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PARADISE MASK UNDER THE TAG: THAILAND TIKTOK TRAVEL VIDEO CRITICAL DISCOURSE WITH VISUAL GRAMMAR ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis and Visual Grammar to examine how TikTok's algorithmic platform constructs Thailand as an "instant paradise" through user-generated travel videos. Analysing 120 high-engagement videos tagged with popular hashtags, we identify three core discursive strategies: (1) hyper-aesthetisation of nature through high-saturation filters, drone perspectives, and looped imagery, which masks environmental realities; (2) temporal flattening that compresses cultural and historical complexity into consumable "moments" via fast-paced editing and time-bound hashtags; and (3) exoticised self-orientalism, where Thai creators strategically perform stereotypical "cuteness," traditional aesthetics, and "service-with-a-smile" narratives to cater to the Global North gaze. We argue that TikTok's algorithm amplifies these strategies through visibility mechanisms, reinforcing a simplified, commodified destination image while marginalizing local voices and socioecological challenges. This "instant paradise" discourse perpetuates power asymmetries, threatens cultural authenticity, and exacerbates overtourism, urging destination management organizations to adopt proactive strategies for sustainable representation.

KEYWORDS: TikTok Tourism, Instant Paradise, Critical Discourse Analysis, Visual Grammar, Algorithmic Platform, Destination Image, Self-Orientalism, Social Media Representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background: TikTok and the Rise of Instant Paradise

In the era of digital media, the image construction and communication mode of tourism destination are undergoing profound changes. Short Video platform represented by TikTok, with its unique algorithm recommendation mechanism and highly visual content presentation, has become a key force in shaping the image of global tourism destinations. TikTok's 15-second montage culture simplifies complex geospatial and cultural experiences into a series of visual symbols that are easy to consume and imitate through quick editing, filter beautification, background music and tag aggregation. In this context, Thailand, a destination that has long been shaped as a "smiling country" and a "tropical paradise" in the global tourism market, has taken on a new character on the TikTok platform. A large number of user-generated content (UGC), through hashtags such as #ThailandVibes and #PhiPhiIsMyParadise, have built Thailand into an "instant paradise"-a utopia that can be reached and consumed instantly through Short Video without deep exploration. This narrative of "instant paradise" not only caters to people's desire for "poetry and distance" in contemporary fast-paced life, but also reflects how digital platforms reshape our perception and imagination of tourist destinations through algorithms and visual rhetoric.

1.2. Research Gap: Algorithm-Driven Tourism Discourse Analysis of Short Video

Although tourism discourse analysis has accumulated a lot in academic circles, most of the existing studies focus on traditional media, such as tourism brochures, official websites, TV advertisements and so on. For such emerging algorithm-driven Short Video platforms as TikTok, their unique communication mechanism and content ecology have not been fully critically examined. In particular, research on how algorithms systematically construct and reinforce the image of a particular destination through tagging, recommendations, and looping remains scarce. Although the existing literature begins to pay attention to the impact of social media on destination image, it often focuses on quantitative analysis, such as user engagement, emotional tendency, etc., while lacking in-depth discourse analysis of multimodal symbols (vision, language, music, etc.) in Short Video. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the popular tourism videos about

Thailand on TikTok through critical discourse analysis (CDA) and visual grammar theory, revealing the discourse mechanism behind them, power relations and their far-reaching impact on Thailand's destination image.

1.3. Research Objectives and Problems

1.3.1. Research Objective: Reveal How TikTok Tags Construct Thailand as an "Instant Paradise"

The core goal of this study is to reveal and critically analyze how mainstream travel hashtags on TikTok (e.g. #ThailandVibes, #PhiPhiIsMyParadise) disambiguate Thailand as an "easy-to-consume paradise." The purpose of this study is to go beyond the superficial description of video content and explore the ideology, power relations and cultural influence behind it. Specifically, this study will analyze how these Short Video use specific semiotics and linguistic resources to simplify Thailand's complex and diverse cultural, historical and social realities into a series of easy-to-consume visual and narrative elements that meet the expectations of global tourists. By deconstructing these "instant paradise" narratives, this study hopes to reveal the role of digital platforms in shaping tourism destination images and the potential challenges these shaping poses to Thailand's cultural authenticity and social sustainability.

1.3.2. Research Questions: Symbolic Resources, Discourse Power, and Sociocultural Influences

In order to achieve the above research objectives, this study proposes the following three core research questions:

1. Semiotics and Linguistics Resources (RQ1): What specific semiotics (visual, auditory) and linguistics (text, labels) resources were mobilized in the popular travel videos about Thailand on TikTok to construct the narrative of "instant paradise"? How do these resources work together to create a specific aesthetic and emotional experience?
2. Discourse Power and Voice (RQ2): Which voices (e.g. Western tourists, Thai local influencers, official tourism agencies) are amplified, and which voices (e.g. local communities, non-tourism practitioners) are marginalized or silenced in this discourse construction of "instant paradise"? What global and local relationships does this distribution of discourse power reflect?
3. Sociocultural Impact (RQ3): What are the specific sociocultural impacts of this TikTok driven "instant paradise" narrative on Thailand's destination image, cultural authenticity, and local communities?

For example, how does it affect visitor behaviour patterns, cultural perceptions, and what challenges and opportunities does it present for Thailand's tourism industry in the long run?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical tourism discourse and destination image research has long focused on the tension between power, representation, and cultural authenticity; social media platforms, especially algorithm-driven Short Video, are rapidly reshaping this tension. This section integrates the latest developments in the three cross-cutting areas in a thematic rather than chronological manner, laying the foundation for dialogue on the theoretical framework and research issues that follow.

2.1. *Criticizing Tourism Discourse and Destination Image*

Early research revealed how official brochures and television advertisements romanticized destinations in the Global South as "unsullied paradise" (Crompton, 1979). In recent years, scholars have introduced Foucault's discourse theory and Said's Orientalist perspective, pointing out that tourism discourse is not only a marketing tool, but also a field for reproducing global-local power relations (Stamou & Paraskevopoulos, 2004). Chon et al. (1993) pointed out that the western media constructed Thailand as a docile and obedient "other" through the "smile-service" narrative, thus concealing labor exploitation and political and economic contradictions. Small, Harris, and Wilson (2008) take cabin magazine advertising further and find that the "social classification" mechanism divides visitors into "explorers" and "explored" and reinforces the colonial gaze. However, these studies mainly focus on traditional media, and there is still insufficient knowledge about the algorithmic logic of Short Video platform and how multimodal symbols reshape destination images.

2.2. *Algorithmic Visibility and Content Homogenization*

Recent scholarship emphasizes that TikTok's "For You" algorithm is not a neutral distributor but a political actor that "naturalizes" specific visual paradigms into destination standards. Dickinson, Hibbert, and Filimonau (2016) note that tourism research has long been dominated by "techno-optimism," often ignoring how such platform politics affect discourse visibility. Specifically, through mechanisms like tag aggregation, loop playback, and imitation challenges, the platform incentivizes

creators to adopt high-saturation filters and "God's perspective" aerial photography to secure traffic. Du et al. (2020) found that these elements have become the standard "visual grammar" for obtaining visibility, leading to the systematic homogenization of destination images. This results in a "punch point" culture, as seen in the cases of Chen & Xing (2021) in Chongqing and Xi'an, where even official organizations compress complex urban and cultural narratives into consumable "sets" to cater to the platform's logic. However, while these studies reveal how complex narratives are reduced to 15-second visual symbols, they have not yet systematically answered: how is the authenticity of destination culture renegotiated when local creators orientalise themselves for visibility?

2.3. *"Instant Paradise" as Orientalist Metaphor*

The "paradise" metaphor has recurred in the history of tourism advertising, and its function is to create a utopia that can escape daily life but is easy to consume (Li & Hamuddin, 2019). In the context of Short Video, this metaphor is further compressed into "instant heaven" of "15 seconds to arrive." McClinchey and Dimanche (2023) note that online media, through "zero-burden" and "zero-time" discourse, reduce perceived risk to destinations, but also smooth out cultural and ecological complexity. Thailand is a typical tourist case: from the early Lost Thailand (Du et al., 2020) movie marketing, to the recent #ThailandVibes challenge on TikTok, has reproduced Thailand as a single symbol of the "smile-sun-beach" trinity. It is worth noting that Thai local online celebrities are not passively accepted, but strategically self-orientalized through "cute" culture, traditional clothing and "slow life" labels in exchange for praise and economic benefits from global northern audiences (Chen & Xing, 2021). This process not only demonstrates the multi-directional nature of power relations in the platform era, but also raises new concerns about cultural commodification and sustainability.

To sum up, existing research reveals how traditional media and early social media construct and solidify "paradise" narratives, but there is still a lack of systematic criticism on how algorithm-driven Short Video specifically mobilize multimodal resources, amplify/mute different subjects, and ultimately affect the social and cultural texture of destinations. By combining Fairclough's critical discourse analysis with Kress van Leeuwen's visual grammar, this paper aims to fill this gap by taking Thailand TikTok high-traffic tourism videos as corpus.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

3.1.1. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model: Text, Discourse Practice, SOCIAL Practice

Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis (CDA) model is adopted as the core theoretical framework for this study. The model divides discourse analysis into three interrelated dimensions: text analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis. At the text level, this study will analyze the multi-modal symbols of TikTok videos, such as language (such as titles, subtitles, comments), vision (such as pictures, colours, compositions) and hearing (such as music, sound effects), and explore how they work together to construct the narrative of "instant heaven". At the discourse practice level, this study will examine how these videos are produced, disseminated and consumed, especially the role played by TikTok's algorithm mechanism, and the interaction between different subjects (such as tourists, online celebrities, official institutions). At the social practical level, this study will explore the ideology and power relations behind this discourse construction and its profound impact on Thai society, culture and economy. Through the comprehensive analysis of these three dimensions, this study aims to reveal the complexity of TikTok tourism discourse and its social significance.

3.1.2. Relationship between Discourse and Power

The core view of CDA is that discourse is not only a tool to reflect social reality, but also an important means to construct social reality and maintain or challenge power relations. In tourism discourse, power relations are embodied in who has the right to define and describe tourism destinations, and how this description affects tourists' cognition and behavior.

This study will draw on Foucault's power discourse theory to analyze the power asymmetry in tourism discourse about Thailand on TikTok. For example, Western tourists and global online celebrities often have greater voice and influence, and their perspectives and narratives are more easily recommended and disseminated by algorithms, thus dominating the construction of Thailand's tourism image. Local Thai community voices, especially those on social issues and environmental challenges that do not fit the "paradise" narrative, may be marginalized or silenced. By revealing these power

relationships, this study aims to critically examine the role of digital platforms in reproducing global inequality.

3.2. Visual Grammar

3.2.1. Kress van Leeuwen's Theory of Visual Grammar

In order to analyze the visual symbols of TikTok videos in depth, this study will introduce the visual grammar theory of Kress and van Leeuwen. The theory holds that images, like language, have their own "grammar" systems that can be used to construct meaning. Visual grammar theory focuses on three levels of meaning construction: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. Reproduction meaning refers to the people, places and events depicted in the image and the relationships between them. Interactive meaning refers to the interaction between the viewer and the person in the image, such as eye contact, distance, perspective, etc. Composition meaning refers to the overall layout of elements in an image, such as information values, saliency, and frames. By applying visual grammar theory, this study can systematically analyze how various visual elements (such as drone perspective, filters, colours, character poses, etc.) in TikTok videos work together to construct a visual narrative of "instant heaven".

3.2.2. Reproduction Meaning, Interaction Meaning and Composition Meaning

In the specific analysis, this study will focus on the following aspects. At the level of rendering meaning, scenes (such as beaches, temples, night markets), people (such as tourists, locals, influencers) and activities (such as diving, worshipping Buddha, tasting food) appearing in the video will be analyzed, and how these elements are selected and combined to highlight Thailand's "paradise" character. At the level of interactive meaning, we will analyze the perspective of the video (e.g., "God's perspective", subjective perspective), lens distance (e.g., close-up, long-range), and the eyes of the characters (e.g., direct lens, averted eyes) to explore how these visual strategies affect the audience's sense of substitution and emotional resonance.

At the level of composition meaning, it will analyze the layout of the picture, the use of colour, the effect of light and shadow, etc., and explore how these elements create a surreal and idealized visual aesthetic feeling. Through a comprehensive analysis of these three levels, this study aims to reveal how TikTok videos construct Thailand as a desirable but

unreachable "other" through visual rhetoric.

3.3. Contextual Analysis

3.3.1. Platform Politics: TikTok's Algorithmic Mechanism

This study emphasizes that the analysis of TikTok tourism discourse cannot be separated from its specific platform context. TikTok's algorithmic mechanics are at the heart of its platform politics, and it determines what content gets wider visibility through "for you" pages. This algorithm is not a neutral technical tool, but contains specific values and business logic. For example, algorithms prefer content that elicits strong emotional reactions from users and is easy to imitate and spread, which leads creators to choose the most visually impactful and entertaining elements to present Thailand in order to cater to algorithms, thus exacerbating the homogenization of "instant paradise" narratives. In addition, the "black box" nature of the algorithm also makes its decision-making process lack transparency, which may lead to some voices being systematically suppressed. Therefore, this study regards TikTok's algorithmic mechanism as an important analytical dimension to explore how it acts as an invisible hand to guide and shape tourism discourse about Thailand.

3.3.2. Postcolonial Gaze and Power Asymmetry

This study will also draw on postcolonial theory, especially the concept of gaze, to analyze the power asymmetry in TikTok tourism discourse. Gaze is not only a kind of viewing behavior, but also a power relationship, which embodies the viewer's domination and definition of the viewed. In the tourism context, western tourists often play the role of "gazer", while tourist destinations and their residents become "other" to be "stared at". On TikTok, this post-colonial gaze is continued and enhanced through the visual narrative of Short Video. For example, the "God's perspective" captured by drones captures Thailand's natural scenery, reflecting the omniscience of the viewer; while the "experiential" consumption of local culture by tourists simplifies complex cultural practices into "landscapes" for viewing and entertainment. This study will critically examine how this postcolonial gaze is manifested on TikTok and explore how Thai native creators negotiate and resist between catering to this gaze and seeking cultural autonomy.

4. RESEARCH TECHNIQUE

4.1. Corpus Construction

4.1.1. Video Sample Selection Criteria and Process

This study will adopt qualitative research methods, by constructing a purposive sample corpus for analysis. The corpus will be constructed according to the following criteria: First, the videos will be published from January to December 2024 to ensure the timeliness of the research content. Secondly, the video needs to obtain high user engagement on TikTok platform, and the specific standard is that the number of plays exceeds 100,000 times. This criterion aims to screen out videos that have broad influence and represent mainstream discourse. Again, the videos are in English or Thai with English subtitles to facilitate cross-cultural analysis. Finally, the video content had to be relevant to Thailand tourism and used the target tags specified in this study. Through the TikTok platform search function, we will systematically search and filter according to these criteria, and finally build an analysis corpus containing 120 high-engagement videos.

4.1.2. Tag Selection: #ThailandVibes, #BangkokStreetFood, etc.

In order to focus on the core discourse of constructing the "instant heaven" narrative, this study will select five popular tags that are representative on TikTok as the basis for corpus construction. The hashtags are #ThailandVibes, #BangkokStreetFood, #PhuketSunset, #ChiangMaiSlow Life and #ThailandBeaches. These labels were chosen based on the following considerations: First, they cover Thailand's most important types of tourist destinations, including capital cities (Bangkok), islands (Phuket), historical cities (Chiang Mai), and beach resorts, with broad representation. Second, the labels themselves contain specific emotional and experiential orientations, such as "Vibes," "Sunset," "Slow Life," and so on, which directly point to the core elements of "instant heaven." By analyzing the videos under these tags, this study aims to reveal the specific forms and common features of "instant heaven" narratives in different scenes.

4.2. Data Sources

Third-Party Data Permission: These videos were used for research purposes under permission from the respective content owners, or are analyzed under fair use provisions for academic purposes from publicly available materials on TikTok.

4.2.1. Video Transcription, Subtitles, and On-Screen Text

The data source of this study is multimodal, aiming to comprehensively capture various symbol information in TikTok videos. First, we will transcribe all 120 sample videos in detail, including spoken language (such as narration, dialogue) and non-spoken sounds (such as ambient sounds, sound effects) in the videos. Second, we extract all text information from the video, including automatically generated subtitles, titles manually added by the creator, descriptive text, and any on-screen text that appears in the video (such as place tags, brand logos, etc.). These textual messages are important bases for understanding the author's intention and discourse orientation. Through the integrated analysis of these multimodal data, this study aims to reveal how language, visual and auditory symbols work together to construct the narrative of "instant heaven".

4.2.2. Music Lyrics and User Comments

In addition to the content of the video itself, the study will collect and analyze music lyrics and user comments associated with the video. The background music of TikTok videos is an important part of their emotional atmosphere and narrative rhythm, and many popular videos use specific "Divine Comedy" whose lyrics often echo the video content, reinforcing the theme of "Heaven." Therefore, we will identify and record the background music used in each sample video and analyze its lyric content. In addition, user reviews are an important source of data reflecting audience reactions and interactions. We will collect popular comments under each video and analyze users' interpretation of the video content, emotional reactions and their own travel intentions. By analyzing the user comments, this study can better understand the actual impact of "instant paradise" narrative on the audience.

4.3. Analytical Procedure

4.3.1. Stage 1: Multimodal Coding Process (NVivo)

To ensure methodological rigor, the 120 videos were analyzed using a systematic coding scheme in NVivo. The analytical procedure for this study will be divided into two phases. Firstly, Open Coding focused on three primary modalities including: 1) Visual elements, specifically identifying high-saturation filters (defined by unnatural vibrancy in primary colours), drone-assisted "God's perspective" shots, and looped natural b-roll, 2) Linguistic resources, including the frequency of time-bound hashtags (e.g., #24hrs in Bangkok) and descriptive

"paradise" keywords in captions such as "surreal beauty," "slow pace of life," "food temptation," and "cultural experience", and 3) Auditory cues, mapping the use of "Divine Comedy" tracks and their emotional resonance. Secondly, Axial Coding then integrated these nodes into higher-level themes by examining the co-occurrence of specific visual filters with "Self-Orientalist" performances, such as "service-with-a-smile" narratives.

4.3.2. Stage 2: Critical Interpretation

In the second phase, we will conduct an in-depth critical interpretation based on the thematic framework developed in the first phase. This phase will combine the theoretical framework of this study, namely Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis Model and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar Theory. We will analyze the discourse strategies, ideologies, and power relations behind each theme. For example, in analyzing the theme of "hyperaestheticization of nature," we will not only describe what filters and camera techniques are used in the video, but also critically explore how these visual rhetoric masks real environmental problems and how nature is transformed into visual goods for consumption. In analyzing "exotic ego-Orientalism," we explore how local Thai creators negotiate between catering to global gaze and maintaining cultural autonomy, and the impact of this negotiation on Thai cultural identity. Through critical interpretation of this stage, this study aims to reveal the deep structure of TikTok tourism discourse and its sociocultural significance.

4.4. Research Ethics and Reflectivity

Ethics Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with the Mahasarakham University Research Ethics Guidelines. Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because the data were derived entirely from publicly accessible TikTok videos without interaction with participants, and no personally identifiable information was collected. This approach is consistent with institutional and international guidelines for research involving human data.

This study will strictly adhere to academic ethics. Since the data for this study was sourced from publicly available social media platforms, we will not interact directly with any video creators or commenters to protect their privacy. In research reports and papers, we anonymize all cited videos and user comments, removing any personally identifiable information. In addition, the study will remain highly reflective. Researchers will recognize

their own positions and biases as analysts, and constantly reflect on whether their interpretations are influenced by their cultural background, values, and knowledge framework. We will record the thoughts and puzzles in the research process by writing reflection journals to ensure the objectivity and rigor of the research.

5. DISCOVERIES: DISCOURSE STRATEGIES FOR CONSTRUCTING "INSTANT PARADISE"

Through the analysis of 120 high-engagement TikTok videos, this study identified three core discourse strategies that collectively construct Thailand's image of "instant paradise." These strategies simplify Thailand's complex and diverse reality into a series of visual and narrative elements that are easy to consume through the synergy of multimodal symbols.

These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Three Discourse Strategies for Constructing Instant Paradise and Their Characteristics.

Discursive Strategy	Key Features	Specific Manifestations	Ideological Function
Hyper-aestheticisation of Nature	Transforming natural landscapes into perfect visual commodities that transcend reality.	High saturation colours, dream filters, drone "God's perspective," looped sunsets and waves.	Covering environmental reality, depoliticizing nature and making it a purely aesthetic and consumer object.
	Compressing complex historical, cultural, and social realities into a series of instantaneous, consumable "moments."	Fast-paced clips, tags like #24hrs in Bangkok, emphasis on "ambience" and "feel."	Dissolve depth and complexity, reducing the travel experience to a series of "punch" and "photo" moments.
Exoticised Self-Orientalism	Local Thai creators actively cater to global gaze, performing and reinforcing "exotic" cultural symbols that meet Western expectations.	Exaggerated use of "cuteness" culture, traditional dress, certain gestures, and emphasis on "service with a smile."	Stereotyping, reducing culture to symbols available for consumption and seeking visibility in global markets.

5.1. The Hyper-aestheticization of Nature

5.1.1. Colour Saturation and Filter Usage

In TikTok's Thailand travel videos, natural hyper-aestheticization is a common discourse strategy. Creators generally use high-saturation colours and dreamy filters to render Thailand's natural scenery (such as beaches, sunsets, jungles) more vivid and perfect than reality.

This visual manipulation not only enhances the visual impact of the image, but also creates a surreal, idealized "paradise" atmosphere. For example, many videos render blue water an unnatural, jewel-like blue and sunset skies an exaggerated pinkish purple. This over-beautification of colour, although it can quickly catch the audience's eye, also masks the real environmental conditions, such as seawater pollution, coral bleaching and other problems. By transforming nature into a purely visual commodity, this strategy reduces complex ecosystems to context for consumption, thereby depoliticizing and commoditizing nature.

5.1.2. Drone "God's Perspective" and Space Compression

The "God's perspective" of drone photography is another key visual element in constructing the "instant heaven" narrative. This view captures Thailand's natural landscape (islands, coastlines, mountains) and creates a grand, spectacular visual effect. By looking down from high altitude, the drone lens compresses complex terrain into exquisite "picture scrolls", giving the audience a sense of omnipotent control.

This perspective not only reinforces Thailand as an object that can be seen at a glance, but also dissolves the sense of distance between visitors and the landscape, making it a visual experience that can be easily "owned". However, this spatial compression also leads to a superficial experience, with visitors being directed to appreciate the most beautiful "postcard" views seen from above, while ignoring the deep experience of walking on the ground and interacting with the local environment.

5.1.3. *Sunset and Waves on Loop*

In TikTok video, the iconic images such as sunset, waves and coconut grove played repeatedly are another important means to construct the image of "instant heaven". These images are often presented in slow motion or loop play, accompanied by soothing music, creating a calm, laid back, timeless atmosphere. This repeated presentation of certain natural elements makes it the "symbol" or "symbol" of Thailand's "paradise" image. After repeated exposure to these symbols, viewers unconsciously associate them with concepts such as "relaxation," "vacation," and "paradise." Although this symbolic approach effectively strengthens Thailand's tourism brand image, it also leads to the simplification and stereotyping of destination image. Thailand's natural diversity is reduced to a few of the most iconic symbols, while less photogenic but equally important ecosystems are ignored.

5.2. *Flattening of Time*

5.2.1. *Simplification of Complexity with Tags like #24hrs in Bangkok*

The flattening of time is another prominent feature of TikTok tourism discourse. By using hashtags like #24hrs in Bangkok, #3Days in Phuket, etc., creators compress complex cities or regions into a series of experiences that can be "done" in a short period of time. This narrative model reduces the travel experience to a "to-do list," in which visitors are directed to "punch in" a pre-set list of attractions, restaurants, and activities. For example, a #24hrs in Bangkok video might show a "perfect day" in Bangkok from morning to night, including visiting the Grand Palace, tasting street food, visiting the floating market, experiencing nightlife, and more. This fast-paced presentation, while providing a convenient "guide" for visitors, also dispels the depth and complexity of Bangkok as a city with a complex history, multiculturalism and a large population. Tourists are encouraged to consume the city in a "fast-food" way, ignoring the possibility of interacting deeply with locals and exploring unknown alleys.

5.2.2. *Fast Paced Editing and Instant Experiences*

Complementing the simplified functionality of the tag is the fast-paced editing of the video. TikTok's Short Video format itself requires content to be compact and efficient. In Thai travel videos, this fast-paced editing is characterized by rapid scene changes, jumping narratives and fragmented

information presentation. A 15-second video might contain a dozen different shots, each lasting only a second or two. This editing creates a strong sense of motion and excitement, but also prevents the viewer from staying and thinking about any single scene. The travel experience is deconstructed into a collection of "moments," such as "the most beautiful sunset moment," "the most delicious food moment," and "the most exciting experience moment." This over-emphasis on "moments" reduces the meaning of travel to capturing and sharing the most visually impactful "highlight moments", ignoring the process, feelings, and thoughts of the journey.

5.3. *Exotic Ego Orientalism*

5.3.1. *Thailand Net Red's Use of "Cute" Cultural Symbols*

On TikTok, many local Thai online celebrities intentionally or unintentionally adopt exotic self-orientalism strategies in order to attract global fans. They cater to the expectations of global audiences by performing and reinforcing cultural symbols that are considered "typical Thai." Among them, "cute" culture is a frequently used element. For example, some influencers use exaggerated "wai" gestures in videos, wear colourful traditional clothes, say cute phrases in "Thai English", and match cute expressions and actions. This use of cuteness, while reflecting to some extent a part of Thai society, may lead to a partial and superficial understanding of Thai culture when it is spread globally as a tagged symbol. This kind of performance cultural display aims to gain attention and traffic in the competitive digital space, rather than truly transmitting cultural connotation.

5.3.2. *Cultural Performances Catering to the Global Gaze*

In addition to the "cute" culture, Thai online celebrities will also cater to global gaze in other ways. For example, they will deliberately display the image of Thailand's "smiling country" and always maintain a smile and friendly attitude in the video, even in the face of some cultural misunderstandings or stereotypes. They will also choose to photograph scenes that are considered "exotic", such as floating markets, elephant camps, temples, etc., and present them in a way that meets the imagination of Western tourists. This cultural pandering behavior, although in the short term can bring economic benefits to creators, in the long run, it may solidify or even deepen stereotypes about Thailand. More seriously, this self-orientalism may have a negative impact on

the cultural identity of Thailand's younger generation, making them feel inferior to their own culture and blindly worship Western culture.

6. DISCUSSIONS

6.1. *Algorithm Repetition and Naturalization of "Instant Heaven"*

6.1.1. *How Algorithms Reinforce Specific Narratives through Loops and Labels*

The construction of Thailand as an "Instant Paradise" is not merely a user choice but a product of TikTok's algorithmic curation. The recommendation mechanism functions as a discursive filter, prioritizing videos that exhibit specific aesthetic markers—such as high-saturation palettes and rapid-cut editing—which the system recognizes as high-engagement "patterns." This creates a "Matthew Effect" of visibility: content already validated as "viral" receives exponential exposure, incentivizing constant imitation. For instance, our analysis of hashtags like #PhuketSunset reveals that the algorithm does not just recommend similar locations, but reinforces a specific "visual template." This repetitive exposure performs a "naturalization" of the discourse; after encountering thousands of nearly identical hyper-aestheticized clips, viewers subconsciously accept this curated, idealized version as the singular, authentic reality of Thailand, effectively masking the mediated nature of the platform.

6.1.2. *Solidification and Simplification of Thailand's Destination Image*

This algorithmic reinforcement leads to the semiotic solidification of Thailand's image, stripping away its multidimensionality as a modern, pluralistic nation. TikTok's logic demands "thumb-stopping" content, which results in Thailand being condensed into a limited set of "paradise symbols": sun, sand, food, smiles, and temples. While these elements are highly "spreadable," they create a digital facade that obscures complex socio-environmental realities. Findings suggest that "non-paradise" elements—such as urban congestion, social inequality, or environmental degradation—are systematically marginalized by the algorithm's preference for aesthetic harmony. This fixation not only risks creating "tourist disappointment" through unrealistic expectations but also threatens Thailand's long-term tourism strategy. By over-privatizing the "beach vacation" or "exotic temple" tropes, the platform discourse may hinder the visibility of sustainable ecotourism and authentic cultural narratives that do

not fit the high-speed, "punch point" criteria of TikTok.

6.2. *Asymmetry of Power: Global Northern Audiences vs. Local Creators*

6.2.1. *Who Defines Authenticity?*

There is an obvious power asymmetry in TikTok's Thai tourism discourse. Viewers and influencers in the global north, as primary viewers and content creators, whose perspectives and aesthetics largely define what "real" Thailand is. Through the lens, they "otherize" Thailand and portray it as a "paradise" full of exotic, primitive nature and cheap consumption, thus satisfying their consumption desires and colonial imagination. Local Thai creators, though they have a voice on the platform, often produce content that is constrained by global audience preferences. In order to gain traffic and attention, they have to cater to this global gaze and perform "self-Orientalist" performances. As a result, the definition of Thai authenticity is largely in the hands of audiences in the global North, while Thai natives are in a passive position to cater.

6.2.2. *Local Creators' Struggle between Pandering and Resisting*

Faced with the pressure of the global gaze, Thai local creators struggle between pandering and resisting. On the one hand, they need to gain economic benefits and social recognition by catering to the expectations of a global audience. On the other hand, they also hope to be able to show a more diverse and authentic Thailand, breaking stereotypes. Some creators may adopt a "strategic pandering," where they subtly incorporate deeper and critical content while meeting audience expectations. Others may choose to resist altogether, insisting on telling Thailand's story in their own way, even if that means their content may not get high traffic. This struggle between pandering and resisting reflects the complex power relations between global and local, as well as the efforts of local creators to seek cultural autonomy in the digital age.

6.3. *Impact on Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and Cultural Sustainability*

6.3.1. *Excessive Tourism and Environmental Stress*

The popularity of "instant paradise" narratives may exacerbate Thailand's over-tourism problem. When a large number of tourists are attracted by the idealized image of "heaven" in Short Video, they may

put great pressure on the local environment and infrastructure. For example, some "online celebrity" beaches that have become popular because of Short Video may be littered with garbage and coral reefs destroyed due to the surge in tourists. This algorithm-driven "traffic binge", while bringing economic benefits in the short term, could cause irreversible damage to Thailand's natural environment and ecosystems in the long term.

6.3.2. Cultural Homogenization and Marginalization of Small Businesses

The cultural homogenization promoted by the "instant paradise" narrative also poses a threat to Thailand's cultural sustainability. When visitor spending behavior is algorithmically guided and focused on a few "influencer" attractions and experiences, small businesses and cultural attractions that are more local but lack marketing resources may be marginalized. For example, a traditional restaurant run by a local may be at risk of closing because it cannot compete with the "influencer" restaurants that have become popular on the Internet. This algorithmically driven winner-take-all scenario not only reduces tourism diversity, but can also negatively impact the economic and cultural life of local communities.

6.3.3. Challenges to Thailand's Tourism Industry and Countermeasures

In the face of the challenges posed by social media such as TikTok, Thailand's destination management organizations (DMOs) need to adopt proactive response strategies. First, DMOs need to step up their monitoring and steering of social media content, working with local creators to tell a more diverse, three-dimensional, authentic Thai story. Second, DMOs need to develop policies to address excessive tourism and environmental issues, such as protecting Thailand's natural and cultural heritage by limiting the number of tourists and promoting ecotourism. Finally, DMOs need to support and empower local communities to better utilize social media platforms to showcase and promote their culture and products, thereby maintaining cultural uniqueness and autonomy in the midst of globalization.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Summary of Main Findings

Through critical discourse analysis of Thai tourism Short Video on TikTok, this study reveals

how the "instant paradise" narrative is constructed, disseminated and consumed through multimodal discourse strategies. It is found that the hyperaestheticization of nature, the flattening of time and the exotic ego-orientalism are the three core strategies for constructing this narrative. These strategies, through the reinforcement of algorithmic mechanisms, together shape a highly simplified, idealized and easy-to-consume image of Thailand. This narrative not only perpetuates unequal power relations between the Global North and South, but also poses a serious challenge to Thailand's destination image, cultural authenticity and social sustainability.

7.2. Theoretical Contribution and Practical Enlightenment

The theoretical contribution of this study is that it applies critical discourse analysis (CDA) and visual grammar theory to the emerging algorithm-driven platform of Short Video, providing a new perspective for understanding tourism discourse in the digital age. This study reveals that algorithms are not only tools for content distribution, but also active participants in discourse construction, which deeply influence the image construction of tourism destinations through its visibility logic. At the practical level, the findings of this study provide important implications for tourism destination management organizations (DMOs). DMOs need to recognize the dual role of social media platforms in shaping destination images and adopt proactive strategies to guide and manage user-generated content to promote sustainable tourism.

7.3. Limitations and Future Prospects

This study also has some limitations. First of all, this study mainly uses qualitative analysis methods, and the sample size is limited, which may not fully represent all travel videos about Thailand on TikTok. Secondly, this study focuses mainly on English content, and lacks analysis of other languages (such as Thai and Chinese). Future research can adopt a hybrid approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, to more fully understand the characteristics and effects of TikTok tourism discourse. Future research could also be conducted with more in-depth fieldwork to better understand cultural production and identity in the digital age through interviews and observations with local Thai creators.

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