

Overtourism as Urban Overdevelopment: Social Representations and Adaptive Governance in Bali

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24843/JKB.2026.v16.i02.p02>

Abstract: While numerous studies examine overtourism's mechanisms and impacts, research on how overtourism is perceived and managed within political governance frameworks remains scarce. Using a case study of Bali, Indonesia, this study examines how overtourism is socially and politically constructed through stakeholder interpretations and identifies adaptive strategies to address this narrative. The study employed data triangulation through three key research methods of document analysis of online media, semi-structured interviews, and fieldwork observations across major tourism destinations in Bali. Our findings suggest that overtourism should be treated as an integral component of urban phenomena. We emphasise the importance of socially adaptive strategies focusing on equitable distribution, aligned with public trust in government through transparency and credibility. Through recognition of long-term tourists' impact, our findings complicate the association of overtourism with lifestyle migrants. The study contributes to reimagining overtourism as a conjoint urban phenomenon and encourages policymakers to advance towards comprehensive urban planning.

Keywords: overtourism; social representation theory; adaptive management strategies; Bali; urbanisation; migration

1. Introduction

Overtourism is a key topic in tourism studies, receiving global attention from media, public discourse, and academia. Destinations like Barcelona, Venice, and Dubrovnik face overwhelmed infrastructure and reduced resident quality of life (Cheung & Li, 2019a; Milano et al., 2024). In 2024, Fodor listed Bali

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Submitted: 4 May 2026; Accepted: 26 July 2026; Published: 5 August 2026



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on its "No-Visit List" due to excessive tourism and unsustainable development ("Fodor's no travel 2025", 2024). Such travel lists highlight important issues yet risk oversimplifying and reducing these concerns to a matter of numbers (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023; Gössling et al., 2020). During the final stage of manuscript preparation in 2026, Bali was ranked by TripAdvisor as the world's best destination (Tripadvisor, 2026). Whilst the government welcomed this, media outlets called for the use of this title to improve tourism facilities and infrastructure (Pusparisa, 2026).

Overtourism typically occurs when the scale and impact of tourism adversely affect local communities, the environment, and heritage resources, often exceeding the destination's management capacity (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023; Dodds & Butler, 2019; Mihalic, 2020). However, no single definition covers all contexts. For example, European cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam face housing shortages and protests (Dodds & Butler, 2019), while on a broader scale, Southeast Asian nation-states like Thailand suffer environmental degradation and overdevelopment (Mihalic, 2020). These examples show overtourism as a dynamic process with various drivers and consequences.

Bali exemplifies overtourism. As Indonesia's top tourist destination, it is a global cultural icon and economic force (MacRae, 2016; Picard, 1996). Rapid tourist growth, population increase, migration, and uneven infrastructure cause local tensions (Chong, 2019; Wardana, 2019). Migration for jobs and business expansion leads to conflicts with local Balinese, who struggle to find employment (Sarmita et al., 2025; Suyadnya et al., 2025). Studies highlight additional issues and sources of local tension, such as land conversion, environmental stress, cultural erosion, and marginalization of the Balinese in decision-making (Mananda et al., 2025; Sunarta et al., 2025; Wardana, 2019, 2020).

A study in Canggu, Bali, however, illustrates how locals rationalize overtourism's disruptions by focusing on economic benefits (Suyadnya et al., 2025). Overtourism discourse in Bali is complicated by political dynamics, where national growth and foreign investments often conflict with local concerns about congestion, pollution, and social change (Fallon, 2001; Situmorang et al., 2019). Overtourism in Bali involves complex social and political dynamics. Widespread elite collusion, corruption, and land mafias influence licensing and development in tourism (Bachriadi & Aspinall, 2023). These issues make solutions like fair and sustainable tourism (Pandit, 2025) seem utopian and difficult to implement.

Despite extensive research on overtourism in Bali as previously discussed, there has been limited focus on how key stakeholders socially represent overtourism and how these differing representations can inform adaptive management approaches to address the socio-political and governance

complexities of tourism development. Utilising Social Representation Theory (SRT), this research examines overtourism as both a tangible and symbolic phenomenon, elucidating how meanings influence perceptions of tourism's impacts, contributing to a more inclusive and adaptive understanding of tourism governance beyond purely quantitative or impact-based perspectives. Two research questions are proposed: How do different stakeholder groups in Bali make sense of the concept of overtourism? And what adaptive management strategies are perceived as viable by stakeholders, and how are they justified within these understandings of overtourism?

2. Literature review

2.1 *Conceptualising overtourism*

Overtourism has become a significant focus of interest in tourism studies and practice, especially in areas facing unsustainable expansion and strain on local resources. This term generally describes the adverse effects of excessive tourism on the environment, local populations, infrastructure, and cultural heritage (Butler, 2020a; Mihalic, 2020; Milano et al., 2024; Panousi & Petrakos, 2021). Researchers have identified several key indicators of overtourism, such as environmental harm, increased cost of living expenses, erosion of local culture, and growing opposition from residents (Dodds & Butler, 2019). There are three major themes that describe overtourism in the tourism literature, including the role of destination mismanagement, the specific context in which overtourism occurs, and how it impacts tourists and residents (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023). Studies of overtourism have also focused on the growth of anti-tourism movements (Mihalic, 2020) and the role that overtourism causing distress to locals, as a result of poor tourist behaviour in the form of law breaking and cultural disrespect, for example, and limited job opportunities within the tourism sector (Bouchon & Rauscher, 2019; Milano et al., 2024; Panousi & Petrakos, 2021; Suyadnya et al., 2025).

Although overtourism was initially exemplified in the study of prominent European cities such as Barcelona and Venice (Dodds & Butler, 2019), island destinations like Bali have increasingly become focal points for overtourism due to rapid and often unregulated tourism growth (Wardana, 2019). These concerns are exemplified in Canggu where a significant foreign population in the area has led to a growth of illegal businesses and property ownership (Mananda et al., 2025; Sunarta et al., 2025). This study defines overtourism as a condition of environmental and socio-cultural pressures to destinations due to immense tourist influx resulting in tourist misbehaviour and residents' rejection of these incomers (Subadra, 2024; Suyadnya et al., 2025) with Bali serving as the focal destination for this research. The selection of Bali is relevant as recent

literature has criticised the tourism development model in Bali which leads to overtourism, land conversion, overpopulation, water crises and marginalisation of local people (Cole et al., 2021; Nordholt, 2007; Westoby et al., 2021). Hence, understanding stakeholder perceptions is crucial for grasping the dynamics of tourism development and its effects in the context of excessively developing tourism in certain destinations (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Despite ongoing concerns about overtourism, Bali remains a popular tourist destination, as illustrated by the large crowds attending the 2026 Bali Spirit Festival (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra, 2026).

Overtourism is intricately linked to urban environments, where "urban" denotes areas with high population density, characterized by concentrated economic activities, infrastructure development, and intensive land use (Parr, 2007). Urban destinations are particularly susceptible to overtourism, as the growth of tourism directly competes with residential demands for space, housing, mobility, and public services (Amore et al., 2020). This phenomenon is closely associated with urbanization processes, which involve the transformation of rural or semi-rural areas into urban-like settings through population growth, infrastructure expansion, and intensified economic activity, often driven by tourism development. This transformation has been observed in numerous rural areas in Indonesia, which have now evolved into urban areas (Cole et al.,

2021; Wall, 2018). In tourism destinations, rapid tourism-induced urbanisation can exacerbate overtourism by increasing accommodation density, attracting migrant populations, and intensifying pressure on land, water, and cultural landscapes (Milano et al., 2019).

Overtourism has also been linked to exclusivity of foreign interests (Bouchon & Rauscher, 2019; Cheung & Li, 2019a), which means there is a substantive neglect of local involvement while prioritising foreign interests amidst the increasing number of tourists (Nilsson, 2020), creating a resident-tourist conflict. Studies indicate that stakeholders' views on tourism significantly affect their responses to its challenges and the formulation of future strategies (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Byrd, 2007; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Loverio et al., 2023; Yrigoy et al., 2024). These perceptions can either facilitate or obstruct sustainable tourism development, depending on whether stakeholder groups' interests align or clash here. In situations of overtourism, conflicts often emerge when local communities feel excluded from decision-making, while industry stakeholders focus on economic expansion (Fallon, 2001; Rosalina et al., 2023; Situmorang et al., 2019). Therefore, examining stakeholder perceptions can facilitate powerful rooted strategies that can advance a more inclusive and equitable tourism development.

2.2 Defining overtourism through the lenses of social representations

Research on overtourism has predominantly utilised frameworks from political economy (Milano et al., 2024), carrying capacity (Butler, 2020b; Panousi & Petrakos, 2021) and stakeholder theory (Loverio et al., 2023; Yrigoy et al., 2024) to investigate the causes, consequences, and strategies of tourism saturation. Numerous studies concentrate on measuring impacts, assessing visitor numbers, or analysing destination management strategies through quantitative or policy-oriented perspectives (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Nepal & Nepal, 2021). While these approaches provide valuable structural insights, they frequently neglect the social construction and symbolic interpretation of tourism by various stakeholder groups. In contrast, Social Representation Theory (SRT) offers a more nuanced and interpretive perspective that emphasizes the collective meaning-making process, which has become a call of research in some studies (Howarth, 2006; Monterrubio & Andriotis, 2014). By adopting SRT, this study transcends surface-level narratives and reveals the underlying social, cultural, and cognitive dynamics that affect how overtourism is perceived and addressed in Bali. This approach is particularly valuable for capturing diverse, context-specific perceptions, which are essential for formulating grounded and inclusive development strategies.

SRT, initially conceptualized by Moscovici (2001) provides a robust framework for examining how social groups construct collective understandings of complex phenomena, such as overtourism. Representations encompass the common-sense knowledge, images, and narratives that circulate within a society, guiding individuals' actions and judgments (Howarth, 2006). In the context of tourism research, SRT has been employed to investigate how communities and stakeholders interpret tourism-related issues, negotiate meanings, and establish symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Monterrubio & Andriotis, 2014; Moscardo, 2011; Moyle et al., 2010). The application of SRT enables researchers to reveal not only negative representations of overtourism, such as overcrowding or the erosion of cultural values; but also more nuanced or positive perceptions, such as viewing tourism as a developmental opportunity (Lai et al., 2016). This would significantly add to scholarly debate and discussion as overtourism is largely regarded as a negative phenomenon or referred to as representative of a 'decline' in a tourism destination lifecycle (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023).

2.3 Adaptive Management in Tourism Planning

Adaptive management (AM), a dynamic and flexible approach with origins in ecological sciences, is designed to manage complex systems under conditions of uncertainty (Holling, 1978). Within the context of tourism, it is increasingly acknowledged as a valuable framework for addressing evolving challenges such as overtourism (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023). "Adaptive management is the process of building resilience and coping with uncertainty through a continual process of experimenting, monitoring, and social learning" (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004, p. 285). This approach emphasizes iterative learning, stakeholder participation, feedback loops, and the capacity to revise actions based on empirical outcomes (Plummer & Fennell, 2009). Such characteristics render it particularly pertinent to destinations like Bali, where tourism pressures fluctuate over time, and uniform solutions often prove inadequate. Integrating adaptive strategies into tourism planning can assist destinations in balancing development and conservation, incorporating diverse perspectives, and maintaining resilience amid change.

Governance is pivotal in determining how destinations address the challenges posed by overtourism. Scholars contend that effective management necessitates not only top-down regulations but also bottom-up participation and multi-stakeholder collaboration (Graci, 2013; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Loverio et al., 2023; McComb et al., 2017). Common policy measures include limiting visitor numbers, zoning, enforcing environmental standards, and investing in infrastructure. However, these measures are often reactive rather than

proactive and do not adequately address the underlying causes of overtourism. In destinations such as Bali, governance is further complicated by overlapping jurisdictions, political interests, and economic reliance on tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). There are some cases where a government program is refused by the local community due to irrelevant community needs and limited community inclusion, though the government claimed that their program objective is community-led and oriented (Cole, 2006; Saufi et al., 2014). Consequently, governance solutions must be context-sensitive, inclusive, and sufficiently flexible to adapt over time, aligning with the principles of AM (Islam et al., 2018).

In alignment with the AM framework, this study utilises a feedback loop model (Armitage et al., 2009; Holling, 1978; Plummer & Fennell, 2009) to evaluate and refine strategies aimed at mitigating overtourism in Bali. The analysis is organised around the identification of mechanisms and anticipated outcomes, thereby facilitating iterative learning and strategy refinement, following earlier study using AM theory in the tourism context (Armitage et al., 2009; Islam et al., 2018; Larson & Poudyal, 2012). Mechanisms are represented by proposed adaptive strategies drawn from the stakeholders' perspectives. The expected outcomes focus on enhancing destination resilience, ensuring equitable tourism benefits, and promoting socio-ecological sustainability (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2005). This feedback loop structure acknowledges that overtourism is a non-linear, evolving challenge that necessitates continuous monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and responsive policy adaptation. By embedding this dynamic approach, the study advances a more context-sensitive and participatory model of destination management, suitable for complex systems such as Bali.

Addressing the issue of overtourism requires a reimagining of tourism that emphasises long-term sustainability, equity, and resilience. In this study, Social Representation Theory (SRT) informs Adaptive Management (AM) by providing the social and interpretive foundation through which stakeholder perceptions, meanings, and contested understandings of overtourism are identified and incorporated into adaptive learning processes. While AM emphasizes iterative learning, feedback loops, and policy adjustment, SRT contributes by explaining how different stakeholder groups socially construct tourism problems and acceptable solutions. Therefore, the feedback loops within AM are not solely driven by technical indicators, but also by evolving social representations, enabling a more socially adaptive, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach to overtourism governance in Bali. In the context of Bali, envisioning responsible tourism futures involves balancing the economic dependence on tourism with the imperative to protect cultural and natural resources (Putra, 2015; Rosalina et al., 2023; Verheijen & Putra, 2019). Therefore,

stakeholder engagement, adaptive governance, and a deeper understanding of local social representations are considered suitable approaches to explore how overtourism in Bali needs to be addressed.

3. Method

A qualitative case study design was employed as this design is particularly relevant to the topic as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives and paradigms on the matter (Miles et al., 2014). Moreover, a case study approach is particularly relevant for examining complex social phenomena within their real-world contexts, enabling an in-depth understanding of tourism-related challenges (Yin, 2001). Bali was selected as the research site due to its global recognition as a prominent tourism destination and its frequent citation in academic and policy discussions on mass tourism and overtourism (Chong, 2019; Suyadnya et al., 2025; Wall, 2018).

There are three methods conducted in this research to allow data triangulation (Miles et al., 2014). Data collection was conducted over a period of three months, from May to August 2025. Initially, the data collection process involved a document analysis of online media pertaining to overtourism in Bali. The keywords employed in this investigation were "overtourism AND Bali." The term "overtourism" has been adopted into the Indonesian language and, therefore, was not translated for this study. Only articles addressing either definitions or solutions were selected for analysis. A total of 44 articles and 7 video news were analysed, as presented in Appendix 1 and 2. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 stakeholders, including representatives from the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local government, a tourism scholar and consultant, tourism entrepreneurs, and hospitality employees. The selection of these stakeholders regards their significant roles in the tourism literature, participants were selected using purposive and chain-referral sampling strategies to ensure the acquisition of deep, context-rich insights (Patton, 2002). The researchers' academic and professional familiarity with Bali's tourism sector facilitated access to diverse tourism stakeholders while also requiring continuous reflexive awareness regarding potential interpretive biases throughout the research process. The selection criteria are based on their long-standing experience (minimum 10 years) in the tourism industry to ensure their deep knowledge of the context being investigated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were meticulously adhered to. Participants were comprehensively informed about the study's objectives, and informed consent was obtained prior to their participation. To maintain confidentiality, all identifying information was either removed or anonymized in the presentation

of the findings (Wiles et al., 2008). The details of the informants' profiles are presented in Table 1. In the analysis, their identities are referred to with the initials Participant: P1–12. Meanwhile, news and video data are referred to with the codes D1–44, and video: V1–7.

Table 1. Participants' details

Participants' Identification	Profile	Gender	Industry tenure (in year)	Organisational tenure (in year)
P1-Hotel	General Manager of a hotel group	M	30	12
P2-NGO	Hotel and Tourism practitioner; NGO Representative; An occasional guest lecture; professional advisor for a legislative group	M	32	11
P3-TA	Entrepreneur/owner of a tour travel; Travel agent representative	M	35	28
P4-TA	Tour guide	F	10	4
P5-Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur/Owner of a hotel	M	10	10
P6 -TA	Tour Guide	F	13	10
P7-TA	Travel operator, managing partner, guest service relation in the travel agency	M	21	11
P8-Academic	Ex-hotel employee and full-time academic, tourism researcher and consultant	F	20	15
P9-Hotel	General Manager of a hotel group; Leader of Hotel Association; Tourism consultant	M	24	15
P10-Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur of a villa management; Villa consultant/developer	M	20	17
P11-Hotel	General Manager of a hotel; CEO of local hotel operator	M	32	12
P12-Government	Government representative	M	28	10

Thirdly, researchers also conducted fieldwork across key tourism hubs in Bali, including Kuta, Nusa Dua, Sanur, Canggu and Ubud; areas that have been significantly impacted by mass tourism (Chong, 2019; Cole & Browne, 2015; Gössling et al., 2020; MacRae, 2016). The purpose of the observation is to validate the data obtained through the first and second methods by specifically examining the environmental and social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), as well as documenting the impacts of overtourism on local communities, including traffic congestion, waste accumulation, environmental degradation, social uneasiness related to tourist misbehaviour, and increasing socio-spatial pressures experienced by residents. By integrating interviews, direct observations at tourism-saturated sites, and online media analysis, the researchers not only enhanced the credibility of their findings but also facilitated the cross-verification of emergent themes across multiple data sources. All datasets were subsequently compiled and transcribed for input into NVivo, where they were analysed using inductive thematic analysis, allowing themes to naturally emerge from the datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inductive thematic analysis was primarily conducted by one researcher to ensure coding consistency, while the resulting codes and themes were regularly reviewed and validated through iterative discussions among the co-authors to enhance analytical reliability, reflexivity, and interpretive credibility. Analytical rigour was further ensured by comparing patterns across the three sources of data (Patton, 2002).

4. Findings

4.1 Overtourism is represented as an urban overdevelopment

Public dissatisfaction with overtourism tends to focus on tourism growth and visitor numbers, often framing tourism as the sole and island-wide issue. Our research, however, suggests that overtourism is the result of a complex overlap between urban overdevelopment and tourism (Figure 2), which complicates how we might associate Bali as a whole with a concept or understanding of overtourism:

In Bali, there are several less-visited tourist areas, while tourists tend to flock in Petitenget, Canggu, and Ubud. It would be beneficial to address this congestion. I am confident that most practitioners would agree that Bali has not yet reached the stage of overtourism. Some hotels remain unoccupied, even though the streets are bustling (P1-Hotel).



Figure 2. Canggu is often associated with traffic congestion and overtourism, yet it continues to attract large numbers of tourists who visit to enjoy its beaches and coastal recreation (Photo: I Nyoman Darma Putra, 2022).

This is also found in the online news, drawn from the statement from the representative of Bali Tourism government, and remains consistent in the interview.

South Bali is the focal point of the island, evident in its bustling business activities, frequent traffic jams, and extensive development. However, Bali encompasses more than just the south; it also includes East, North, and West Bali (D20).

More importantly, some participants highlighted that tourism might be not the only causal factor affecting the overdevelopment and landscape change. Participants perceived overtourism as an imbalance of infrastructure to carry the tourist/visitor influx.

Generally, we see overtourism is used as a campaign to disparage destinations (P2-Hotel).

In fact, tourism alone should not bear the blame. Bali has experienced significant population growth, yet this increase has not been accompanied by corresponding infrastructure improvements. The roads remain narrow, with no upgrades, and public transportation is not operating as it should. (P3-entrepreneur).

Various online sources similarly depict tourism as a factor contributing to a destination's inability to balance urban development or manage migration and foreign involvement, as one article explains that:

The initial threat of overtourism can be felt in several aspects: property sold to foreigners, cultural shifts in some areas, and concrete threats to infrastructure. The "New Moscow" phenomenon [refers to influx of long-term foreigners, including Russian nationals to settle in one particular suburb/area], ongoing uncontrolled traffic jams, and even fireworks at beach clubs disrupt local traditional rituals (D9).

This imbalance creates annoyance and irritability in both tourists and visitors, illustrating how overtourism can have reciprocal negative impacts in host-guests experiences due to a shift in perceived decline in local culture and the spread of urbanisation towards once pristine or valued rural areas. Take the view of a travel agent below:

On the downside, it could potentially affect local culture, making it appear as though we are altering our own traditions to align with theirs (tourists'), thereby transforming our identity. The environment also gets impacted, for instance, through extensive landscape change of hotels and villas, along with increased pollution and traffic congestion. Overcrowding results in excessive resource consumption, which is what makes the Balinese people slowly feel annoyance at their own homeland (P7-TA).

These views suggest that overtourism is perceived as a framing of the complex inter-related impacts of migration and urban-development. As the participants and online data suggest, tourism can be a part of, yet cannot be regarded as a sole cause of the detrimental impact on a destination.

4.2 Towards adaptive management of overtourism

4.2.1 Spatial strategy

Overtourism is perceived as a spatial planning issue. When participants were asked whether they agreed with the statement that Bali is experiencing overtourism, they believe that overtourism is confined to specific, urbanised areas that do not reflect Bali as an entire destination. An academic mentioned that:

Bali is not yet having overtourism, actually the problem is the uneven distribution of tourists, we can compare it with Singapore and Malaysia, with so many tourists visiting, they can still make tourists comfortable (P8-Academic).

Although comparing Bali as an island to countries like Singapore and Malaysia might be a flawed assumption, this participant's comment highlights the poor management of tourism in Bali, particularly in terms of distributing tourists effectively, or attracting tourists in least visited destinations. Most discussions then lead to a focus on a more equitable distribution of the tourism economy by empowering local communities, leveraging entrepreneurial efforts, creating new tourist attractions, as well as promoting alternatives to diversify tourism mobilities and pathways across the island. This hotel stakeholder also resonates with previous comments by an academic:

We need to create opportunities for entrepreneurs in less densely populated regions, as well as for other small businesses. Additionally, we should collaborate with local entrepreneurs to bring their products to the international market (P11-Hotel).

As one accommodation entrepreneur illustrates, the spatial distribution of the tourism economy is also viewed through the idea of involving tourism villages beyond congested areas and promoting new tourism products and attractions:

Our aim is to develop tourist villages by enhancing their attractions based on their unique potential. Therefore, we should not limit our focus to popular destinations only. Instead, we can tailor our offerings by guiding tourists to lesser-known destinations, enriching their travel experiences with similar attractions. For instance, when someone desired the Tanah Lot sunset but faced heavy traffic, we can replace the Tanah Lot visit to an alternative sunrise spot, such as in Kintamani (P3-Entrepreneur).

The analysis suggests overtourism is positioned less as an issue of excessive tourist arrivals and more as a challenge of managing spatial distribution to enhance both visitor experiences and local livelihoods.

4.2.2 Limitation strategy

The analysis indicates that it is crucial to limit growth, being uniform amidst diverse types of stakeholder groups, particularly in terms of infrastructure development and visitor numbers, as illustrated below:

The governor needs to consider the optimal number for Bali. For instance, we mentioned 7 million tourists, which differs from

the national target, as the central government is advocating for a continuous increase (P9-Hotel).

Moreover, technology can aid in controlling the number of visitors to certain overcrowded tourist destinations. As P8 suggested, visitor tracking data can be utilised:

Based on this data, we can determine where tourists should visit, allowing us to impose restrictions. This approach has been implemented at Borobudur and can be applied to other crowded destinations (P8-Academic).

Other participants expressed concerns about the importance of enforcing a moratorium on infrastructure development with rigorous monitoring. To provide context, Bali has imposed such a moratorium on hotels and villas in overcrowded tourist areas since 2015, yet participants noted inconsistencies in its implementation:

Despite the moratorium, development sometimes continues, so the government must monitor it to ensure effective destination management (P1-Hotel).

Overall, the theme suggests that limitations are essential in controlling the crowd and massive development, but further efforts are needed to enforce sanctions and ensure the moratorium is implemented as initially intended.

4.2.3 Tourist Levy

Regulations regarding the foreign tourist levy in Bali are designed to address overtourism and outlined through several complementary provisions. Regional Regulation (*Perda*) No. 6/2023, effective since August 2023, introduced the levy to support cultural and environmental preservation, later refined by *Perda* number 2/2025, which added provisions on exemptions and service fees. Governor Regulation (*Pergub*) No. 2/2024 specifies the payment procedure, which must be made cashless via the *Love Bali* application, with a fixed amount of IDR 150,000 per visit. Exemptions apply to holders of certain visas such as diplomatic, KITAS/KITAP (Temporary or Permanent resident visa), student, business, and golden visas. Sanctions include warnings and restrictions from entering tourist sites, while incentives provide a 3% service fee to certain parties. Overall, these regulations aim to protect Bali's culture and environment while enhancing the sustainability and quality of its tourism sector.

Although the levy was generally introduced as a preservation-oriented initiative, many participants perceived its implementation with scepticism and

distrust, expressing concerns that the policy symbolised ineffective governance, limited transparency, and weak accountability rather than meaningful community protection. Several participants questioned whether the levy genuinely contributed to addressing overtourism or merely functioned as an additional financial burden disconnected from local community needs, as reflected in the following quote:

I have heard about this (levy), but in my opinion, it was ineffective because there was no transparency regarding how the funds were ultimately utilised, making the outcomes unclear. As a result, many assumed it to be an act of extortion since no evidence of its use was available afterward. People were, in fact, willing to contribute, especially when framed as supporting sustainability, but the implementation lacked clarity. Was there any tangible value or benefit? (P8-Academic).

While one participant (P9-Hotel) expressed support for the Tourist Levy and viewed it as a necessary mechanism for preserving Bali's environmental and cultural sustainability, this positive representation was strongly tied to perceptions of stricter enforcement, institutional commitment, and shared responsibility among tourism stakeholders. Drawing from prior involvement in government briefings, the participant perceived the End-point mechanism as a potentially more credible and effective approach to improving levy implementation:

This End-point system essentially operates through an incentive mechanism for the collectors, whereby each would receive 3% of the total amount they collect. By downloading the Love Bali application, they can explain its functions and benefits while also facilitating the onsite payment process. This new system has already been stipulated and legalized in the Regional Regulation (Perda). They also explained that since only around 30% (approximately IDR 300 billion) of the targeted amount (of this year) has been collected, the government is not yet in a position to allocate the funds for improving destinations (P9-Hotel).

P12-Government further confirmed that the revenue from the levy in 2024 surpassed its target, with total earnings exceeding IDR 318 billion, well above the initial goal of IDR 250 billion. All funds have been transferred to the regional treasury and allocated according to the 2025 Regional Budget (APBD) to safeguard Balinese culture and the environment. These funds are utilized for various activities, including support for traditional villages, *subaks* irrigation system, and artists participating in the Bali Arts Festival (PKB). In a news article, it is confirmed that a considerable amount has been allocated, IDR 6.5 billion

in 2025, part of which was sourced from the PWA fund (Samudero, 2025). They also confirm to optimise the use of the fund for the waste management through the TPS3R (recycling facilities) in regencies and cities. The Bali Provincial Government is committed to transparency in PWA management and anticipates that revenues in 2025 will rise in line with improvements made on the ground.

While P9-Hotel perceived the levy as a preservation-oriented initiative with potential to improve tourism governance, many other participants viewed it with scepticism due to limited transparency regarding fund allocation and implementation. For these stakeholders, the levy symbolised not only environmental responsibility, but also growing distrust toward governmental accountability and commitment to addressing overtourism. Although the government later promoted the allocation of levy funds for waste management, customary villages, and infrastructure development (Nusa Bali, 2025), participants remained cautious about whether these promises would translate into tangible improvements for local communities and destinations experiencing overtourism pressures.

5. Discussion

5.1 Redefining overtourism and tourism system

Most of the literature on overtourism frames it as a problem of excessive tourist arrivals surpassing a destination's carrying capacity (Mihalic, 2020), which subsequently diminishes the quality of life for residents and degrades the visitor experience (Goodwin, 2017). The repercussions include environmental stress, cultural erosion, increased living costs, and stakeholder conflicts arising from uneven benefits and differing priorities (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023; Mihalic, 2020). Our findings propose a more nuanced perspective: in Bali, overtourism is largely seen as a form of urban overdevelopment, where tourism intersects with rapid population growth, migration, and growing infrastructure deficits. Although Bali is not universally labelled as overtouristed by its residents (as they largely focus on population concentration), there is widespread acknowledgment of poor management of both migrants and tourists, leading to overcrowding, landscape changes, overloaded infrastructure, and local frustration with newcomers and visitors.

This finding directly aligns with MacRae's (2016) arguments, which explore how migration and cosmopolitan identities complicate the narrative of tourism-driven change. Since the post-bombing attacks in 2002 and 2005, an anti-migrant sentiment has passively emerged among the Balinese, who perceive the bombing as having been caused by Muslims (Couteau, 2003). This sentiment is now further intensified by the influx of foreign residents, whose misbehaviour often undermines the cultural values of Bali, a place where

sacredness is cherished (Nordholt, 2007). Migrants, former residents, and tourists all contribute to shifts in urban demographics, spatial consumption, and cultural tensions, making it difficult to single out tourism as the sole cause of urban stress. The situation in Seville further illustrates this dynamic. Jover & Díaz-Parra (2022) document that in the historic center, lifestyle migrants and tourists often inhabit the same neighborhoods, leading to increased housing costs, altering the social profile, and causing long-term residents to feel “outpriced” or socially excluded. Similarly, in Reykjavík, Iceland, recent research indicates that the growth of tourism-related short-term rentals and migration has exacerbated a housing shortage for long-term residents, increasing precarity and undermining housing stability (Mixa & Loftsdóttir, 2025). These examples underscore that overtourism cannot be reduced to visitor numbers alone but is intricately linked with migration flows, housing markets, and urban governance.

Applying Social Representation Theory (SRT) allows us to see overtourism not as a condition but as a contested social meaning. Stakeholders in Bali framed overtourism as both a tangible issue, manifested in traffic congestion, pollution, and landscape changes, as well as a symbolic issue, linked to cultural erosion, shifting identities, and a sense of annoyance toward both tourists and development actors. These representations reveal nuance to the existing literature, which often portrays overtourism as a homogenous, universally negative phenomenon (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023). By highlighting the diversity and contestation in how overtourism is socially constructed, our study advances the role of SRT in tourism scholarship and demonstrates how meanings, rather than numbers, drive community acceptance or rejection of tourism policies.

Bali’s case enriches the growing body of literature by demonstrating that the discourse of overtourism is influenced not only by tourist arrivals but also by internal and external migration. This highlights the necessity of viewing overtourism as a complex social phenomenon arising from the cumulative effects of various social and political dynamics, rather than simply as a matter of lifestyle migrants. Indeed, the term overtourism itself can be considered a form of media framing (Clark & Nyaupane, 2020; Phi, 2020) that risks oversimplifying the issue and diverting attention from more fundamental challenges in destination management and urban planning.

This understanding also prompts a re-evaluation of earlier theoretical models of the tourism system. For instance, Leiper’s (1990) model emphasizes the flow of tourists between origin and destination, and Dwyer and Kim’s (2003) focus on destination competitiveness highlights comparative advantages, yet they largely overlook the possibility that tourists may become long-term residents, property investors, or business owners. Another concern is Doxey’s

Tourist's Irritation Index, which needs expansion (Williams, 1979), as findings show that local communities can also become irritated when tourism is not properly managed. The findings suggest that residents' frustration is directed less toward tourists themselves and more toward perceived governance failures, particularly as lifestyle migrants contribute to urban overdevelopment, land-use change, and socio-spatial pressures that extend beyond the impacts of tourism per se. Consequently, recognizing the declining phase in a tourism destination's lifecycle as a result of overtourism (Chaney & Séraphin, 2023) can serve as a warning to implement effective management strategies before further deterioration occurs. These realities call for a more critical and integrated perspective on destination management framework, one that prioritises the well-being of local communities while also considering the role of foreign investment and migration in shaping urban and tourism landscapes.

5.2 Towards a new framework: Tackling overtourism with socially adaptive management strategies

This finding underscores the necessity of framing the issue of overtourism as a consequence of mismanagement, which neglects the prioritization of visitor management and destination planning. Numerous studies, such as those conducted in Singapore (Toan et al., 2023) illustrates the successful management of destinations despite high visitor numbers. Participants have consistently highlighted that congestion in Bali is concentrated in specific hotspots (such as Canggu, Jimbaran, Uluwatu, Ubud), while many areas remain underutilised, indicating an uneven spatial development pattern rather than island-wide saturation. This insight contributes to current debates by redefining overtourism not as a universal threshold of numbers and impacts (Mihalic, 2020; Milano et al., 2019) but as a relational imbalance between tourism growth, infrastructure provision, and urban planning. Such a reframing emphasizes the need to integrate overtourism research with urban studies and social-ecological systems, offering a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding.

Our findings offer empirical support for the application of adaptive management within the tourism sector. We identified three strategies: spatial strategy, limitation strategy, and tourist levy, each reflecting varying degrees of adaptive thinking. The spatial dispersal approach, which promotes the development of new attractions and entrepreneurship in less-visited areas, aligns closely with the principles of experimentation, flexibility, and learning inherent in AM (Islam et al., 2018). Conversely, limitation strategies, such as moratoria on hotel construction or the implementation of visitor tracking technologies, underscore the tension between policy ambition and enforcement capacity, revealing deficiencies in governance structures and lacking the

collaborative focus, essential to AM (Plummer & Fennell, 2009). Lastly, the tourist levy exemplifies how adaptive strategies can falter in the absence of trust, transparency, and effective feedback mechanisms: although intended to preserve culture and the environment, stakeholders questioned its credibility and fairness. These insights advance AM theory by demonstrating that its efficacy depends not only on technical design (Armitage et al., 2008) but also on the social legitimacy of policies within local contexts.

The analysis further elucidates that deficiencies in governance are central to the issue of overtourism in Bali. Numerous documented issues pertain to the involvement of national elites and foreign investors, and land mafias (Bachriadi & Aspinall, 2023) often at the expense of the interests of the local Balinese population in decision-making processes related to tourism development in Bali (Adityanandana & Gerber, 2019; Rosalina et al., 2023; Wardana, 2019). Furthermore, there exists a misalignment between national visitor arrival targets and the potential impacts thereof. While the national government prioritizes continued growth targets, local communities express concerns regarding congestion, cultural erosion, and the quality of daily life (Chong, 2019). This misalignment generates tensions that cannot be resolved solely through adaptive strategies. Participants consistently highlighted issues such as weak enforcement, inconsistent monitoring, and a lack of transparency in government programs, particularly concerning the tourist levy. These findings not only corroborate but also expand upon existing literature that identifies governance failures as a fundamental cause of overtourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Situmorang et al., 2019).

Our contribution, therefore, is the direct linkage of governance trust to AM, extending the aim of sustainability and fairness (Pandit, 2025; Sharpley, 2000). Without institutional credibility and stakeholder confidence, even well-intentioned adaptive measures may be perceived as ineffective or exploitative. This underscores the political dimensions of overtourism management, where success is contingent not only upon technical design but also upon sustained legitimacy and participatory engagement.

In synthesising these insights, we propose that overtourism in Bali should be conceptualised as a socially adaptive governance process rather than merely a tourism management problem. The findings suggest that overtourism is closely intertwined with urban overdevelopment, migration, and governance challenges, where effective management depends not only on technical interventions but also on institutional legitimacy. Within this framework, social representations shape how stakeholders interpret overtourism and evaluate the legitimacy of policy responses, while Adaptive Management contributes principles of experimentation, flexibility, and continuous learning. Trust, transparency, and collaboration emerge

as critical adaptive governance mechanisms because they strengthen institutional legitimacy and stakeholder willingness to support, participate in, and comply with management interventions. Consequently, transparency should be understood not simply as a normative principle, but as an adaptive strategy that enables learning, reduces stakeholder scepticism, and facilitates collective responses to the complex socio-spatial challenges of overtourism

5.3 Practical contributions

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for policymakers, destination managers, and local communities. Firstly, the study reconceptualises overtourism as an issue of governance and spatial management rather than merely a matter of tourist numbers. Destination planners are encouraged to focus on redistributing visitor flows and enhancing infrastructure, particularly in underdeveloped areas. This reframing facilitates more targeted interventions, such as zoning policies, diversification of attractions, and mobility management, which can alleviate pressure on hotspots while creating new opportunities for peripheral communities (Amore et al., 2020; Nilsson, 2020). Secondly, the application of AM underscores the necessity for governance practices that prioritise trust, transparency, and participatory decision-making. This suggests that adaptive measures, such as levies or dispersal programs, must be co-designed with local stakeholders to ensure legitimacy and acceptance (Mihalic, 2020). Finally, by linking tourism pressures with migration, housing, and urban development dynamics, the study provides a foundation for cross-sector collaboration between tourism authorities, urban planners, and community organizations (Cheung & Li, 2019b; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Loverio et al., 2023). Such integrative governance can help align national growth objectives with local well-being, ensuring that tourism development supports both cultural sustainability and the quality of life for residents.

6. Conclusion and Future Research

This study contributes to overtourism scholarship by reconceptualising overtourism as a socially adaptive governance challenge rather than merely a consequence of excessive visitor numbers. By integrating Social Representation Theory and Adaptive Management, the study demonstrates that stakeholder perceptions, institutional legitimacy, trust, and governance capacity are central to understanding and managing overtourism. The findings further suggest that overtourism in Bali is closely linked to urban overdevelopment, migration dynamics, and uneven governance processes, highlighting the need to move beyond visitor management toward more adaptive, participatory, and spatially informed governance approaches.

Future research should further examine the political ecology of overtourism governance, particularly how power relations, institutional arrangements, and competing stakeholder interests, shape tourism development in island destinations. It is crucial to examine whether adopting a participatory and partnership-centered model with various stakeholders, while promoting local involvement, is necessary, as suggested by earlier studies (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Loverio et al., 2023). In the context of Bali, the emerging concept of “One Island Management” (Pitana, 2004, Konsep ‘One Island Management’, 2018, 2025) presents a promising avenue for future investigation. Rather than being viewed solely as a governance mechanism, a research question can be framed, for instance, “How can the concept of One Island Management enhance institutional legitimacy, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive governance in addressing overtourism and urban overdevelopment in Bali? Examining the opportunities, limitations, and political realities of One Island Management would not only advance understanding of overtourism governance in Bali but also contribute to broader debates on adaptive governance and political-ecological management (Dangi & Petrick, 2021) in island geographies.

Acknowledgments

Our deepest gratitude goes to the participations and insights from the interviewees. This work was supported by the Institute for Research and Community Service (LPPM - *Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*) of Udayana University with a scheme Collaborative Outreach for International Research Networking (CONNECT) number: B/229.251/UN14.4.A/PT.01.03/2025

Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Sources of written online news article

ID Number	URL Link
D1	Kurniati, D. (2025, March 16). Atasi overtourism, anggota DPR usul naikan tarif pajak turis di Bali. <i>DDTC News</i> . https://news.ddtc.co.id/berita/nasional/1809483/atasi-overtourism-anggota-dpr-usul-naikkan-tarif-pajak-turis-di-bali
D2	Lisani, N. (2024, September 30). Bagaimana overtourism jadi ancaman bagi pariwisata Indonesia. <i>Identitas Unhas</i> . https://identitasunhas.com/bagaimana-overtourism-jadi-ancaman-bagi-pariwisata-indonesia/
D3	CXO Media. (2024, April 29). Bali dan overtourism yang menghantui. <i>CXO Media</i> . https://www.cxomedia.id/general-knowledge/20240429160710-55-180289/bali-dan-overtourism-yang-menghantui
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D5	The Bali Sun. (2024, November 22). Bali kicks back over listing on travel “no list” for 2025. <i>The Bali Sun</i> . https://thebalisun.com/bali-kicks-back-over-listing-on-travel-no-list-for-2025
D6	Wahyuni, T. (2024, December 3). Mengubur mimpi punya tanah di Bali – Warga ‘terjepit’ di tengah perkembangan wisata dan kebutuhan hidup. <i>BBC News Indonesia</i> . https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c14ld7l1gyeo
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D9	Regitahadi. (2025, January 7). Bali surga yang terancam overtourism. <i>Kumparan</i> . https://kumparan.com/regita-hadi/bali-surga-yang-terancam-overtourism-24FgXOcywFF
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D11	World Tourism Forum. (2024, September 17). Bali takes action to combat overtourism with new hotel ban. <i>World Tourism Forum</i> . https://live.worldtourismforum.net/news/Catch-up-the-latest-news-i...ndustry/Bali-Takes-Action-to-Combat-Overtourism-with-New-Hotel-Ban
D12	Novita, M. (2024, November 19). Bali tops Fodor’s 2025 “no list” due to overtourism. <i>Tempo</i> . https://en.tempo.co/read/1943066/bali-tops-fodors-2025-no-list-due-to-overtourism

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D24	Rahmat, A.F. (2025, March 9). Mengapa Bali dilabeli sebagai overtourism. <i>Netral News</i> . https://www.netralnews.com/mengapa-bali-dilabeli-sebagai-overtourism-dan-apa-yang-harus-pemerintah-lakukan/Sk5vMDVwSUVBL3VVQUZrUGR5UTFWQT09

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D26	Dewi, F.S. (2024, April 19). Menparekraf Sandiaga Uno bantah Bali alami overtourism. <i>Bisnis.com</i> . https://ekonomi.bisnis.com/read/20240419/12/1758799/menparekraf-sandiaga-uno-bantah-bali-alami-overtourism
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D30	Nugroho, M.A.H. (2025, November 26). Overtourism Bali: Ancaman lingkungan dan urgensi pariwisata hijau. <i>Kompasiana</i> . https://www.kompasiana.com
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D42	Rayda, N. (2025, February 20). IN FOCUS: Overcrowded south, undeveloped north – Bali seeks new airport, highways and rail lines despite roadblocks. <i>Channel News Asia</i> . https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/indonesia-north-bali-new-airport-infrastructure-projects-tourism-4942186

Appendix 2. Sources of video news

ID Number	URL Link
V1	KompasTV Dewata. (2023, September 27). <i>Mulai Februari, Wisatawan Asing Kena Pungutan Rp. 150.000</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df66pqRfUko
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V5	DW Indonesia. (2024, March 12). <i>Turis masuk Bali, kini kena pajak! Ini reaksi wisatawan asing atas retribusi lingkungan dan budaya</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYXSS7t_wUM
V6	Kompas TV. (2023, March 23). <i>Bali Colonized by Foreign Tourists</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oh6a3R0fupM
V7	Podcast ASN Bali Bisa. (2025, November 5). <i>Podcast Episode 35: optimalisasi pungutan wisatawan asing (PWA) melalui kerjasama endpoint</i> [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df66pqRfUko

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