the term "McDisneyization" has been used to describe the same condition, modeled after the Disney theme parks in the way it processes large numbers of people in a highly predictable, calculable, circumscribed, clean and safe environment (Ritzer & Liska, 1997). The original Disneyland was created as a safe, clean, aesthetically appealing entertainment environment. Disneyland wanted to separate itself from the amusement parks where criminals or shady characters would gather (Weinstein, 1992). This then became the model for the mass production of amusement and leisure experiences with numerous similar businesses applying the same prototype to provide safe, clean, and highly predictable experiences to the rising demand. Similarly, businesses such as themed restaurants create a carefully planned and managed atmosphere to provide specific standards of service, décor and ambiance whilst providing a shield from unsavory or unwanted elements (Edensor, 2000).

Indeed, where research has critiqued enclavic spaces of tourist photography (Edensor, 2000; Scarles, 2012), this has been undertaken in a pre-SNS and Instagram era, before the rise of demand by travelers seeking selfies and engaging in photographic practices that result in Instagram-ready images deemed appropriate for SNS circulation (Siegel, Tussyadiah & Scarles, 2022).

There are many similarities when considering "selfie spaces" within the context of McDisneyization, and to the early motivations to create enclaves for the enjoyment of leisure experiences. As such, this paper seeks to revisit the concept of enclavic tourism spaces within the context of travel photography for SNSs. It will explore the emergence of contemporary enclavic spaces, and the implications these have on touristic photographic practice. In doing so, the paper also recognizes that 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.

Literature Review

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). However, 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; S.P. Smith, 2019).

As with any other type of tourism, as photo-taking practices begin to unfold on a large scale, there are potential negative implications for said Instagrammable destinations themselves. The amplification of lesser-known destinations through social media can have devastating consequences, as they are rarely equipped to handle such a sudden onslaught of visitors (Butler, 2019).

Tribe and Mkono (2017) point to how obsessive selfie-taking can result in a lack of authentic connection to place. Furthermore, the acts of photo-taking among social media-induced tourists can be much more extensive and interrupt daily life for local communities when conducting in residential settings (Siegel, Tussyadiah & Scarles, 2023). Attempts to manage these visitors can prove to be more difficult than others because they have been found to exhibit more hedonistic, egocentric characteristics (Canavan, 2017). Because of this, it is important to consider unique approaches to encourage more appropriate photo taking behaviors, which enclavic selfie spaces may potentially offer.

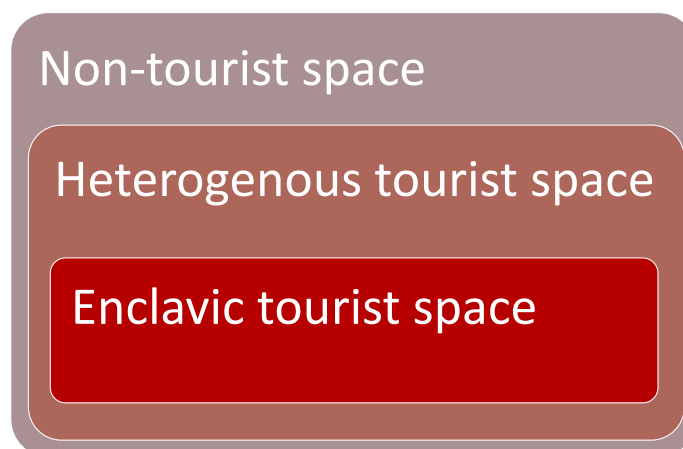
Tourism Enclaves

Tourism enclaves are usually separated from the surrounding communities and their social realities (Saarinen, 2017) and can have a well-defined perimeter (Judd, 1999). 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, dilution of culture, weak linkages to host communities and local economy with negative impacts on local socioeconomic development (Hall & Tucker, 2004; Prayag, 2015; Saarinen, 2017; Shaw & Shaw, 1999; Wall-Reinius et al., 2019).

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. Additionally, Scarles (2013) describes tourists expressing that these types of staged encounters with locals for photo taking felt “inauthentic” and “gimmicky” (p. 906), and there was a visceral awareness among the travelers that these spaces were staged only for tourists and did not represent the real life of the locals. These feelings reinforce the concept of McDonaldization of place, wherein success for touristic places entails the production of standardized experiences, targeting a mass market and homogenizing the world to produce a generic experience (Ritzer, 2004). These scenarios will be explored more throughout this study.

There can be a range of spaces available and utilized for experience consumption including enclavic, heterogenous and non-tourist. This study will seek to explore where selfie spaces fit into this spectrum, and whether they are an efficient way to manage tourism.

Figure 1. Spectrum of tourist spaces.



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 the islands of Bali and Gili Trawangan, Indonesia, which were identified as key locations for data collection because of the as reputation of one of the most Instagrammable places in the world (Big Seven 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 that were indicated as popular for Instagrammability. 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 notes were added to field notes.

Table 1. List of interviewed stakeholders onsite in Bali.

Item	Content
OM1.	Selfie park general manager
OM2.	Selfie park groups manager/coordinator
OM3.	‘Instagrammable’ hotel social media manager
OM4.	Tourism Board official

OM5.	Founder of sustainable travel company in Bali
OM6.	Public relations manager – Bali destination management organization

The qualitative data analysis tool, NVivo, was used to thematically analyze the interview transcripts, field notes/journals and visual data and generate coding labels. After the codes were generated and the data was organized accordingly, the researchers then began to build on the data with reflections that mirrored the patterns found within the coding schema. All findings were then subject to triangulation in order to authenticate results across all collected data.

Results

Enclavic spaces in Bali for tourist photography

The sites studied in Bali existed within a variety of spaces in Bali, each in response to demand from visitors in that very specific area (see Figure 2). There were spaces which 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. Spectrum of existing spaces for tourist photography in Bali.

Non-tourist space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Other Rice Terraces</i> • <i>Existing sites without ticketing schemes</i> • <i>Highly photogenic local spaces</i>
Heterogenous space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tegalalang Rice Terraces</i> • <i>Instagrammable Hotels</i> • <i>Existing sites with ticketing schemes</i>
Enclavic space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Selfie parks</i> • <i>Selfie museums</i>

The existing sites that had to incorporate ticketing systems including Tegalalang Rice Terraces, Handara Gate and other hotels or heritage sites considered especially Instagrammable. 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 can exist as active 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.

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 3). 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 of the selfie parks had the same

Figure 3. Aerial view of a Balinese selfie park.



One of the selfie park features that most designates it as enclavic is the requirement of payment enter the space. Upon arrival, greeters welcome visitors in a reception area with a *menu* of available packages for purchase (see Figure 4). There is a base charge of 100,000IDR simply for entry access to the park and the 'public' areas, with more exclusive photo packages available at an upcharge.

Figure 4. Selfie park reception area, menu of services and safety release.



The safety of the selfie parks were one of the most notable differentiating factors from other photographic hotspots around Bali that did not charge an entrance fee. 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 from uncontrolled heterogenous spaces, and this control is what lends itself towards a more positive experience for involved stakeholders.

The parks have a controlled atmosphere which categorically contribute to health and safety conditions for visitors. 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, like Iceland, where tourist injuries are quite common due to the difficult terrain, a space like a selfie park might be welcome for visitors to obtain the desired destination imagery without putting themselves or others in danger.

Convenience

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 have very nuanced onsite photographic behaviors like the use of props and exaggerated costume for the “*hidden performances of image creation*” as they “*choreographed and captured their desired images*” (p. 2346). Selfie parks offer a locally-managed space for photo seekers and 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.

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). 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.

Local community impacts and opportunities

The ticketing systems were useful in managing visitor numbers as well as maximizing economic revenue for hyper-local economies and communities. OM2 indicated that the selfie parks were a highly coveted source of employment for Balinese people, and that they travel from all around Bali to work here because it is a highly coveted job choice. 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 maximising the potential for the sector to contribute to regional economic development. An especially effective way to do this is through locals becoming more directly involved in terms of ownership and levels of control of tourism businesses.

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 or even assist with English language classes while visiting Bali. 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.

Commodification

The arguments around enclaves for tourists in the past can be split into perceptions by two groups: local communities and tourists themselves. Past research around tourism enclaves that addresses

impacts on local communities includes potential segregation between locals and tourists, economic leakages, and limited benefits for local communities if not planned and managed properly (Saarinen, 2019). From the tourists' perspective, there exists a notion that there is negative value for the tourist themselves in seeing an amusement park-like atmosphere that is disconnected from local culture and experiences, mirroring McDisneyization.

The success and planned expansions of selfie parks of Bali demonstrates travelers' lack of resistance towards the perceived commodification that a selfie park may represent. Indeed, as aforementioned, some tourists explicitly prefer the more efficient and sanitized experience of the parks. As interviewee OM2 stated:

“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. They even are happy to pay extra money for that.”

There is an inauthentic nature in many types of tourist photography (Larsen & Urry, 2011) and thus selfie parks are not a significant departure from long-existing norms in tourist photography.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study set out to explore the emergence of dedicated spaces for tourist photography in the selfie era, and how they compared to tourism enclaves that have been studied in the past. The original Disneyland was created as a safe, clean, aesthetically appealing entertainment environment which then became the model for the mass production of amusement and leisure experiences (Weinstein, 1992). Likewise, this research has found that as the quest for perfect selfies is a significant component of contemporary leisure experiences and therefore selfie parks can serve as a model for the mass production of such.

Much like all 'McDisneyized' hospitality or tourism businesses, the appeal of these enclavic spaces lies in the ease and convenience of having all of one's intended photographic opportunities in one place under a controlled environment which provides the elements that are a part of this photographic process, including professionalized equipment, costumes and props, and the distinct types of representations that these travelers are seeking to suitably portray the imagery they believe best represents Bali. 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. Selfie parks aid in standardizing the visual aesthetics of Bali, and they provide a structured and ordered nature of production and consumption. As such, the selfie parks visited in Bali are poised to follow a path to McDonaldization and because travel photography has become commoditized, a natural progression towards the commodification of obtaining the final photographic product will and has ensued.

Past research around tourism enclaves that addresses impacts on local communities includes potential segregation between locals and tourists, economic leakages, and limited benefits for local communities if not planned and managed properly (Saarinen, 2019). As compared to past criticism of tourism enclaves, the spaces that are now emerging in Bali for selfie-seekers can instead be feasible opportunities for visitor management, economic growth, and local employment.

The model of McDonaldization or McDisneyization does apply to several elements of selfie parks such as the ability to safeguard visitors against unwanted atmospheric elements and the convenience however the negative aspects normally associated with McDisneyization do not apply

to this model. However, this does not preclude that negative aspects may emerge over time if not managed well and kept wholly local. 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, tourist photographic practices and management. This study also provides practical contributions for tourist 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.

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. When conducting qualitative research, it is always important not to generalize findings beyond the research context. This study creates several 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.

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