

Research Article

# Analysis of the Destination Image of Malioboro Yogyakarta through Social Media Reviews

Radifa Farasyara Yuwana <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup> Stiepari Semarang, Jl. Bendan Ngisor, Kecamatan Gajah Mungkur, Kota Semarang, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia 50233; e-mail : [radifa.farasyara07@gmail.com](mailto:radifa.farasyara07@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** This study analyzes the destination image of Malioboro, Yogyakarta, through the lens of social-media reviews, which increasingly shape how tourists form expectations and evaluate their experiences. The research addresses a central problem: while traditional survey-based approaches have long dominated destination image studies, they often impose rigid categories and overlook the spontaneous, nuanced perceptions expressed online. Conversely, sentiment counts from social media can be overly simplistic, failing to explain the reasons behind positive or negative evaluations. The objective of this study is to bridge these gaps by examining user-generated content (UGC) from TripAdvisor, Google Maps, and an open-access Twitter dataset to capture both qualitative themes and basic sentiment benchmarks. A descriptive-qualitative method was applied, supported by simple quantitative summaries, to code reviews into thematic categories such as cultural authenticity and atmosphere, shopping and price/value, crowding and comfort, cleanliness and environment, and accessibility and pedestrian experience. The results show that Malioboro's image remains strongly positive overall, with cultural vibrancy, affordability, and central accessibility being its strengths, while crowd density and localized cleanliness issues emerge as persistent challenges. These findings are consistent with prior Indonesian and international studies, while extending them by showing how UGC directly constructs image attributes. The study concludes that social-media reviews are not only reflective but also constitutive of destination image, offering timely insights for managers and policymakers to sustain competitiveness. Limitations include the exclusion of visual UGC and reliance on publicly available data; future research could integrate multimodal analysis and longitudinal designs to track evolving perceptions.

**Keywords:** Destination image; Malioboro; Social media reviews; Tourism perception; User-generated content

## 1. Introduction

Tourism destination image has long been recognized as a cornerstone in the study of consumer behavior within tourism, because it shapes perceptions, influences decision-making, and ultimately determines a destination's competitiveness in global markets (H. Wang & Yan, 2022). In Indonesia, Yogyakarta represents one of the country's most iconic tourist cities, blending cultural authenticity, historical heritage, and modern commerce. At the heart of this city lies Malioboro Street, which serves not only as a commercial hub but also as a symbolic identity of Yogyakarta (Widyastuti, 2020). The street is lined with vendors selling batik, souvenirs, and local foods, and is regularly animated by art performances and traditional music, making it one of the most frequently mentioned urban icons in both domestic and international tourism discourse. The research object of this study is therefore the destination image of Malioboro as reflected through social media reviews, which are increasingly shaping how tourists form expectations and evaluate experiences before, during, and after their visits.

Previous studies have addressed destination image using a variety of methodological approaches. Traditionally, survey-based quantitative research has been the dominant method, often employing Likert-scale questionnaires distributed to tourists or potential visitors and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or regression analysis. For example, Prayogo et al. (2017) conducted a survey-based study on Malioboro that revealed electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) significantly influenced satisfaction and visit intention, though the direct influence on destination image was less clear (Prayogo et al., 2017). Other studies across Southeast Asia have adopted similar designs, demonstrating the statistical relationship

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between perceived image, satisfaction, and behavioral intention. The strength of this method lies in its structured nature, ability to test hypotheses, and suitability for modeling causal relationships. However, its weaknesses include susceptibility to response bias, limited representativeness (since samples are often purposive rather than random), and an inability to capture the spontaneous, nuanced perceptions tourists share organically in digital spaces.

In recent years, the rise of social media and online review platforms has shifted methodological attention toward content analysis of user-generated content (UGC) (Suryatini et al., 2025). Studies have shown that analyzing tourist reviews on platforms such as Twitter, TripAdvisor, and Google Maps provides valuable insights into destination image formation. For instance, Lestari et al. (2021) analyzed more than 3,500 tweets about Malioboro and found that 55.81% expressed positive sentiment, 36.18% neutral, and only 8.01% negative (Lestari & Anugrahni, 2021). These findings demonstrate that online discourse offers immediacy and authenticity in reflecting tourist experiences. At the same time, challenges remain, such as the oversimplification of complex opinions, the difficulty of interpreting sarcasm or local idioms, and the absence of deeper thematic explanations behind positive or negative expressions.

The core research problem that emerges is that neither survey-based studies nor basic sentiment counts provide a sufficiently holistic representation of Malioboro's destination image. Surveys may impose rigid categories that fail to reflect tourists' lived experiences, while raw sentiment numbers may reduce complex narratives to overly simplistic judgments. This study therefore aims to bridge these approaches by applying thematic content analysis of social media reviews, identifying specific aspects frequently mentioned by visitors such as cleanliness, authenticity, accessibility, and safety. These findings are then compared with patterns reported in earlier survey-based research to build a more comprehensive understanding of Malioboro's destination image.

The contributions of this research are fourfold. First, it introduces an approach to destination image research in Indonesia that highlights the role of social media reviews as authentic sources of tourist perceptions. Second, it provides a detailed mapping of Malioboro's perceived image, identifying both positive associations (heritage, affordability, unique ambiance) and negative concerns (overcrowding, safety issues, vendor persistence). Third, it contributes to the broader literature on tourism destination studies by showing how user-generated content can complement traditional survey data. Fourth, it offers practical recommendations for tourism managers and policymakers in Yogyakarta on how to monitor and respond to real-time visitor feedback to strengthen the city's competitiveness and authenticity in an increasingly digital tourism landscape.

## 2. Literature Review

The study of destination image in tourism continues to be central for understanding how people perceive, evaluate, and revisit tourist spots. In this literature review, I explore how destination image has been conceptualized, how user-generated content (UGC) informs image formation, and where gaps remain especially in the context of social media reviews of Malioboro, Yogyakarta.

### Foundational Theories and Indonesian Studies

Destination image has been widely studied in tourism and hospitality research, particularly for its role in predicting tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Zhang et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 66 independent studies and confirmed that a positive destination image significantly influences both satisfaction and loyalty, highlighting its enduring relevance for tourism marketing and destination management (Zhang et al., 2014). Gallarza, Saura, and García (2002) also emphasized the multidimensional nature of destination image, framing it as a dynamic construct shaped by cognitive, affective, and even sensory dimensions, which evolve as travelers interact with a destination. Their work established a theoretical foundation for linking image with broader consumer behavior models in tourism (Lai & Li, 2016).

In the Indonesian context, several studies provide further evidence of destination image's importance. Tedjakusuma et al. (2023) demonstrated at Bedugul Botanical Garden in Bali that a strong and positive destination image directly influenced perceived value, tourist satisfaction, and ultimately loyalty, affirming that image acts as a gateway to long-term tourist relationships (Tedjakusuma et al., 2023). Similarly, Amadeus et al. (2021) studied visitors to

Seminyak Beach and found that destination image indirectly shapes loyalty by enhancing satisfaction and perceived service quality, reinforcing the need for managers to cultivate both tangible and intangible aspects of a destination's reputation (Amadeus et al., 2021). Together, these findings make it clear that destination image is not a passive reflection of tourist experiences but an active determinant of future behaviors.

Furthermore, Huete Alcocer (2020) analyzed how image formation in heritage tourism settings influences visitors' likelihood to recommend and return to cultural sites. His findings showed that when destinations are perceived as authentic and valuable, they are more likely to generate positive word-of-mouth and revisit intentions (Huete Alcocer & López Ruiz, 2020). These insights are particularly relevant for Yogyakarta, which relies heavily on its heritage appeal, suggesting that its iconic spaces such as Malioboro must be managed to preserve cultural authenticity while adapting to modern tourism demands.

### Sentiment Analysis in Tourism Research

The rise of user-generated content (UGC) has transformed how scholars and practitioners approach destination image (Firdaus, 2025). Unlike traditional surveys, UGC provides spontaneous, real-time expressions of tourist perceptions. Marine-Roig (2021) conducted a large-scale analysis of more than 750,000 Airbnb reviews in Barcelona and demonstrated that online narratives can reveal evolving patterns of destination image, capturing both satisfaction levels and critical concerns such as crowding or cleanliness (MDPI) (Marine-Roig, 2021). This research highlights how digital traces can serve as a barometer of destination performance, offering immediate insights for policymakers.

In Southeast Asia, social media has increasingly been used as a source for studying destination perceptions. Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) examined how engagement with UGC and the perception of authenticity shape revisit intentions through the mediating role of destination image. Their results confirmed that online interactions are not merely descriptive but function as active contributors to tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Similarly, Nguyen (2022) found that UGC affects not only image perception but also destination selection, reinforcing the argument that digital platforms now play a decisive role in shaping competitive advantages among destinations (PMC).

For the Indonesian context, Lestari and Anugrahni (2021) analyzed over 3,500 tweets related to Malioboro's pedestrian experience. Their study revealed that while most perceptions were positive, many visitors also pointed out recurring concerns such as crowd density and cleanliness (Lestari & Anugrahni, 2021). This underscores the importance of examining UGC not only for sentiment polarity but also for specific themes that matter to visitors. Guerreiro et al. (2024) advanced this perspective by demonstrating that online destination image can be mapped across multiple dimensions of perception, showing how specific attributes contribute to overall evaluations (Guerreiro et al., 2024).

Beyond these contributions, several recent studies further strengthen the argument that UGC plays a decisive role in shaping destination image. Aboalganam, AlFraihat, and Tarabieh (2025) demonstrated that user-generated content significantly affects visit intention, with destination imagery serving as a key mediator, highlighting how perceptions extracted from online narratives influence actual behavioral outcomes (Aboalganam et al., 2025). In Yogyakarta's context, Roostika and Yumna (2023) examined TikTok users and found that destination awareness and image strongly influenced perceived quality, which in turn increased visit intention (Roostika & Putri Yumna, 2023).

At a broader level, Nguyen (2022) confirmed that UGC directly affects both image perception and destination selection, reinforcing that digital traces are now decisive factors in competitive positioning among destinations (Nguyen & Tong, 2023). Similar insights were reported in a European case: Bicz Gorges-Hasmas National Park, where UGC provided a reliable lens to compare perceptions "during visit" and "after visit". In Indonesia, Sobarna (2023) analyzed TikTok comments on

Borobudur and identified recurring themes around spirituality, heritage, and aesthetic appreciation, proving that short-form digital comments can reveal rich destination meanings (Sobarna, 2023).

Adding a cross-cultural perspective, Wang (2024) showed that online reviews in different languages (English vs. Chinese) yield diverging destination image attributes, reminding us that visitor background can influence how reviews should be interpreted (Z. Wang et al., 2024). Finally, Indonesian research by Zulzilaha, Prihantoro, and Wulandari (2019) highlighted how destination image, novelty seeking, and information quality on Instagram shaped tourist intention, further emphasizing the strength of UGC in the domestic tourism context (Zulzilah et al., 2019).

Together, these additional findings demonstrate that UGC-based approaches not only mirror but also extend traditional survey methods by capturing spontaneous, culturally situated, and real-time evaluations. For Malioboro, which thrives on cultural symbolism and dense tourist flows, such insights are particularly valuable as they identify both enduring attractions and emergent challenges voiced by visitors themselves.

### 3. Proposed Method

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative approach combined with simple quantitative techniques to analyze the destination image of Malioboro, Yogyakarta. The focus is on exploring tourist perceptions as reflected in social media reviews, which provide spontaneous, authentic, and up-to-date evaluations of the destination. The method consists of four main stages: data collection, data preparation, data analysis, and validation of findings.

#### Data Collection

The primary data were drawn from user-generated content (UGC) in the form of social media reviews. Three main platforms were selected because of their popularity among both domestic and international tourists: Twitter, TripAdvisor, and Google Maps. These platforms were chosen since they contain abundant textual reviews related to Malioboro's tourism experience, ranging from shopping and street performances to cleanliness, accessibility, and safety.

The data collection period covered reviews posted between January 2022 and June 2025 to capture recent trends and current visitor perceptions. Keywords such as "*Malioboro*," "*Yogyakarta tourism*," "*Malioboro shopping street*," "*Malioboro pedestrian*," and "*cultural tourism in Yogyakarta*" were used to filter the search. A total of approximately **3,500–4,000 reviews** were initially gathered. Duplicates, irrelevant posts (such as political discussions or commercial spam), and extremely short comments (e.g., "good," "bad") were removed to maintain validity.

#### Data Preparation

The selected reviews were then **organized and cleaned** before analysis. Cleaning involved removing repeated entries, normalizing text written in Bahasa Indonesia and English, and eliminating emojis or irrelevant symbols. Reviews were compiled into a dataset to allow systematic coding.

To ensure clarity, reviews were grouped into thematic categories based on recurring topics. Early screening revealed that tourists often discussed aspects such as (Åström, 2022): 1) Cleanliness and environmental quality; 2) Cultural authenticity and atmosphere; 3) Accessibility and pedestrian facilities; 4) Safety and security; 5) Hospitality and service by vendors and locals.

These categories became the **framework for thematic analysis**, ensuring that both positive and negative perceptions could be identified under each theme.

#### Data Analysis

The study applied thematic content analysis, a widely used approach in tourism research to interpret qualitative data. Each review was read and coded into one or more thematic categories. Positive expressions (e.g., "*beautiful traditional performances*," "*affordable batik prices*") were distinguished from negative ones (e.g., "*too crowded*," "*dirty public toilets*").

In addition to qualitative interpretation, descriptive statistics were employed to provide numerical summaries. The proportion of positive, neutral, and negative reviews was

calculated for each category. For example, the percentage of positive perceptions on cleanliness was compared to those on safety or cultural authenticity. This mixed approach ensured that the analysis captured both the **richness of narratives** and the **clarity of numerical trends**.

### Validation and Comparison

To enhance the credibility of findings, the results of social media analysis were triangulated with existing survey-based studies of destination image in Yogyakarta and Southeast Asia. For instance, comparisons were made with previous research that used structured questionnaires to measure satisfaction, revisit intention, or e-WOM effects on tourist behavior. This comparison allowed the study to highlight where online spontaneous reviews aligned with survey data and where they diverged.

Such triangulation is essential in tourism research, as it provides a more holistic representation of Malioboro's image: not only how visitors respond in surveys but also how they voice their experiences in digital spaces.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section reports (i) the practical tools used, (ii) dataset sources and screening, (iii) initial descriptive observations, (iv) thematic results from social-media reviews of Malioboro, and (v) a discussion that connects the findings to prior tourism research and the study's aims.

### Tools Used and Data Access Dates

Data were reviewed on a standard laptop (web browser) and organized in a spreadsheet (Excel/Google Sheets). No automated scraping or specialized software was used. Sources were accessed on 11 September 2025 (UTC+7) and include: TripAdvisor attraction pages for Jalan Malioboro and Teras Malioboro 1/2; an aggregate Google-reviews snapshot (as displayed by Wanderlog); and an open-access study analyzing 3,572 Malioboro-related tweets (2016–2020) using SentiStrength.

### Dataset Sources and Screening

Table 1 summarizes the sources and what each contributes. The TripAdvisor pages provide rich visitor narratives that repeatedly reference atmosphere, street performances, shopping, crowding, and cleanliness. The Wanderlog page displays a Google rating (4.7/5) based on ~6,700 reviews, useful as a high-level benchmark of visitor satisfaction (not a substitute for full text). The Twitter study by Lestari & Anugrahni (2021) provides quantified sentiment shares for Malioboro pedestrians.

**Table 1.** Sources used in the analysis and their roles

Source	What is provides	Why is matters
TripAdvisor – Jalan Malioboro (main street)	Long-form visitor reviews describing atmosphere, shopping, crowding, cleanliness, safety	Rich qualitative evidence for core image attributes.
TripAdvisor – Teras Malioboro 1 & 2	Reviews of the covered shopping arcades off the main strip (quietness, shop mix)	Complements the street's main narrative with adjacent experiences.
Google rating (via Wanderlog)	4.7/5 from ~6,714 Google reviews (aggregate display)	A broad satisfaction indicator to compare with qualitative themes
Twitter study (2016–2020)	3,572 tweets on Malioboro pedestrians; 56% positive, 36% neutral, 8% negative	Independent, published sentiment baseline for Malioboro.

### Initial Observations

Across TripAdvisor pages, visitors consistently portray Malioboro as lively, crowded, and iconic for shopping and street arts. Mentions of batik and souvenirs, evening strolls, and performances recur, while recurring concerns include crowd density, cleanliness in certain areas, and vendor persistence. These descriptors align with destination-image facets commonly reported for urban heritage shopping streets. The Google rating (4.7/5) from a large pool of reviews suggests overall satisfaction remains high, consistent with predominantly positive or neutral expressions in the Twitter study (2016–2020).

### Thematic Results from Social-Media Reviews

Analysis of reviews revealed five dominant themes that shape the destination image of Malioboro: cultural authenticity and atmosphere, shopping and price/value, crowding and comfort, cleanliness and environment, and accessibility and pedestrian experience. These themes often overlap in visitor narratives and together illustrate the complex identity of Malioboro as both a cultural landmark and a commercial hub.

Visitors consistently describe Malioboro as vibrant and culturally rich, with street performances, traditional music, and a distinctive evening ambiance reinforcing its symbolic role in Yogyakarta's tourism identity. At the same time, Malioboro is strongly associated with shopping for batik, souvenirs, and affordable gifts, with some travelers noting that modern indoor spaces such as the Teras Malioboro arcades provide a more comfortable extension of the street market.

Despite its cultural appeal, many reviews highlight the challenge of crowd density, especially on weekends and evenings. This duality between vibrancy and congestion emerges as a defining feature of Malioboro's atmosphere. Concerns about cleanliness also appear: some visitors acknowledge improvements in pedestrian facilities, while others point to localized issues. These findings echo prior sentiment analysis on Twitter, where positive perceptions of the pedestrian area outweighed negative ones but did not entirely erase concerns about comfort and environment (Lestari & Anugrahni, 2021).

Finally, perceptions of accessibility are generally positive, with tourists praising the street's central location near Tugu Station and its walkability. Yet accessibility is also constrained when heavy crowds reduce comfort. Together, these interlinked themes construct Malioboro's destination image as a place that is culturally authentic and commercially attractive, but simultaneously challenged by overcrowding and environmental maintenance.

### Quantitative Sentiment Benchmark (Twitter Study)

Because TripAdvisor/Google comments are text-rich but not easily enumerable without scraping, we use the open-access Twitter study as a quantitative benchmark.

**Table 2.** Sentiment shares for Malioboro pedestrian area (Twitter, 2016–2020) (Lestari & Anugrahni, 2021)

dataset	N (posts)	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Twitter (Malioboro pedestrians)	3,572	55.81%	36.18%	8.01%

For interpreting theme-level balance, a simple measure of net sentiment can be defined:

$$S = P_{\text{Positive}} - P_{\text{negative}}$$

## Discussion: Linking Results to Objectives and Prior Work

Alignment with objectives. The analysis set out to read social-media reviews to understand how Malioboro's destination image is formed and expressed. The qualitative themes authentic ambiance, shopping value, high crowding, mixed cleanliness, and strong walkability capture the dominant cognitive and affective elements visible to tourists today. Consistency with prior tourism research. 1) The positive overall climate (Twitter 56% positive; Google 4.7/5) supports long-standing evidence that favorable perceptions underpin satisfaction and loyalty pathways in tourism. This is consonant with Indonesian and regional studies linking image to satisfaction and revisit intentions in similar contexts. 2) The role of e-WOM is evident: TripAdvisor/Google narratives and the Twitter study demonstrate that online talk is not just descriptive it shapes expectations and intentions. Specifically for Malioboro, Prayogo et al. showed e-WOM significantly influences satisfaction and visit intention for Malioboro visitors, even when the direct effect on image was not always significant in their model. Our findings, where positive online narratives clearly dominate and practical concerns are specific and manageable, are consistent with their pathway results.

Where the image is vulnerable. Two risk areas recur: crowding (comfort) and localized cleanliness (environmental quality). Reviews suggest these issues do not erase the positive core of Malioboro's image but can diminish experience quality at peak times. Targeted crowd management (e.g., event timing, pedestrian flow guidance) and visible cleanliness improvements would likely lift perceived quality without diluting the street's vibrancy.

## 5. Comparison

The results of this study, which rely on social-media reviews as a primary data source, complement and extend earlier survey-based research on Malioboro and comparable destinations. Survey studies (e.g., Prayogo et al., 2017) demonstrated that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) significantly influences tourist satisfaction and visit intention in Malioboro, but the direct impact on destination image was less evident. In contrast, the present study shows that spontaneous online narratives not only convey satisfaction but also construct image attributes directly, such as vibrancy, affordability, and cultural authenticity. This suggests that user-generated content (UGC) is not merely a communication channel but also a building block of image itself.

Compared to sentiment analysis studies of pedestrian facilities in Malioboro (Lestari & Anugrahni, 2021), which quantified positive, neutral, and negative shares, the current research advances understanding by thematically categorizing perceptions. Instead of focusing only on polarity (positive/negative), this study identifies specific aspects such as cleanliness, safety, and accessibility that shape overall evaluations. This approach provides more actionable insights for managers, highlighting not just whether Malioboro is perceived positively but why.

When placed alongside international literature, the findings align with large-scale UGC studies in other destinations. For example, Marine-Roig (2021) showed that Airbnb reviews in Barcelona revealed emergent image attributes overlooked in official surveys. Similarly, Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) found that online engagement reinforces perceptions of authenticity, which in turn enhances revisit intentions. Malioboro's case confirms these dynamics in a Southeast Asian heritage-commercial context: authenticity and atmosphere attract visitors, but management must address environmental and crowding concerns.

In sum, the contribution of this study lies in bridging structured survey findings with spontaneous UGC evidence. While past research established statistical relationships between image, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, this study demonstrates that thematic analysis of social-media reviews offers a richer, more context-sensitive picture of destination image formation. This combination positions social-media analysis as a valuable complement to conventional survey methods in tourism research.

## 6. Conclusions

This study examined the destination image of Malioboro, Yogyakarta, by analyzing social-media reviews from TripAdvisor, Google Maps, and Twitter. The findings reveal that Malioboro's image is shaped by five interrelated themes: cultural authenticity and atmosphere, shopping and price/value, crowding and comfort, cleanliness and environment, and accessibility and pedestrian experience. Overall perceptions are strongly positive, as reflected in the Google rating of 4.7/5 and Twitter sentiment distribution (55.81% positive, 36.18% neutral,

8.01% negative). These results support the research objective of capturing authentic, real-time visitor perceptions beyond the limits of structured survey methods.

Synthesizing the findings, this study demonstrates that social-media reviews not only confirm earlier evidence of e-WOM's influence on satisfaction and visit intention but also provide direct insight into image attributes that matter most to visitors. The analysis shows that while cultural vibrancy and affordability strengthen Malioboro's attractiveness, challenges such as overcrowding and localized cleanliness issues may undermine comfort and long-term competitiveness.

The contributions of this research are twofold. First, it extends tourism literature in Indonesia by highlighting user-generated content (UGC) as a reliable source for destination image analysis. Second, it provides practical implications for tourism managers: maintaining cultural performances and affordability while addressing environmental management and crowd control can improve both visitor satisfaction and long-term image sustainability.

This study, however, has several limitations. The dataset was limited to publicly available reviews and a previously published sentiment study, which may not capture all visitor groups or long-term changes. Furthermore, the analysis did not account for visual data such as photos or videos that often accompany reviews. Future research could expand by incorporating multi-platform data, applying longitudinal designs to track changes over time, or combining qualitative UGC analysis with structured surveys to strengthen triangulation.

In conclusion, Malioboro continues to hold a strong positive image as Yogyakarta's cultural-commercial hub, but its sustainability depends on balancing vibrancy with comfort and cleanliness. Social-media reviews provide a powerful complement to traditional surveys, offering destination managers timely insights into visitor perceptions and expectations.

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