

A Semiotic Branding Analysis of Borobudur: World Spiritual Tourism Destination

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Latifah¹

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ABSTRACT

In the context of internationalizing Borobudur as a destination for global Buddhist religious tourism this research aims to address the research questions: how does Borobudur's branding position it as a centre for the world's religions this study focuses on Borobudur's branding in social media and content, social networks, social news, review sites, and virtual worlds forum. This research also incorporates data obtained through interviews with the managers of Borobudur Temple. This research employs a qualitative approach with a semiotic branding approach related to the declaration of the Borobudur Temple complex designated as one of the world's religious centres. the researcher conducts an analysis within the frameworks of syntagmatic, paradigmatic, and intertextuality. The research highlights Borobudur's profound significance as a living spiritual and multicultural space, emphasizing its identity as a dynamic product shaped by social media. The study identifies two perceptions: religious tourism and cultural engagement, emphasizing Borobudur's multicultural appeal. The study aligns with the evolving nature of place branding, emphasizing emotional and experiential aspects. In conclusion, Borobudur emerges as a dynamic, spiritually rich destination with multicultural appeal. Social media plays a pivotal role in shaping its brand, emphasizing continuous promotion for global recognition and resonance. The influence of information technology propels globalization, altering the branding terrain. In this dynamic environment, tourists play an active role in shaping destination images, disrupting conventional top-down methodologies.

1. INTRODUCTION

On February 11, 2022, Borobudur, an ancient temple in Indonesia, achieved global recognition as a center for world religions, particularly for the worship of the international Buddhist community. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) marked a pivotal moment, involving key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Agama Buddha Kertarajasa, Indonesia. Email: efi.latifah@gmail.com

Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the Regional Government of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, and the Central Java Province (Tim Humas 2022a). This strategic initiative aimed at utilizing Borobudur, along with Prambanan Temple, Mendut Temple, and Pawon Temple, for the interests of both Hindu and Buddhist communities in Indonesia and worldwide.

The sacred and global dimensions of Borobudur were underscored by the formation of a Technical Team for the Utilization of Borobudur as a Center for Buddhist Worship, as outlined in the Decree of the Director General of Buddhist Guidance in 2021. Rooted in the teachings of Buddha, the significance of visiting sacred Buddhist places is highlighted in the Mahaparanibbana *Sutta* (D.N.22), where it is proclaimed that those who die with faith while on a pilgrimage will find rebirth in a realm of heavenly happiness (Vajira a998nd Story 1).

From its initiation as a center for world religions, Borobudur has embraced the sacred by organizing various Buddhist activities, ranging from major annual worship events to daily, weekly, and monthly practices. Puja Manggala Uposatha, conducted on April 2, 2022 (Tim Humas 2022b), exemplifies this commitment, with Buddhists reciting prayers for happiness within the temple's precincts. In a broader context, Buddhist sacred sites, including Borobudur, have transformed into spiritual tourism destinations (Hermawan 2017), contributing to Indonesia's vision of positioning Borobudur as a world-class destination and a Super Priority Tourism Destination.

However, despite these efforts, challenges persist, as evidenced by the slow growth in the number of foreign tourists visiting Borobudur. The 2020 Integrated Tourism Master Plan emphasizes the need for improvements, recommending measures such as direct flights and enhanced tourist amenities. Notably, the plan focuses on infrastructure development, raising questions about the efficacy of branding strategies in attracting international visitors.

This research seeks to address the gaps in understanding Borobudur's branding as a center for the world's religions, particularly in the context of global Buddhist religious tourism. The study aims to explore Borobudur's positioning through an evaluation of its branding practices in social media and content platforms. By delving into microblogging, social networks, media sharing sites, social news, bookmarking, review sites, forums, and virtual worlds, the research aims to decipher the representation of external stakeholders toward Borobudur's brand and tourism image.

To contextualize this investigation, previous studies on Borobudur's tourism and religious pilgrimage provide valuable insights. Hermawan et al.'s research (Hermawan et al. 2019), for instance, highlighted the importance of sacredness and the destination's image in influencing foreign tourists' interest in Borobudur. Building upon these findings, my study adopts a different approach, focusing on online media content and external stakeholder representation.

As we embark on this exploration of Borobudur's branding, we recognize the need to understand how the global promotion process, especially in the tourism sector, influences its sacred identity. By contributing to the fields of marketing

management and religious tourism, this research aims to unravel the nuances that make Borobudur a unique and compelling destination for the world's religions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a semiotic branding approach related to the declaration of the Borobudur Temple complex as a religious tourism destination object, designated as one of the world's religious centers. Semiotic marketing research forms a specific methodology within the interpretive research tradition concerning its strategic focus, methodology, and underlying logic. Semiotics takes into account the relationship between various sign systems that play a role in the data set by considering the contrast between verbal and nonverbal messages, such as the disposition of design elements on service sites or the structure of multimedia hypertext experiences. These relationships often represent emerging consumer needs or cultural trends. To uncover these emerging codes, Greimas semiotics conducts binary analysis of findings using a research tool called the semiotic square (Oswald 2015; Hébert 2019, 40–49).

In the first place, semiotic analysis identifies cultural codes in patterns formed from data. The data set includes many examples to infer the logic underlying meaning production in a category or consumer segment. The second stage of semiotic analysis involves in-depth research that often forms the basis for their positioning and creative development. This research explores deeper consumer expectations of the brand to foster creativity in subsequent branding strategies (Oswald 2015, 45).

In semiotics, two main concepts are known, namely signifier and signified. The signifier is the sign itself, which can take the form of an image, slogan, word, or sentence. Meanwhile, the signified refers to the ideas, concepts, meanings, or notions expressed by the signifier (Djiwandono and Yulianto 2023, 61–65). This semiotic study aims to map the signifiers and signified that are widely dispersed in the communication of the online world. To achieve this, the researcher conducts an analysis within the frameworks of syntagmatic, paradigmatic, and intertextuality.

Therefore, this research utilizes primary data sources, namely writings in the form of news, features, or essays, images, and videos related to Borobudur as a world religious center, produced by stakeholders (managers, government, and foreign visitors, especially posted in YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Tripadvisor. Other primary data includes interviews with stakeholders, namely the management of PT Taman Wisata Candi (TWC). Simultaneously with data collection in the field, data analysis is carried out because the data analysis process takes place simultaneously. During data collection, transcripts are created, which are then coded to mark the analysis of important parts or segments of data, both language and visual data (Bungin; 2021, 262–63).

The binary structure is defined by signifiers, the visual and textual elements representing Borobudur, and signified, the associated ideas conveyed by these elements. The analysis involves three frameworks: syntagmatic, paradigmatic, and intertextuality. In syntagmatic analysis, sequential examination of online content identifies related visual and textual elements, unveiling meanings like the pilgrimage

experience and spiritual journey. Paradigmatic analysis focuses on choices made within a set of signs, revealing intentional representations; for example, specific images of religious rituals may signify Borobudur's spiritual ambiance. Intertextuality analysis explores references and influences between Borobudur-related signs and other cultural or textual elements online, contributing to a broader cultural context.

The binary analysis process consists of seven steps, starting with data collection from various online platforms. Identification of signifiers involves recognizing visual and textual elements representing Borobudur. Analysis within the syntagmatic framework sequentially reveals meanings and concepts, while paradigmatic analysis examines intentional representations within a set of signs. Intertextuality analysis explores connections to other cultural elements online. Binary coding assigns codes indicating the presence or absence of specific meanings to each signifier. Data interpretation involves collectively analyzing binary codes to understand patterns and trends in Borobudur's representation. This systematic application of the binary analysis method provides a nuanced understanding of the intricate layers of meaning embedded in Borobudur's online communication, contributing to its semiotic representation in the digital realm as a world spiritual tourism destination.

The syntagmatic framework is evident in the sequential arrangement of observations related to Borobudur's branding. The text first introduces the overarching goal of developing Borobudur as a spiritual tourism destination and then progresses to the methodology, incorporating the analysis of social media platforms, specifically YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. The narrative unfolds systematically, allowing readers to follow the logical progression of the semiotic analysis process, mirroring the sequential nature of syntagmatic analysis.

The paradigmatic framework is applied in the exploration of choices made in representing Borobudur. It delves into the perceptions of international tourists and emphasizes the multifaceted aspects that resonate with them, such as spiritual ambiance, cultural richness, and architectural magnificence. The exploration of distinct categories, including the portrayal of Borobudur as a religious tourism destination and the engagement of individuals from diverse backgrounds in cultural practices, highlights the choices made in shaping the branding of Borobudur. This framework aids in understanding the diverse narratives that contribute to Borobudur's overall semiotic representation.

The intertextuality framework is reflected in the references to interviews, personal narratives, and multimedia content. Interviews and references to cultural practices, such as *pradakshinaa*, draw on real-world interactions and experiences, contributing to a rich intertextual tapestry. Moreover, the inclusion of visuals, such as videos and photographs from social media, serves as a direct intertextual link, bringing viewers into the shared experiences of visitors. The intentional use of specific cultural symbols, like the chanting of Buddhist prayers or the depiction of rituals, creates intertextual connections with broader cultural and religious contexts, enriching the semiotic analysis. In brief, the syntagmatic framework guides the chronological presentation of findings, the paradigmatic framework reveals the choices made in representation, and the intertextuality framework intertwines real-

world narratives and multimedia content to provide a holistic understanding of Borobudur's semiotic branding as a global spiritual tourism destination.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

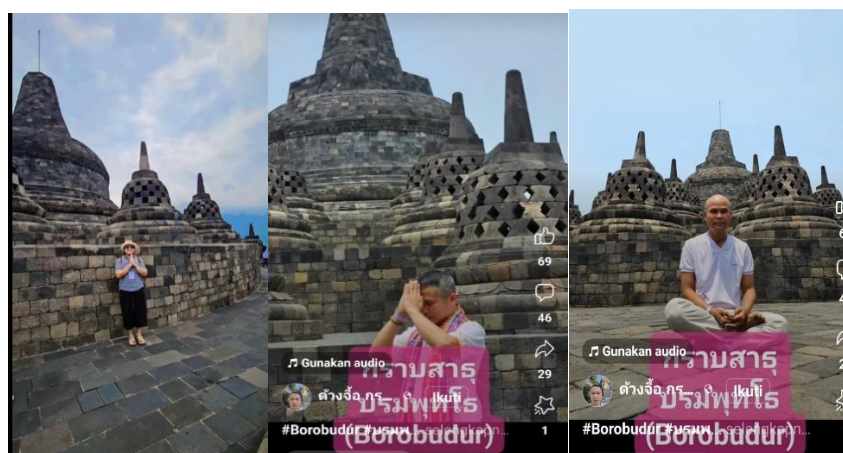
In the effort to develop the Borobudur brand as a world-class spiritual or religious tourism destination, we need to consider the essence of Borobudur as a "product" that emphasizes its spiritual image. To elevate Borobudur's status as a prominent global spiritual or religious tourism destination, it is crucial to delve into the perceptions conveyed by international tourists through websites and various social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. These platforms serve as a lens through which we can observe and understand how visitors from around the world interact with and portray their experiences at Borobudur. By analysing their posts, videos, and comments, we gain insights into the aspects that resonate most strongly with them – whether it be the spiritual ambiance, the cultural richness, or the architectural magnificence of Borobudur. Harnessing the power of social media, we can strategically shape and refine the branding of Borobudur, ensuring that it resonates with the spiritual and religious aspirations sought by global travellers. This multifaceted approach, anchored in the digital realm, allows us to authentically communicate Borobudur's unique identity and position it as a beacon for spiritual seekers worldwide.

In an interview with Mrs. Rini Andriyani from PT. Taman Wisata Candi Borobudur, it was revealed the intention of visitors. The primary motivation for visitors to ascend Borobudur Temple is to capture aesthetically pleasing photographs and gain a closer understanding of its historical significance. On the other hand, visitors from Thailand visit for spiritual reason. Mrs. Rini emphasized the observation that visitors from Thailand predominantly arrive with the intention of religious worship, albeit necessitating adjustments to accommodate the prescribed visiting hours and applicable permit procedures. The management has devised hour-long visitation sessions atop Borobudur Temple, each subject to a quota, thereby requiring visitors to make reservations in advance. Additionally, specific sandal requirements have been instituted to ensure the preservation of the temple's surface. This is orchestrated in alignment with the temple's capacity constraints and serves to cultivate a more structured visitation experience for attendees. In conclusion, the outcomes of this interview underscore disparities in visitor motivation and expectations, illuminating the management's endeavours to furnish an organized and impactful visitation encounter at Borobudur Temple. Consequently, effective branding strategies stand to fortify Borobudur's standing as a global spiritual tourism destination.

Social media platforms analysis such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook serve as invaluable lenses through which we observe and comprehend global visitors' interactions with Borobudur. Analyzing posts, videos, and comments unveils the aspects resonating most strongly with visitors, offering a nuanced understanding of their experiences. In exploration of the spiritual image of Borobudur, it becomes evident that there are at least two distinct categories that depict the perceptions of

In **Figure 2**, an engaging visual narrative unfolds, capturing the essence of dynamic movement as the individual behind the camera deftly manoeuvres around the stupa. Despite the rapid pace, the pilgrimage to Borobudur Temple is imbued with a distinctly religious aura, as the visitors traverse the sacred grounds while intoning *Paritta Vandana Tisarana Buddhanusati Dhammanusato Sanghanusati* (Dhammadhiro 2017). Notably, the audio accompanying the footage emanates from the authentic sounds recorded by the videographer, subtly preserving the purity of the experience, even in the absence of their facial presence on screen.

In a separate video, a compelling juxtaposition occurs when the video creator steps into the spotlight, revealing their countenance and engaging in Buddhist rituals, such as the reverent *anjali* pose illustrated in **Figure 3** and **Figure 4**. The contemplative *dhyani mudra* depicted in **Figure 5**. This deliberate inclusion of the creator's identity adds a personal dimension to the visual narrative, forging a connection between the viewer and the spiritual journey documented. Importantly, this consistent emphasis on the portrayal of religious tourism remains unwavering, transcending the mere backdrop of Borobudur in their photographs or videos. Instead, the iconic temple becomes an integral part of a broader narrative, intertwining the sacred and the visual in a seamless tapestry of cultural and spiritual exploration.



From Left to Right. **Figure 3**. Posing Anjali (Courtesy of Thaw Dar Win).

Figure 4. Posing Anjali. **Figure 5**. Posing Dhyanamudra (Courtesy of ดำงจื้อ กระบี่บินเดี่ยว)

Beyond Buddhist visitors, individuals from diverse backgrounds also engage in cultural practices at Borobudur, apparent in their adoption of the *anjali* gesture and seated postures forming *mudras* that convey Buddhist spiritual characteristics, as illustrated in **Figures 6** and **7**. This intercultural manifestation suggests a universal appreciation and respect for the spiritual ambiance of the temple, transcending religious affiliations. This intercultural manifestation suggests a universal appreciation and respect for the spiritual ambiance of the temple, transcending religious affiliations, and emphasizing the sacredness of the site.



From Left to Right. **Figure 6.** A Tourist Seated in Padmasana, courtesy of Asmarahana Borobudur Tours (2022). **Figure 7.** A Tourist in Anjali, courtesy of San H Laing (2020)

Moreover, foreign tourists are observed participating in *pradakshinaa*, a circumambulatory ritual, guided by motifs rooted in their own cultural beliefs. **Figure 8** captures instances where international visitors perform *pradakshinaa* with the intent of acquiring auspicious life experiences. This cultural convergence highlights Borobudur as a shared space where visitors, irrespective of their origins, converge in search of profound spiritual encounters. *Pradakshinaa*, obviously, has become a tradition embraced by international tourists, serving as a conduit for a spiritual experience commonly associated with their visits to Borobudur Temple. **Figure 9**, depicting a guide to *pradakshinaa* posted by a tourist, further reinforces the significance of this ritual within the broader narrative of cultural and spiritual exploration at Borobudur. The convergence of diverse cultural expressions around these practices underscores Borobudur's role as a global pilgrimage site, where individuals from various cultural backgrounds come together in a collective pursuit of spiritual enrichment.



From Left to Right. **Figure 8.** Pradakshinaa, good fortune and love. **Figure 9.** Borobudur's sign board map

Beyond documenting personal experiences, the spiritual atmosphere at Borobudur comes to life through the rituals conducted by a *bhikkhu* in the early morning, as illustrated in **Figure 10**. In a snapshot captured by a French tourist, a *bhikkhu* is portrayed engrossed in solitary prayer while engaging in the ritual of *pradakshinaa*. In contrast to the apparent solitude, the *bhikkhu* is, in fact, accompanied by a *samaneri* and followed by two tourists from East Asia during this poignant moment, as revealed in an interview with Dittthisampanno Thera regarding the implementation of the morning prayer at Borobudur. The purpose behind capturing this scene is evidently to provide a contextual link between Borobudur and the vibrant religious practices of Buddhism.

It is discernible that the primary intention of the photographer is to encapsulate the essence of Borobudur within the broader framework of Buddhism's active religious life. Consequently, the photographer deems that the distant sighting of *bhikkhu* and his distinctive robe adequately encapsulates the spiritual ambiance. In an admirable display of respect for the privacy of the tourists engaged in prayer alongside a *bhikkhu*, the photographer consciously refrains from including them in the photograph. This deliberate choice underscores the sensitivity and consideration with which the photographer approaches the portrayal of spiritual moments, preserving the sanctity of the religious experience for both the practitioners and the observer. Moreover, from that post, we can interpret that the elements of locality are the primary focus for the foreign tourist, as they only capture the presence of a *bhikkhu* in that moment and disregard the presence of other foreign tourists who are also performing *pradakshinaa* following *bhikkhu*.



Figure 10. A *bhikkhu* in solitary prayer Courtesy of babelo_adventure (2023),

The photograph depicting a lone *bhikkhu* engaging in *pradakshinaa*, even though in reality he is accompanied by two other foreign tourists, contrasts with the spiritual activities captured in **Figures 11, 12** (from a TripAdvisor member) and **13** (from Facebook). In these images, a distinct group of international visitors actively participates in religious practices alongside a Rinpoche or *bhikkhu*. The values of sacredness are vividly captured in the spiritual experience manifested through the communal engagement in these religious rituals, whether the photographer is directly involved or merely an observer. This communal involvement also reveals the inclusivity of the spiritual journey within the sacredness of Borobudur.

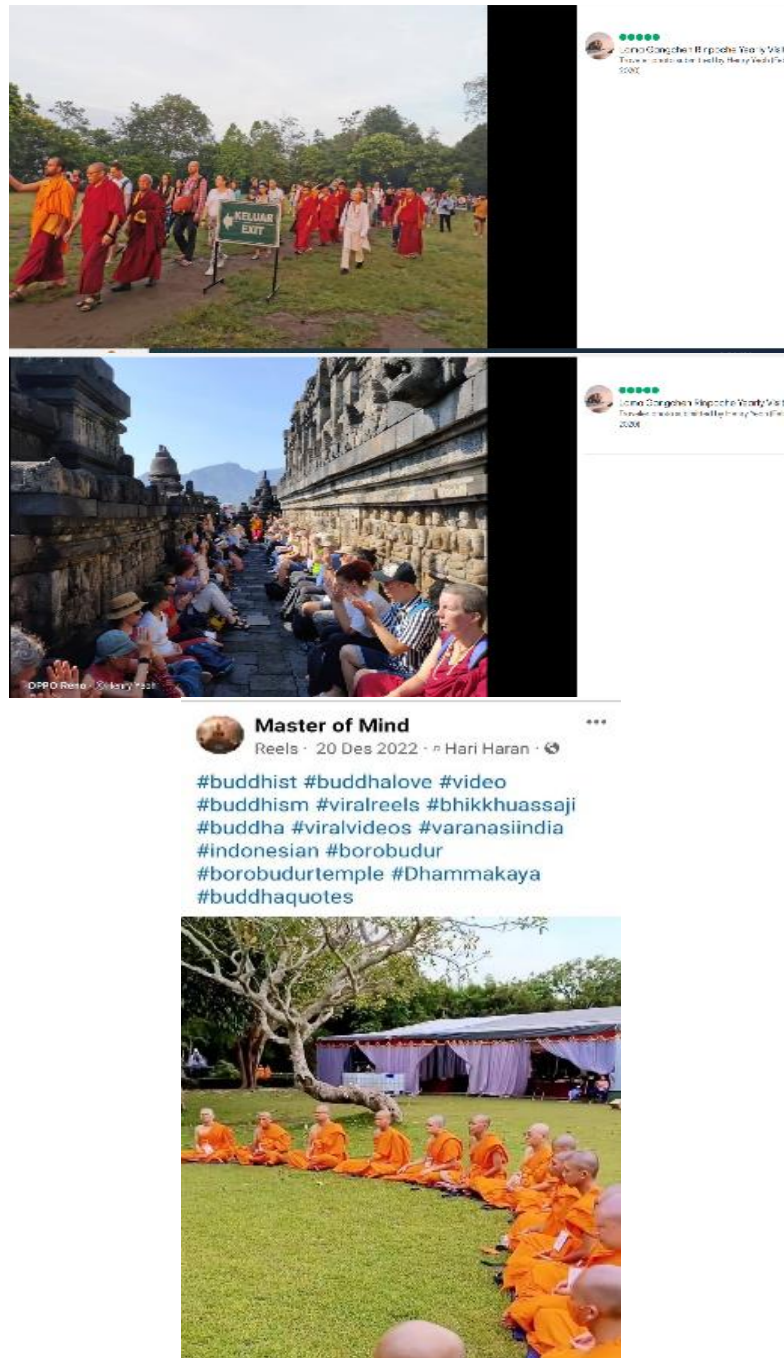


Figure 11 & 12. lama Gangchen Rinpoche Yearly Visit Traveller, courtesy of Henry Yeoh (Feb 2023). **Figure 12.** Meditation in circle, courtesy of Master of Mind, <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1468855160271095>

The spiritual experience at Borobudur Temple is not only inclusive but also reflects Indonesia's multiculturalism through the contributions made by foreign visitors. These visitors often capture these moments through photographs that depict the religious identity of Muslims, who are also a significant group of visitors at Borobudur. This religious identity is clearly evident through attire, particularly among visitors who wear the hijab **Figure 14**. Through the uploading of these photos,

foreign tourists showcase inclusivity at Borobudur, globally recognized as a representation of the heritage of Nusantara's Buddhist teachings and culture. Furthermore, this portrayal can be interpreted as a response to the reports of terrorism threats that are still often associated with Borobudur. By featuring the religious identity of Muslims in this Buddhist sacred site, foreign visitors indirectly convey a positive message about religious harmony and tolerance in Indonesia. This action can help alleviate the negative stigma associated with the potential terrorism threat and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the harmonious reality among various religious groups visiting Borobudur. As a result, their experiences not only contribute to the sustainability of spiritual inclusivity at the site but also enrich the positive narrative about religious life in Indonesia as a whole.



Figure 13. Space of Religious Moderation Courtesy of IG: @atson

To advance Borobudur's stature as a premier global spiritual and religious tourism destination, an exploration into its essence as a "product" with a distinct spiritual image is imperative. Delving into international tourists' perceptions, as conveyed through various online platforms, unveils insights that shape strategic branding efforts. To elevate Borobudur's standing as a premier global spiritual and religious tourism destination, it is imperative to delve into its essence as a unique "product" with a distinct spiritual image. This exploration involves understanding international tourists' perceptions, as conveyed through various online platforms, to unveil insights that can inform strategic branding efforts.

Various visitor motivations for ascending Borobudur were revealed, highlighting a diverse range of intentions. Among general tourists, the allure lies in the aesthetics and historical understanding that the temple offers. In contrast, visitors from Thailand demonstrate a distinct preference, primarily seeking a profound spiritual experience during their ascent of Borobudur. This discernible difference in motivations calls for precise management adjustments. To address the spiritual expectations of Thai visitors, the management has implemented meticulous changes reflected in reservation systems and specific requirements. This strategic approach not only acknowledges the unique needs of spiritual seekers but also underscores the

management's unwavering commitment to curating impactful visitation encounters at Borobudur.

In portraying Borobudur as a religious tourism destination, distinct categories reflecting its spiritual image come to light. Buddhist tourists, particularly from Buddhist-majority countries, emphasize religious aspects in their posts, documenting practices such as *pradakshinaa* and incorporating Buddhist symbols and chants. This emphasis underscores Borobudur's significance as a destination fulfilling the religious pursuits of Buddhist pilgrims.

Beyond Buddhism, visitors from diverse backgrounds engage in cultural practices, adopting gestures and rituals that convey a universal appreciation for Borobudur's spiritual ambiance. Foreign tourists actively participate in *pradakshinaa*, highlighting the temple as a shared space where diverse cultures converge in pursuit of spiritual enrichment. The portrayal of religious identity, particularly by Muslim visitors, contributes to Borobudur's inclusivity narrative, countering negative stigmas and fostering a harmonious understanding of religious life in Indonesia.

Photographic and video evidence further illustrates communal engagement in religious practices at Borobudur, emphasizing the sacredness of the site. Visitors actively participating alongside spiritual leaders underscore the inclusive and enriching nature of the spiritual journey at Borobudur, reinforcing its status as a destination where diverse cultures come together in a shared pursuit of spiritual connection.

Discussion

The findings of the study underscore Borobudur's significance, extending beyond its historical and architectural attributes to establish itself as a spiritual and multicultural destination. This exploration delves into Borobudur's essence, emphasizing its identity as a "product" with a distinct focus on its spiritual image. The following discussion aims to analyse and interpret the research outcomes, shedding light on the perceptions of international tourists as expressed through various digital platforms, notably websites and social media.

The study emphasizes the critical role played by social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TripAdvisor functioning as lenses through which global visitors' perceptions are observed. By scrutinizing posts, videos, and comments, the research aims to extract insights into the aspects of Borobudur that resonate most profoundly with international tourists.

The exploration identifies at least two distinct categories portraying foreigners' perceptions of Borobudur's spiritual image. Firstly, the temple is depicted as a religious tourism destination, with a specific emphasis on Buddhist interests, particularly highlighted by visitors from Buddhist-majority countries. These tourists document their religious activities, emphasizing rituals like *pradakshinaa* and incorporating Buddhist symbols and chants into their digital narratives.

Examining Buddhist perspectives, Figure 1 illustrates the spiritual journey of a Thai tourist, emphasizing the profound insights sought from the teachings of Buddha intricately carved on Borobudur's relief panels. The inclusion of the meditative chant "Om Mani Padme Hum" creates a transformative audio-visual experience, allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the spiritual essence of the pilgrimage. Beyond the Buddhist perspective, **Figures 6 and 7** depict individuals from diverse backgrounds engaging in cultural practices at Borobudur. The adoption of the *anjali* gesture and mudras conveys Buddhist spiritual characteristics, emphasizing a universal appreciation for the spiritual ambiance of the temple that transcends religious affiliations. The research further illustrates Borobudur's multicultural appeal, with foreign tourists participating in *pradakshinaa* guided by motifs rooted in their own cultural beliefs (Figure 8). This cultural convergence emphasizes Borobudur as a shared space where individuals from various cultural backgrounds converge in pursuit of profound spiritual encounters.

Borobudur emerges not merely as a historical monument but as a living spiritual and multicultural space. The digital realm, specifically social media, serves as a powerful tool to shape and refine Borobudur's branding, ensuring it resonates with the spiritual and religious aspirations sought by global travellers. The inclusivity, cultural convergence, and sensitivity depicted in the digital narratives enrich the multifaceted identity of Borobudur, positioning it as a global beacon for spiritual seekers and cultural explorers alike.

The findings of this research affirm the strength of Borobudur's "product" image as a global religious or spiritual tourism destination. This branding can be reinforced through the posts of foreign tourists emphasizing Borobudur's identity as the primary focus of its spiritual image. Therefore, continuous efforts in promotional methods are necessary to enhance and strengthen the image that is already known to the public.

As articulated by Judisseno (2019, 19–20), promotion is a continuing activity after a strong brand image is formed, as promotional activities involve disseminating the brand image of a product through various methods to reach the target market. Consequently, consumers are motivated to try the product. The key to forming a brand image and effective tourism promotion, especially concerning the international target market, relies on the Country of Origin (CoO) concept.

In the tourism context, CoO is associated with the demand side, encompassing sociodemographic characteristics, the number of visits, length of stay, sources of information, tourists' attitudes and lifestyles that can influence the environment of their travel destination, as well as satisfaction and the intention to revisit. Therefore, repeated branding activities through brand identity, marketing communication, and customer services are necessary to create a strong emotional attachment with consumers in the long term.

The research findings confirm Borobudur's strength as a global religious and spiritual tourism destination. This branding can be further reinforced through the continued efforts of foreign tourists, emphasizing Borobudur's identity as the focal point of its spiritual image. Persistent promotional methods are deemed necessary to

enhance and strengthen the image already known to the public. As mentioned by Lominadze and Soroka (2011), the branding of a destination through an iconic product, such as Borobudur Temple, involves an interrelationship on a symbolic level. Iconic products contribute attributes and features to the destination brand, and vice versa. The understanding and symbolization of a destination by consumers are influenced by iconic products. The functional dimensions of an iconic product play a role in influencing the destination brand. A positive iconic product experience positively impacts the formation of the destination image, and vice versa. Therefore, the symbiotic relationship between Borobudur as an iconic product and its role in shaping the destination brand is integral to its success in the global tourism landscape.

The findings of the study underscore Borobudur's significance, extending beyond its historical and architectural attributes to establish itself as a spiritual and multicultural destination. This exploration delves into Borobudur's essence, emphasizing its identity as a "product" with a distinct focus on its spiritual image. The following discussion aims to analyze and interpret the research outcomes, shedding light on the perceptions of international tourists as expressed through various digital platforms, notably websites and social media.

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4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the profound significance of social media platforms in shaping and refining the branding of Borobudur as a dynamic spiritual and multicultural space, transcending its historical and architectural essence. The study accentuates the pivotal role played by platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TripAdvisor, which serve as influential lenses through which global visitors' perceptions are observed.

Borobudur, far from being confined to its historical significance, emerges as a vibrant space resonating with the spiritual and religious aspirations of diverse global travelers. The digital realm, particularly social media, is identified as a potent tool for influencing and enhancing Borobudur's branding to align with the varied spiritual and cultural interests of its visitors. This research recognizes the evolving nature of tourism brand perceptions, influenced by historical, sociocultural factors, and the

transformative impact of information technology on globalization, thereby disrupting traditional branding methodologies.

The importance of continuous promotional efforts is underscored to solidify Borobudur's image as a global religious and spiritual tourism destination. The study emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between Borobudur as an iconic product and its role in shaping the destination brand for success in the global tourism landscape.

Furthermore, this research aligns with prior studies that emphasize the evolving nature of place branding, prioritizing emotional and experiential aspects over functional appeals. It recommends adaptive destination branding efforts, urging the incorporation of innovative strategies to engage diverse target audiences and establish a robust emotional attachment with consumers over the long term. In summary, the findings affirm Borobudur's resilience as a multifaceted global destination, highlighting the crucial role of strategic and adaptive branding efforts to align with the evolving expectations and perceptions of international tourists. This research serves as a significant contribution to understanding the intricate relationship between Borobudur, social media platforms, and the ever-changing landscape of global tourism.

While this research provides valuable insights into the role of social media platforms in shaping Borobudur's branding as a spiritual and multicultural destination, certain limitations need acknowledgment. One significant limitation pertains to the data mining aspect of the research, which remains constrained and has not extensively captured the representation of the spiritual image in countries such as India and China. These countries share a historical connection with Buddhist pilgrimage routes in Indonesia, and a more comprehensive analysis of their perceptions would contribute significantly to a holistic understanding of Borobudur's global image.

Moreover, to enhance the depth of the study, it is crucial to consider the importance of conducting comparative analyses with other countries that are actively developing new Buddhist religious tourism destinations, such as Japan. Investigating the strategies and outcomes of travel agents in these comparable settings would contribute valuable insights to the evaluation of Borobudur's promotion as a spiritual tourism destination.

In addition to engaging travel agents, it is imperative to involve global Buddhist communities more extensively. This approach would foster greater connectivity of Borobudur's spiritual values within the global community, particularly emphasizing the significance of Borobudur as a Buddhist pilgrimage site. By incorporating perspectives and practices from various Buddhist communities worldwide, the study can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the spiritual and cultural dimensions associated with Borobudur, thereby enriching the overall analysis of its branding and marketing initiatives. For future research endeavors, it is recommended to address these limitations by expanding the scope of data mining to include a more diverse range of countries, particularly those with strong historical ties to Buddhist traditions. This could involve conducting targeted surveys, interviews, or content

analyses to gather a more comprehensive dataset. Furthermore, delving into the specific strategies and effectiveness of travel agents in promoting Borobudur could unveil crucial information for destination management and marketing.

In conclusion, while this research contributes significantly to our understanding of Borobudur's branding through social media, acknowledging and addressing these limitations in future studies will ensure a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the factors influencing the global perception of this iconic destination.

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