

## Curating culture: Instagram and the visual representation of heritage tourism in Surabaya

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**Abstract** This study investigates how Instagram shapes public engagement with cultural heritage through a case study in Surabaya, Indonesia. Surabaya possesses diverse assets; however, its tourism potential remains underexplored compared with established destinations such as Yogyakarta. Instagram offers opportunities to study how Surabaya's identity is visually constructed and promoted to visitors. Through hashtag #surabayaheritage, users practice certain perspectives on the city's multifaceted history. This study aims to investigate how Instagram shapes public engagement with cultural heritage through a case study of Surabaya, Indonesia. Specifically, this research examines how Surabaya's identity is visually constructed through the hashtag #surabayaheritage on Instagram. Employing both qualitative content analysis and critical visual discourse, this study examined 100 top Instagram posts, revealing that heritage discourse dominated the posts, with Dutch colonial buildings being the primary photographic subjects. The research findings also emphasise that while the historical discourse emphasises architectural details and educational history, it marginalises other aspects of cultural heritage, especially those that do not originate from the colonial era. By applying visual discourse analysis, this aestheticised selective gaze indicates the productive power of Instagram conventions in framing heritage sites. Further research should incorporate non-Instagram perspectives and spatial analysis. As heritage tourism expands globally, critical examination of social media discourse provides vital insights into the risks and opportunities for inclusive and sustainable development, particularly for local communities.

**Keywords:** discourse; heritage; Instagram; tourism

### INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed how travellers engage with destinations, plan trips, and share their experiences. Platforms like Instagram offer a wealth of user-generated visual content that shapes perceptions of places. As Jurgenson points out, "People travel to take photos, and photos travel to attract people" (Jurgenson, 2019). Leveraging social media marketing and understanding tourist motivations is crucial for emerging tourist destinations seeking to promote cultural heritage assets.

The Indonesian city of Surabaya possesses a wealth of multicultural heritage, reflecting its history as a significant trading port in Southeast Asia (Damayanti & Kossak, 2016; Kuswanto et al., 2019). However, Surabaya's heritage tourism remains underdeveloped compared to more established Indonesian destinations such as Bali and Yogyakarta (Krisna et al., 2019). As Indonesia's second-largest city, Surabaya has the potential to attract greater cultural tourism. Instagram, which is heavily used by Indonesian youth, provides a platform for researching tourists' perceptions, marketing practices, and opportunities to showcase Surabaya's heritage.

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This study examines how Instagram engages with Surabaya's heritage sites and shapes the representation of heritage tourism. In doing so, two qualitative methods were utilised: qualitative content analysis and visual discourse analysis. The research questions posed are: First, how are Surabaya heritage sites textually represented on Instagram through the hashtag #surabayaheritage? Second, what discourses on Surabaya's heritage are constructed through the hashtag #surabayaheritage on Instagram?

Previous studies have shown that Instagram is one of the most influential social media platforms for visually promoting tourism destinations and shaping their online images (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). Compared to other platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, which combine various formats, Instagram's focus on visual photo sharing makes it uniquely impactful for place branding and heritage documentation (Acuti et al., 2018). Moreover, hashtags allow Instagram users to connect their posts to larger conversations and networks, creating viral trends that are difficult to analyse across multiple platforms (Saraswati & Beta, 2020). As Surabaya's heritage discourse is visually oriented, Instagram was selected for its power to widely disseminate images and build a cohesive narrative thread via hashtags, such as #surabayaheritage. While valuable insights could also emerge from exploring other platforms, examining Instagram provides a targeted understanding of how photos and captions framing heritage sites collectively mould tourism imaginaries and urban identity (Degen & Rose, 2022). Therefore, this study purposefully selects Instagram as the most relevant social media platform to shape Surabaya's heritage tourism landscape.

Heritage tourism highlights historical or cultural heritage, encompassing events, celebrations, places, and attractions that showcase past customs and traditions (Albert et al., 2013; Nagy, 2012). Heritage tourism can also be divided into tangible (buildings, sites, architecture, etc.) and intangible (art, customs, cultural practices) (Bhowmik, 2021). According to Nagy (2012), Nurrick's definition of heritage states that heritage includes any transmitted material from the past, such as cultural and natural resources, built environment, archaeological sites, intangible heritage, and natural heritage. These heritage resources are considered valuable by our multicultural society, not only for their historical significance but also for their aesthetic, scientific, or spiritual importance, and are worthy of preservation for the enjoyment of current and future generations (Nagy, 2012). The concept of heritage includes a wide range of aspects such as landscapes, historical sites, locations, built environments, biodiversity, collections, cultural practices, knowledge, and experiences from the past that continue to shape national, regional, and local identities (Mulyantari et al., 2021). Heritage tourism encapsulates the core of cultural tourism by providing genuine depictions of the historical, cultural, and natural assets of a specific region (Mulyantari et al., 2021).

Research has estimated that approximately 50% of leisure trips involve engagement with cultural and historical assets (Albert et al., 2013). Improved transport options combined with ageing populations seeking meaningful experiences explain the growth in heritage and nostalgia tourism (Falk & Hagsten, 2021). Cities emphasise cultural heritage in place branding to attract creative-class workers and investments in the knowledge economy (Gwee, 2009). Heritage tourism also facilitates postcolonial re-evaluations of history and identity. Instagram and social media enable virtual access and the growing popularity of difficult heritage sites related to war, genocide, and slavery (Bareither 2020).

Social media transformation has significant implications for heritage tourism, which has emerged as a major area of tourism scholarship and industrial growth since the 1990s (Degen and Rose, 2022; María et al., 2014). Reflecting the heightened global interest in culture, history, and traditions, studies have examined the diverse dimensions of visitor engagement with the past. Nostalgia, authenticity seeking, identity formation, and meaning-making commonly drive heritage tourism (Zhu 2021; Zhu and Martínez 2022). Studies also reveal complex visitor reactions to difficult heritage sites around war, genocide, and slavery as 'dark tourism' expands (Lewis & Schrier, 2022). Scholars have also explored photography and social media behaviour at heritage sites, noting the risks of superficial engagement (Jurgenson, 2019). Other studies have focused on heritage tourism in broader theories and contexts. The commodification of cultural practices and tourist gaze has been criticised (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Smith, 2018). Sustainability frameworks highlight the environmental and social impacts of the expansion of heritage tourism, particularly over-tourism (Benjamin et al. 2020; Bernardi 2022). Social media transformation has significant implications for heritage tourism, which has emerged as a major

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Several studies have analysed Instagram content to understand destination branding and its associations. Acuti et al. (2018) compared 1200 Instagram posts in London and Florence and found fashion integrated with heritage in the city image co-created by users (Acuti et al., 2018). They also studied Instagram and branding in London and Florence, confirming that consumers play a significant role in generating content that shapes brand image. Some research has examined how national cultural values influence cultural tourism promotion on Instagram across Chile, Portugal, the USA, and the Netherlands, emphasising the need to adapt social media marketing to the cultural background of the target markets (Albert et al., 2013). These initial destination branding studies on Instagram paved the way for a deeper investigation into the transformative impacts of social media and user-generated content on place branding.

Critical gaps remain, including the limited research on heritage tourism in the Global South and Muslim world contexts (Suradin, 2018). An analysis of emerging digital technologies and platforms is needed as virtual, augmented, and mixed reality transform heritage experiences. Greater investigation of the perspectives of host communities, excluded groups, and indigenous peoples is vital for equitable tourism (Bernardi, 2022). These gaps in understanding heritage tourism motivations, impacts, and technologies highlight the need for further research in understudied Global South contexts such as Indonesia.

While existing literature provides valuable insights into Instagram's multifaceted impacts on tourism and heritage engagement, significant research gaps remain. Most studies have focused on Europe, North America, and other Asian countries. More work is needed to explore tourist practices on Instagram across Africa, South America, the Middle East, and other regions (Mele et al. 2021; Nissen 2022; Smith 2018). Research tends to concentrate on certain popular sites, such as World Heritage Sites, rather than on diverse types of heritage attractions. The perspective of heritage organisations and local stakeholders is also lacking relative to that of tourists.

Heritage tourism has dramatically increased in Indonesia, paralleling global trends. Domestic and international tourism focusing on cultural sites and traditions has expanded significantly since the 2000s, as Indonesia has prioritised tourism development (Sihite & Nugroho, 2018; Suradin, 2018). Trips to heritage attractions grew by 251% from 2007-2017, outpacing tourism overall (World Bank 2020). Several factors drive the growth of heritage tourism in Indonesia. Cultural heritage assets attract travellers interested in history and tradition, especially temples, mosques, colonial architecture, ethnic diversity, art forms, and intangible heritage such as dance, crafts, and cuisine (Suradin, 2018). Improved infrastructure, such as new airports and roads, has increased access, combined with marketing campaigns promoting Indonesian heritage both domestically and abroad (Sihite & Nugroho, 2018). Event spotlighting culture also stimulates heritage tourism, including the UNESCO recognition of batiks, angklung musical instruments, and the Borobudur Buddhist Temple (Dwi & Subekti, 2017).

Key destinations exemplify Indonesia's increasing popularity of heritage tourism. Yogyakarta experienced a five-fold increase in visitors from 2002 to 2015, drawn by its palaces, temples, handicrafts, art, and cultural traditions (Dwi & Subekti, 2017). Bali's culture and temples are central to brand identity and Instagram's popularity (Sihite and Nugroho 2018). Batu and Malang leveraged social media and creative industries to promote their cultural assets and received the 'World Best Emerging Tourism Destination' award in 2017 (Hidayat & Are, 2018). However, risks accompany growth, including the commodification of culture, exclusion of local communities, and potential damage to fragile heritage sites. Sustainable management that balances conservation and responsible tourism development is required (Busque et al., 2021).

Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city, possesses a wealth of multicultural heritage that remains underleveraged for tourism. As a historic port, Surabaya is a vibrant hub for trade

and migration, reflected in an intricate mix of Javanese, Chinese, Arab, and Dutch architecture and communities (Ricklefs 1981). Surabaya is also renowned for its vibrant food scene, which merges Indonesian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern influences (Damayanti and Kossak 2016). However, awareness and promotion of Surabaya's heritage tourism potential have been limited compared to established destinations such as Yogyakarta or Bali. Domestic and international tourists often overlook Surabaya's rich assets. As Indonesia's second-largest metropolitan area, Surabaya has transport links, attractions, and soft infrastructure to support expanded cultural tourism. Surabaya can leverage its heritage with strategic planning and promotion to achieve sustainable urban development (Fianto and Andrianto, 2022).

Instagram offers a platform for researching tourist perceptions, showcasing Surabaya's heritage diversity to potential visitors, and developing creative city branding. An analysis of geotagged images, captions, and stories can provide insight into how tourists visually engage with sites, their interests, and behaviours (Wahyuni et al., 2021). Mapping popular and overlooked locations can help inform the planning process. Research on Instagram use specifically provides timely insights, as Indonesian youth are among the world's heaviest social media users, number four after India, the U.S. and Brazil (Statista, 2023). Surabaya's cultural heritage deserves greater celebration, and further study of its Instagram branding and promotion can help catalyse responsible tourism growth.

With all the research on Instagram and tourism above, very little research has explored it in terms of Surabaya tourism and Instagram (Krisna et al., 2019; Pramana et al., 2022). Even if there is, it is more focused on tourist sites that are already well known, such as Bali (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015; Kadar & Klaniczay, 2022; Krisna et al., 2019). As Indonesia expands culturally, analysis engaging local stakeholders to inform policies is vital. Examining Surabaya's emerging heritage discourse on Instagram will provide novel empirical insights into this understudied context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the representations and discourses of Surabaya's heritage on Instagram through hashtag #surabayaheritage, which already has more than 13 thousand posts. This hashtag was deliberately chosen because it has the highest engagement in terms of presenting Surabaya as heritage tourism on Instagram. To examine the research question on visual and textual representations, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on a systematic sample of 100 top public Instagram posts within the hashtag #surabayaheritage. Text elements, including captions and hashtags, were analysed thematically to uncover common topics and framings. The posts were read closely and inductively coded to identify salient themes and patterns in the data. As themes emerged, they were refined into codes, which were then grouped into broader conceptual categories. Through an iterative process of coding and recoding, the textual data were systematically analysed to surface key meanings and conceptualise the ways in which the issue was being discussed and framed across the posts. Attention was paid to extracting representative quotes and examples to illustrate salient framings and themes. This type of inductive thematic analysis allowed for an in-depth examination of textual content to uncover latent patterns and meanings.

The discussion section also employs an analysis of discursive construction towards the production and construction of such visual and textual information on #surabayaheritage on Instagram. This study employs critical visual discourse analysis, borrowing from the Gillian Rose framework, to examine representations of Surabaya heritage tourism on Instagram (Rose, 2021). We focus on how Instagram discourses surrounding Surabaya heritage sites and practices reinforce particular discursive power regarding the city's heritage. As Rose asserted, "Visual imagery is never innocent; it is always constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledge. Therefore, a critical approach to visual images is needed: one that considers the agency of the image considers the social practices and effects of its circulation and viewing, and reflects on the specificity of that viewing by various audiences, including the academic critic" (Rose, 2016). By specifically analysing Instagram visual images, this study explores how heritage is constructed, negotiated, and contested through the platform, shedding light on the social, cultural, and political factors that shape these representations. Conducting discourse analysis using Gillian Rose's visual methodology on Instagram posts involves considering visual aesthetics, presentation modalities, and the interplay between them (Rose, 2016). Specifically,

discourse analysis is useful for investigating “the social modality of the image site. In particular, discourse analysis explores how those specific views or accounts are constructed as real or truthful or natural through particular regimes of truth.” (Rose, 2016)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores the results of the data analysis and interpretation obtained from the qualitative content analysis of 100 top Instagram posts using the hashtag #surabayaheritage as an analysis point. Some dominant themes are outlined. The second part of this section will then continue the results of the qualitative content analysis utilising critical visual discourse based on Gillian Rose's framework, which looks between the text and its discursive practice.

### Constructing Surabaya's Heritage on Instagram: Initial Themes and Patterns

The qualitative content analysis revealed several key themes in how Surabaya's cultural heritage is visually and textually represented on Instagram through hashtag #surabayaheritage. As shown in Table 1, the analysis of 100 top posts uncovered predominant patterns related to the types of heritage sites portrayed, their era and condition, subjects depicted, tourism activities, and communication styles evident in captions and hashtags. Colonial architecture has emerged as the primary subject, with building aesthetics and educational history as major topics. Overall, these initial findings provide insights into how Instagram users engage with, portray, and co-construct Surabaya's heritage.

**Table 1.** Coding framework of #surabayaheritage on Instagram\*

Thematic	Exploration	Qualitative Interpretation
Type of heritage sites	Historic buildings, monuments, museums, cultural sites, religious sites, archaeological sites, etc	It is dominated by historical buildings and historical architecture. In addition to buildings, there are also well-preserved houses, as well as Dutch graves.
Location	City, neighbourhood, specific site name	Surabaya old town district that has left behind many Dutch colonial heritage buildings.
Era/origin	Colonial, post-independence, modern or contemporary	Dutch colonial history dominates the era represented in Instagram. Surabaya has been a bustling port city since the Dutch occupation.
Condition	Well-preserved, Damaged or deteriorating	It is dominated by colonial-era buildings that were renovated or restored by the Surabaya city government and the tourism office in order to develop heritage tourism in Surabaya.
Subject focus	Architecture, artefacts, exhibits, people, activities, ceremonies, customs, artworks	Most posts focus on the colonial buildings and architecture itself. Not much other heritage is displayed besides buildings/sites, e.g. art and cultural practices.
Tourism activities shown	Posing (selfies), visiting exhibits, tours, participating in cultural ceremonies	Most local (Surabaya) tourists who have an interest in photography of Surabaya's historical buildings are mostly behind the camera.
Tourism role	The main subject of the photo, background or context of other activity	Most make the buildings/heritage sites the background or context. The face is not overly highlighted (selfies are very rare), and the point of focus is on the wide angle of the historic building.
Captions (language used)	Educational, opinion, review, recommendations, humour/jokes, promotional / sponsored	Some official local government accounts are educational about the history of the site. Some of Surabaya's I.G. tourism accounts provide information about the location. Netizens' posts are a combination of educational and information about the historical background of the building. Very rarely promotional (even from official government/tourism agency accounts).
Aesthetics	1. Perspectives, angles, filters 2. Focus on grand architecture or details 3. Staged or candid	Historic buildings are seen as aesthetically pleasing, and the contrast between their historical value and the modern buildings around them is often highlighted. There seems to be an effort to elevate colonial history as a nostalgia for the past. The dominant building becomes the focal point of I.G. posts.
Tones (expression)	Informational, nostalgia, evoking emotions, humour/irony, promotional	Dominated by educational (telling the historical background of the building) and informational (where to find the building). The tone tends to be nostalgic.

\*Analysed thematically from the top 100 #surabayaheritage on Instagram  
 Source: Author' analysis (2023)

Several major trends have emerged from this analysis. First, a heavy focus was on colonial buildings and architecture from the Dutch era as the main heritage representations. Second, the visuals emphasise architectural aesthetics, with majestic angled shots of buildings rather than mundane streetscapes. Third, captions frequently have an educational tone, providing a historical background on colonial sites. Fourth, selfies and blatant tourist imagery are surprisingly rare, with buildings constituting the main frame subject. Fifth, obvious promotional language and hashtags are uncommon, even in official accounts.

The subsequent discussion interprets these key patterns in relation to the wider literature on social media and heritage tourism. The aim is to situate the findings within theoretical debates regarding Instagram's impact on cultural engagement and place identity. The discussion also considers how technological and social practices on Instagram may shape identified representations (Table 1). Further discourse analysis examined the latent power dynamics embedded in posts. Based on the findings of this study, implications for tourism development and promotion in Surabaya were explored.

The prevalence of colonial architecture as the main subject of #surabayaheritage Instagram posts reflects broader trends in postcolonial nostalgia in tourism marketing and experience (Caton & Santos, 2007; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2017; Salazar, 2012). The findings also reveal traces of counterperspectives. Some captions provide nuanced educational information on the colonial era, potentially encouraging critical reflections. This aligns with the research contending that social media allows diverse engagements with difficult heritage, not just superficial consumption (Bareither, 2020). Further discourse analysis can assess whether these captions reinforced or troubled colonial nostalgia.

The results also echo studies arguing that Instagram promotes viewing heritage as a consumable experience rather than deeper learning, given the focus on buildings' grandest and aesthetics (Wang et al., 2011). However, informational captions subverted this interpretation, suggesting the potential for more thoughtful engagement. Surabaya's government Instagram accounts and other well-known promotional I.G. accounts seem to have more intent on educational communication than just visually pleasing images.

These initial findings align with prior research on social media's tendency to promote nostalgic, aestheticised engagements with heritage sites that risk superficiality. However, counter-trends toward educational communication and documentation have also emerged, reflecting Instagram's user diversity (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). The prominence of colonial architectural imagery indicates the strength of colonial nostalgia in shaping which facets of Surabaya's diverse heritage are highlighted on Instagram. This emphasis marginalises other assets, such as the Arab and Chinese diaspora quarters, with their own rich history and hybrid culture. The emphasis on the visual layout and angle of buildings suggests how Instagram's technological capabilities influence cultural heritage interactions. However, the caption analysis suggests that many tourists seek to learn about architecture and eras, even if their visual orientation remains aesthetic. Surabaya residents themselves may perceive these colonial fragments more pragmatically as part of the lived urban environment rather than as tourist attractions. Overall, these qualitative content analysis findings demonstrate how Instagram trends can powerfully amplify particular visions of heritage sites oriented toward visual pleasure and nostalgia.

### **The Visual Representation of Postcolonial Nostalgia on Social Media**

The prominence of colonial architecture as a subject aligns with Foucault's view of discourse as productive in shaping particular ways of seeing and engaging with the world. Instagram posts normalised and naturalised a focus on colonial buildings as the definitive Surabaya heritage, marginalising pre-colonial and non-European history. It could be argued this dominant representation regime produced a narrow vision of the past. However, Foucault highlighted opportunities for resistance. The informational captions on some posts potentially open spaces to highlight excluded heritage and trouble the colonial narrative. Diverse users can introduce new discursive constructions for a city's identity.

The visual patterns exhibiting staged, enhanced architectural photographs also illustrate the disciplinary power of aesthetic discourse. Instagram's technology promotes certain normalised gazes and framings. However, users retain agency in their engagement with such tools. Appropriating filters or captions for more critical aims demonstrates the intertextual nature

of discourse. However, as discourse is diffuse and contested, opportunities exist for more diverse engagement. Further discourse analysis of intertextual links, assumptions, and power-knowledge claims would enrich the understanding of these complex dynamics. Foucault's framework also optimistically suggests that dominant discourses contain vulnerabilities to resistance and counter-knowledge. This opens a conceptual space to imagine social media fostering more inclusive and equitable heritage engagements.

Gillian Rose's framework of discourse analysis examines how knowledge claims render particular perspectives truthful or natural (Rose, 2016). This aligns with Foucault's (1988) argument that power operates by normalising certain regimes of truth (Foucault, 1988). The Instagram findings demonstrate this process, as colonial architecture is established as an authoritative Surabaya heritage. The historical details presented in captions about Dutch buildings strengthen this narrow regime. Pre-colonial, indigenous, diasporic pasts become marginalised 'counter-knowledges' in comparison.

Rose's analytical ways of seeing also compel a reflexive analysis of the critic's position (Rose, 2016, 2021). As researchers, we occupy an authoritative subject position that reproduces the power of interpreting Surabaya's heritage by coding Instagram posts. Our decisions on methodology, coding frames, and analytical interpretations all enact epistemic power. Being an insider on Surabaya also limited our perspective. Instagram's technological features also exert power by shaping aesthetic preferences through filters and editing tools.

Overall, applying Rose's framework reveals additional avenues for interpreting how varied powers shape the Instagram heritage discourse. Her emphasis on reflexivity, derived from Foucault, compels a deeper examination of our own assumptions and complicity in disciplinary knowledge construction as researchers. The analysis also focuses on how Instagram's technical and business operations exert power alongside the user content itself. This demonstrates the broader value of visual discourse analysis, which situates images within wider social power networks. Photos appearing innocuous as travel mementoes are interpreted as forces of colonial erasure when positioned in relation to marginalised counter-histories. The images' reality effects become unveiled as being carefully cultivated rather than natural. Therefore, discourse analysis provides a vital lens for contextualising how Instagram heritage discourse intersects knowledge formations, user practices, platform architectures, mobilities of meaning, and tourism economies.

This study examines how Instagram is utilised to engage with and represent Surabaya's cultural heritage assets, as captured through hashtag #surabayaheritage. Qualitative content and discourse analysis of the top posts revealed several predominant themes. Colonial architecture and Dutch-era buildings overwhelmingly dominate as subjects, with a focus on their grandeur and aesthetics over the intangible dimensions of heritage. Captions frequently adopt an educational tone to provide a historical background. However, contemporary multicultural facets of Surabaya have received limited prominence. Applying Foucault and Rose's frameworks, we can interpret visual and textual patterns as reflecting the productive power of an Instagram nostalgia discourse that privileges colonial vestiges as Surabaya's authoritative heritage. However, opportunities exist for user-generated content to diversify representations by excluding narratives. Further research should incorporate interviews with Surabayans to capture the contested constructions of the city's identity fully. Overall, this initial study demonstrates Instagram's tendency to promote aestheticised, consumable engagements with colonial architecture that risks decontextualising difficult heritage. However, counter-discourses have emerged that encourage a more nuanced grappling with the inequities of the colonial past. As Surabaya strives to leverage its vibrant multicultural fabric for sustainable heritage tourism, the findings suggest the need for enhanced ethics in its Instagram branding. Concerted efforts to showcase diversity can enrich perceptions. However, Instagram's commercial interests pose challenges for participatory, ethical representation. Further research on the surrounding platforms and non-digital heritage experiences will provide a clearer picture.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explores how Instagram is utilised to visually and textually represent Surabaya's diverse cultural heritage, as well as the discourses constructed within the hashtag #surabayaheritage. Several key findings emerge through qualitative content analysis of top posts and the application of visual discourse analysis frameworks. Colonial architecture

overwhelmingly dominates the subjects, reflecting a nostalgia discourse that romanticises Dutch legacies as an authoritative heritage. However, some captions encourage a more nuanced engagement with the colonial era's oppressive dimensions. Surabaya's multicultural fabric beyond colonialism has received limited prominence. The focus on visually pleasing imagery risks reducing heritage to a consumable aesthetic experience.

Overall, the results align with the prior literature on social media's tendency to decontextualise the past by accentuating grand facades and nostalgic gazing. The prevalence of the nostalgic colonial discourse indicates that many Instagram users and tourists adhere to the common perspective being circulated and promoted on the platform. Rather than challenging the status quo, their posts conform to the majority voice that privileges Dutch architectural remnants over other heritage assets. Their imagery and narratives frequently fall into a tourist gaze that objectifies the past into consumable sights and aesthetically pleasing facades. Most users seem to uncritically absorb the selective historical framing they encounter on Instagram, reproducing similar visual tropes and textual themes.

As the city expands its cultural tourism initiatives, the strategic strategy of its Instagram branding and partnerships with local communities is vital to ensure that diverse voices are heard. Theoretically, this study provides further evidence for the productive power of social media in framing heritage sites and shaping collective imaginaries. It shows how Instagram's technological affordances and vernacular creative practices selectively reconstruct notions of cultural heritage and urban identity. The dominance of aestheticised colonial architecture expands scholarly understandings of nostalgia discourse in digitally mediated tourism engagement. However, the emergence of more critical captions also underscores that Instagram Users can foster multifaceted negotiations with the past, not just passive consumption. Hence, users have agentive capabilities for more inclusive representations if granted appropriate resources. Examining this Instagram discourse highlights the need for theory attuned to modern heritage experiences mediated through digital platforms. This initial study contributes to the empirical analysis of Instagram's double-edged impact in an understudied Indonesian context. Furthermore, limitations exist regarding sample size and the lack of non-Instagramming perspectives. Further research should compare the findings across multiple platforms and geotagged locations. Interviews, surveys, participant observations, and spatial mapping can enrich our understanding of complex heritage discourse.

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