



MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION OF OVERTOURISM READINESS: INTEGRATING TOURIST DISPERSION AND TOUR OPERATOR PRACTICES FOR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The rapid concentration of tourists in a limited number of Philippine destinations has intensified overtourism-related pressures on infrastructure, the environment, and visitor experience, yet localized, statistically grounded evidence on how tourism intermediaries respond to these pressures remains scarce. This study examined the level of overtourism and the extent of implementation of tourist dispersal strategies among tour operators and travel agencies in the National Capital Region (NCR) and selected provincial areas of the Philippines, and explored the lived experiences that underlie these responses. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed. In the quantitative phase, a researcher-developed, expert-validated questionnaire (overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.909) was administered to 136 purposively sampled tour operators and travel agency representatives. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 key informants selected through criterion-based purposive sampling, and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Overtourism conditions were rated "strongly evident" across tourist concentration ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.55$), environmental and infrastructure pressure ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.57$), and visitor experience and satisfaction ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.54$). Tourist dispersal strategies were "highly implemented," particularly through digital platforms and marketing ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.51$), itinerary diversification ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.53$), and promotion of secondary destinations ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.59$). A Spearman rank-order correlation revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between overtourism conditions and dispersal-strategy implementation ($\rho = 0.713$, $p < .001$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. Thematic analysis of the interviews yielded five themes: operational congestion and service pressure, infrastructure and capacity constraints, emotional and customer-relationship strain, adaptive strategic responses, and a divergent view of overtourism as both an opportunity and a challenge. Triangulation of the two strands showed convergence on the severity and operational nature of overtourism, complementarity in explaining how and why dispersal strategies are adopted, and divergence in stakeholder attitudes toward rising visitor volumes. Building on these integrated findings, the study proposes the Philippine Integrated National Sustainability Tourist Dispersion Framework (PINSTDF), which combines destination diversification, smart tourism management, infrastructure development, collaborative governance, sustainability management, and community participation. The findings position tour operators and travel agencies not as passive intermediaries but as active agents of tourist redistribution, and offer an evidence-based, theoretically grounded framework to guide policymakers and industry stakeholders toward more balanced and resilient tourism development in the Philippines.

Keywords: *overtourism; tourist dispersal strategies; sustainable tourism development; destination management; tour operators; travel agencies; PINSTDF*



INTRODUCTION

Tourism expansion was once regarded almost uniformly as a driver of economic growth, improved transport infrastructure, and cultural exchange. By the 1970s, however, scholars had begun documenting the costs of unmanaged tourism growth, particularly its erosion of heritage sites and natural resources (Goodwin, 2021). That imbalance has since evolved into what is now termed overtourism: a condition in which the volume of tourists exceeds a destination's environmental, social, and infrastructural capacity. International tourist arrivals surpassed 1.3 billion in 2023, concentrated in a comparatively small number of destinations, underscoring that overtourism is less a matter of aggregate visitor numbers than of spatial concentration and management inefficiency (UNWTO, 2024). Cities such as Barcelona, Venice, and Amsterdam illustrate the tangible costs of this concentration — congestion, environmental degradation, and resident dissatisfaction (Gössling et al., 2020; Milano et al., 2020).

Much of the existing literature, however, relies on macro-level indicators — arrivals, density ratios, carrying-capacity estimates — with comparatively little attention to how tourism flows are generated and managed at the operational level (UNWTO, 2024). Structural drivers such as low-cost air travel, cruise tourism, and digital platforms have simultaneously expanded access and reinforced demand for a narrow set of iconic destinations (Peeters et al., 2021; OECD, 2024). In response, countries including Japan, New Zealand, France, and Italy have pursued dispersal-oriented policies that promote regional and alternative itineraries, but these policy-level responses often overlook the role of intermediary stakeholders — particularly tour operators — in actually shaping where tourists go (Gatto & Scorza, 2025; Hao et al., 2025).

In the Philippines, the National Capital Region functions as the country's principal tourism gateway, concentrating transport hubs, accommodations, and travel services (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2024). While the Department of Tourism's National Tourism Development Plan articulates a commitment to sustainable, inclusive, and resilient tourism by developing emerging destinations, a gap persists between this policy intent and its implementation at the level of individual tour operators and travel agencies (Hao et al., 2025; Zuckerman Farkash et al., 2024). The rehabilitation of Boracay remains the clearest domestic illustration of what happens when carrying capacity is exceeded (Department of Tourism [DOT], 2025; PSA, 2024).

Literature Review

Overtourism is increasingly conceptualized as the excessive concentration of tourists that degrades both resident quality of life and visitor experience (Gössling et al., 2020; Milano et al., 2020), driven by structural factors such as low-cost travel, improved accessibility, and platform-amplified demand for iconic sites (Peeters et al., 2021; Bergantino et al., 2025; Simmons, 2025). It is also a measurable phenomenon: researchers have proposed indicators such as tourist density, overnight stays, and visitor-to-resident ratios to quantify tourism pressure (Amore et al., 2020; Moreno et al., 2025). Systematic reviews note that this literature remains heavily concentrated in European urban contexts, leaving developing regions such as the Philippines comparatively under-examined using systematic, data-driven approaches (Alsharif et al., 2025).

The documented impacts of overtourism span environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions: resource depletion, waste generation, and ecosystem degradation (Gössling et al., 2020; Mandić & Marković Vukadin, 2021); gentrification, displacement, and declining community tolerance (Szromek et al., 2019; Sarantakou & Terkenli, 2021); and rising living costs alongside an uneven distribution of tourism benefits (Milano et al., 2020; Majdak et al., 2023). Overtourism is, in turn, fundamentally a governance problem. Destination Management Organizations are positioned to regulate flows and implement sustainable-tourism policy (OECD, 2024; Vysušilová, 2024), yet governance approaches are frequently fragmented, reactive, and shaped by a prevailing "wait-and-see" posture rather than proactive management (Eckert et al., 2019; Najafi & Costa, 2026).



Digital platforms and social media significantly shape destination choice, often reinforcing concentration in already-popular sites, even as the same technologies — big-data analytics, artificial intelligence, and real-time monitoring — are proposed as tools for managing visitor flow (Gretzel et al., 2020; Bisht, 2025; Trunfio & Pasquinelli, 2021). Tourist dispersal has emerged as the principal management response: redistributing visitors from saturated destinations toward secondary or peripheral areas to relieve pressure while extending tourism's economic benefits more broadly (OECD, 2024; Hao et al., 2025; Majdak & De Almeida, 2022). Spatial-planning innovations such as "anti-gravity tourism" (Gatto & Scorza, 2025) and geographic information system-based mobility analysis (Rogowski, 2025) support this redirection, although implementation is constrained by infrastructure gaps and the perceived risk of promoting unproven secondary destinations (Lyu et al., 2025).

Tour operators and travel agencies occupy a pivotal but under-examined position in this system. As intermediaries, they shape tourism flows through itinerary design, marketing, and service packaging, and hold real capacity to promote alternative destinations (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2020; Bhatia, 2025; Zuckerman Farkash et al., 2024). In practice, however, their decisions are also driven by profitability and risk minimization, which favors established destinations with predictable infrastructure and demand over the higher up-front costs of building supply chains in emerging locations (Mihalic, 2024; Think Digital Travel, 2025). Philippine law provides an institutional channel for dispersal: Republic Act No. 9593 (the Tourism Act of 2009) mandates Tourism Enterprise Zones capable of developing into self-sustaining destinations, exemplified by San Vicente, Palawan, as a planned alternative to El Nido.

Research Gap and Theoretical Framework

Despite this expanding literature, three gaps remain salient. First, existing work is largely descriptive of overtourism's impacts rather than oriented toward integrated, actionable frameworks (Alsharif et al., 2025). Second, empirical, statistically grounded evidence specific to the Philippine context is scarce, even as destinations such as Boracay and Cebu exhibit clear signs of overtourism (DOT, 2025; PSA, 2024). Third, the operational role of tour operators and travel agencies — as opposed to policy actors or destinations themselves — as active shapers of tourist distribution remains under-examined, particularly through research that integrates statistical indicators with the lived, experiential realities of these intermediaries (Busalla, 2025).

This study addresses these gaps by anchoring overtourism within a behavioral and stakeholder-oriented framework and examining the lived experiences of tourism intermediaries in the National Capital Region, with the aim of developing a Strategic Dispersal Framework that bridges policy intention and industry-level practice.

Three interrelated theories anchor the study. Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Theory explains that destinations progress through exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and eventual decline or rejuvenation; as destinations reach consolidation and stagnation, congestion, environmental degradation, and declining visitor satisfaction become more pronounced, and adaptive strategies such as tourist dispersal become necessary to support rejuvenation. The Carrying Capacity Framework defines the physical, environmental, socio-cultural, and managerial thresholds beyond which tourism activity generates unacceptable impacts, and is used here to explain how overtourism emerges when these thresholds are exceeded. Psychological Carrying Capacity (PCC) Theory complements both by emphasizing that overcrowding is also a subjective, experiential phenomenon: a destination may remain physically capable of accommodating visitors while nonetheless being perceived as overcrowded, with direct consequences for satisfaction and, as this study's qualitative findings show, for the well-being of the practitioners who manage that experience.

Together, these theories frame overtourism as the intersection of destination maturity (TALC), exceeded physical and managerial thresholds (Carrying Capacity), and perceived crowding (PCC) — a convergence to which tour operators and travel agencies respond, based on their lived experience, by redistributing tourists toward secondary destinations.



Objectives, Research Questions, and Hypothesis

This study aimed to examine overtourism conditions and the lived experiences of tour operators and travel agencies in dispersing tourists from primary to secondary destinations, as a basis for a strategic dispersal framework. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of overtourism in selected primary destinations in terms of (a) tourist concentration; (b) environmental and infrastructure pressure; and (c) visitor experience and satisfaction?
2. What is the level of implementation of tourist dispersal strategies among tour operators and travel agencies in terms of (a) itinerary diversification; (b) promotion of secondary destinations; and (c) use of digital platforms and marketing strategies?
3. Is there a significant relationship between overtourism conditions and the implementation of tourist dispersal strategies?
4. How do tour operators and travel agencies experience overtourism in their operations within the National Capital Region?
5. How do tour operators and travel agencies perceive and respond to challenges associated with overtourism in terms of operational, logistical, and market-related factors?
6. What strategies and practices emerge from the lived experiences of tour operators in dispersing tourists from primary to secondary destinations?
7. Based on the findings, what strategic dispersal framework for managing overtourism in the Philippine tourism context can be proposed?

H₀: There is no significant relationship between overtourism conditions and the implementation of tourist dispersal strategies.



METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative strands to develop a comprehensive account of overtourism management and the lived experiences of tour operators. In the first phase, quantitative data established the level of overtourism and the extent of dispersal-strategy implementation; in the second phase, semi-structured interviews explored the perceptions and adaptive practices underlying those quantitative patterns. This sequencing allowed the qualitative inquiry to be grounded in measurable tourism conditions, and the integration of both phases served as the empirical basis for the strategic framework proposed in Section 4.2.

Research Locale, Participants, and Sampling

The study was conducted among tour operators and travel agencies operating within primary tourism destinations and service areas in the National Capital Region and selected provincial locations across the Philippines. For the quantitative phase, respondents were registered and operational tour operators and travel agencies marketing established ("best-seller") domestic destinations, selected through purposive sampling to ensure direct experience with both primary and secondary destinations. Cochran's formula for finite populations, applied to the list of registered tour operators and travel agencies obtained from the Department of Tourism–NCR at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, yielded a required and achieved sample of 136 respondents.

For the qualitative phase, 10 key informants were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling, requiring a minimum of three years in tourism operations, active involvement in tour packaging or guiding, and direct experience managing overtourism-related challenges. Informants represented a geographic range of operations spanning Marinduque, Cebu City, Ilocos, Quezon Province and Manila, Iloilo City, Malay–Aklan, Puerto Princesa (Palawan), Cagayan de Oro, and Marikina City, with three to twelve years of operating experience. Data saturation, reached when no new themes emerged from successive interviews, guided the adequacy of the sample.

Instruments

Two instruments corresponded to the study's two phases. The quantitative survey questionnaire used Likert-scale items to measure overtourism (tourist concentration; environmental and infrastructure pressure; visitor experience and satisfaction) and dispersal-strategy implementation (itinerary diversification; promotion of secondary destinations; use of digital platforms and marketing strategies). Content validity was established through review by five experts — three tourism-management specialists and two research-methodology specialists — whose feedback on clarity, relevance, adequacy, and objective alignment was incorporated prior to pilot testing.

The questionnaire was subsequently pilot-tested with 30 respondents sharing the target population's characteristics but excluded from the final study. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha coefficients across the six subscales ranged from 0.887 to 0.934 (good to excellent internal consistency), with an overall instrument reliability of $\alpha = 0.909$.

Table 1. Reliability of the Research Instrument (n = 30)

Variable	Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Tourist Concentration	5	0.912	Excellent

Variable	Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Environmental and Infrastructure Pressure	5	0.896	Good
Visitor Experience and Satisfaction	5	0.921	Excellent
Itinerary Diversification	5	0.903	Excellent
Promotion of Secondary Destinations	5	0.887	Good
Digital Platforms and Marketing Strategies	5	0.934	Excellent
Overall Instrument	30	0.909	Excellent

Note. 0.90–1.00 = Excellent; 0.80–0.89 = Good; 0.70–0.79 = Acceptable; 0.60–0.69 = Questionable; 0.50–0.59 = Poor; below 0.50 = Unacceptable.

The qualitative semi-structured interview guide, likewise validated by qualitative research experts, explored three areas: experiences of overtourism in NCR and provincial operations; perceptions of and responses to operational, logistical, and market-related challenges; and emergent dispersal strategies and practices.

Data Gathering Procedure

Following institutional approval, survey questionnaires were administered to respondents after they were briefed on the study's purpose and provided informed consent. In the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted face-to-face or online depending on informant availability, audio-recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim; field notes captured non-verbal cues and contextual detail.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using weighted means to determine the level of overtourism and dispersal-strategy implementation. A Shapiro–Wilk test of normality indicated that neither overtourism conditions ($W = 0.918$, $p = .002$) nor dispersal-strategy implementation ($W = 0.927$, $p = .004$) were normally distributed; accordingly, Spearman's rank-order correlation (ρ) — rather than Pearson's r — was used to test the relationship between the two variables.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure: familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme review, theme definition and naming, and production of the final narrative. Integration of the two strands occurred at the interpretation stage through triangulation, in which quantitative indicators of overtourism and dispersal-strategy implementation were read alongside the qualitative themes to identify convergence, complementarity, and divergence.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Beyond the instrument's psychometric reliability (Section 2.3), the qualitative strand's trustworthiness was addressed through the criteria of Lincoln and Guba (2020): credibility, via member checking and prolonged



engagement; transferability, via detailed description of the research context; and dependability and confirmability, via a documented audit trail and researcher reflexivity (Noble & Smith, 2022; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical research protocols. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants following a briefing on the study's objectives, procedures, and any potential risks. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through redaction of identifying information and the use of alphanumeric codes (e.g., P1–P20) in place of participant names. Participants retained an unconditional right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Research materials — recordings, transcripts, and analytic notes — were stored in encrypted, password-protected files accessible only to the core research team (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

Of the 136 respondents, 38.2% identified as tour operators, 31.6% as travel agencies, and 30.1% operated as both. Years of operation were fairly evenly distributed: 4–6 years (27.9%), 11 years and above (25.7%), 1–3 years (24.3%), and 7–10 years (22.1%). Businesses were concentrated in major Metro Manila commercial hubs — Quezon City (24.3%), Manila (19.9%), Makati (17.6%), Taguig (16.2%), Pasay (14.0%), and other areas (8.1%) — and handled a broad range of monthly tourist volumes, from below 50 (30.1%) to 201 and above (24.3%). Boracay (25.7%), Cebu (20.6%), Japan (19.9%), Palawan (19.1%), and Bohol (14.7%) were the most commonly offered primary destinations, consistent with these sites' established infrastructure and market demand — and, per TALC theory, with their position in the consolidation stage of the destination life cycle.

Level of Overtourism in Selected Primary Destinations

Overtourism conditions were rated "strongly evident" across all three dimensions measured (Table 2).

Table 2. Level of Overtourism in Selected Primary Destinations

Dimension	Highest-rated indicator (M)	M	SD	Interpretation
Tourist Concentration	Popular sites frequently overcrowded (3.74)	3.64	0.55	Strongly Agree
Environmental and Infrastructure Pressure	Roads/transport overloaded by tourist influx (3.72)	3.56	0.57	Strongly Agree
Visitor Experience and Satisfaction	Enjoyment decreases when overcrowded (3.71)	3.65	0.54	Strongly Agree

Note. Scale: 3.50–4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50–3.49 = Agree; 1.50–2.49 = Disagree; 1.00–1.49 = Strongly Disagree.

Respondents most strongly agreed that popular sites frequently experience overcrowding ($M = 3.74$) and that managing large volumes becomes difficult during holidays and weekends ($M = 3.71$). Under environmental and infrastructure pressure, transportation overload ($M = 3.72$) and accommodation reaching full capacity ($M = 3.66$) were the most salient concerns, while utility strain and insufficient infrastructure development, though still rated "Agree" or higher, were comparatively lower ($M = 3.38$ – 3.44). For visitor experience, reduced enjoyment under crowding ($M = 3.71$) and the reputational cost of poor visitor experience ($M = 3.67$) were most pronounced. The consistently low standard deviations (0.48–0.64) indicate that these perceptions were broadly shared across respondents rather than concentrated among a subset.

Level of Implementation of Tourist Dispersal Strategies

Dispersal strategies were, on average, "highly implemented," with digital platforms and marketing the most developed lever (Table 3).

Table 3. Level of Implementation of Tourist Dispersal Strategies

Dimension	Highest-rated indicator (M)	M	SD	Interpretation
Itinerary Diversification	Encourage visits to nearby alternative attractions (3.69)	3.60	0.53	Highly Implemented
Promotion of Secondary Destinations	Actively promote lesser-known destinations (3.66)	3.50	0.59	Highly Implemented
Digital Platforms and Marketing Strategies	Digital platforms improve promotion efficiency (3.76)	3.66	0.51	Highly Implemented

Note. Scale: 3.50–4.00 = Highly Implemented; 2.50–3.49 = Implemented; 1.50–2.49 = Somewhat Implemented; 1.00–1.49 = Not Implemented.

Within promotion of secondary destinations, indicators tied to customer receptiveness ("clients respond positively," $M = 3.44$) and promotional discounting ($M = 3.35$) lagged behind operators' own promotional effort ($M = 3.66$), suggesting that supply-side marketing of alternative destinations currently outpaces demand-side uptake — that is, tourists' preference for established destinations remains a binding constraint even where operators actively promote alternatives. Digital platforms were the strongest lever overall, led by their contribution to promotion efficiency ($M = 3.76$) and social media's role in redirecting tourists ($M = 3.73$).

Relationship Between Overtourism Conditions and Dispersal Strategies

A Shapiro–Wilk test confirmed non-normal distribution for both variables (overtourism: $W = 0.918$, $p = .002$; dispersal strategies: $W = 0.927$, $p = .004$), warranting a non-parametric test. Spearman's rank-order correlation revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between overtourism conditions and dispersal-strategy implementation, $\rho(134) = 0.713$, $p < .001$ (Table 4). The null hypothesis of no significant relationship is therefore rejected.

Table 4. Correlation Between Overtourism Conditions and Tourist Dispersal Strategies

Variables	Spearman ρ	p	Interpretation	Decision on H_0
Overtourism Conditions × Tourist Dispersal Strategies	0.713	< .001	Strong positive, significant	Rejected

This effect size indicates not only statistical but practical significance: as overtourism conditions intensify, tour operators and travel agencies become measurably more proactive in itinerary redesign, secondary-destination promotion, flexible scheduling, and digital marketing. The finding is consistent with the study's theoretical framework — under TALC and Carrying Capacity theory, mounting pressure at mature, saturated destinations is expected to trigger adaptive rejuvenation strategies, of which tourist dispersal is one form.



Lived Experiences of Tour Operators and Travel Agencies

Thematic analysis of the ten key-informant interviews generated four convergent themes and one divergent theme, summarized in Table 5 and elaborated below with illustrative excerpts (participant codes P1–P20 as assigned in the original transcripts; Filipino-language excerpts are presented as transcribed, reflecting participants' own code-switching).

Table 5. Summary of Qualitative Themes

Theme	Core Finding
1. Operational Congestion and Service Pressure	Traffic, overcrowded attractions, and delayed schedules disrupt itinerary implementation and strain personnel, especially during peak periods.
2. Infrastructure and Capacity Constraints	Accommodation shortages, road congestion, and overloaded facilities reflect destinations approaching or exceeding carrying capacity.
3. Emotional and Customer-Relationship Strain	Operators report anxiety, exhaustion, and fear of negative reviews when service quality is compromised by conditions beyond their control.
4. Adaptive Strategic Responses	Operators redesign itineraries, promote off-peak travel, use social media, and collaborate with local communities to redirect tourist flow.
5. (Divergent) Overtourism as Opportunity and Challenge	Some operators view high arrivals positively as a revenue driver, framing overtourism as a management failure rather than an inherent problem.

Theme 1: Operational Congestion and Service Pressure

Participants described worsening difficulty managing tours because of traffic, overcrowded attractions, and delayed schedules, particularly during holidays and long weekends.

Participant 3 shared: “Tanggap naman namin, every Holy Week and long weekends, yung traffic becomes extremely heavy. Even if we leave early, delays are unavoidable. Guests expect everything to proceed smoothly, and when schedules are affected, they become disappointed.”

Participant 7 explained: “We spend more time adjusting schedules than actually implementing tours. Sometimes attractions are so crowded that clients become impatient and frustrated.”

These accounts suggest that overtourism is experienced less as an abstract statistic than as a source of continuous operational uncertainty requiring real-time crisis management — consistent with Dodds and Butler's (2019) observation that congestion measurably degrades service delivery.

Theme 2: Infrastructure and Capacity Constraints

Participant 5 shared: “During peak periods, hotels become fully booked. We often struggle to find alternative accommodations for our clients.”



Participant 18 remarked: “Infrastructure development cannot keep up with tourism growth. Destinations become crowded, and public services become overloaded.”

These narratives directly evidence the Carrying Capacity Framework's central premise: destinations possess finite ecological, physical, and managerial thresholds, and participants' accounts of Boracay, Cebu, Bohol, and Siargao indicate that several primary destinations are operating at or near those limits.

Theme 3: Emotional and Customer-Relationship Strain

Participant 2 explained: “Emotionally exhausting because clients complain even when delays are caused by traffic and overcrowding. We worry because dissatisfied customers may never return.”

Participant 10 stated: “Negative reviews are our biggest concern. One unpleasant experience can affect our reputation.”

This theme extends Psychological Carrying Capacity Theory beyond the tourist's own perception of crowding to the practitioner's experience of managing that perception — a dimension the theory does not explicitly anticipate but which the data make clear is operationally significant.

Theme 4: Adaptive Strategic Responses

Participant 1 shared: “We redesign itineraries and recommend nearby destinations with fewer crowds.”

Participant 13 remarked: “Instead of concentrating tourists in Boracay, we recommend nearby destinations that offer similar experiences.”

These accounts depict tour operators functioning as active managers of tourist mobility rather than passive intermediaries — a pattern consistent with Stakeholder Theory's emphasis on shared, distributed responsibility for destination outcomes.

Divergent Theme: Overtourism as Both Opportunity and Challenge

Participant 17 explained: “More tourists mean more bookings. Despite operational difficulties, peak seasons are good for business.”

Participant 11 stated: “Overtourism becomes a problem only when management fails. High arrivals are still beneficial if destinations are properly managed.”

The inclusion of these contrasting accounts strengthens, rather than undermines, the credibility of the qualitative findings: it demonstrates that stakeholder experience of overtourism is not uniform but shaped by differing operational realities and business priorities.

Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Integration of the two strands at the interpretation stage revealed three patterns. First, convergence: high quantitative ratings of tourist concentration, infrastructure pressure, and declining visitor experience (Section 3.2) were reinforced by Themes 1 and 2, which independently described congestion, overcrowding, and infrastructural strain in the same set of destinations (Boracay, Cebu, Palawan, Bohol, Siargao). Second, complementarity: the high implementation of dispersal strategies observed quantitatively (Section 3.3) was explained qualitatively by Theme 4, which detailed how these strategies are actually practiced — itinerary redesign, off-peak promotion, social media, and community collaboration — and by Theme 3, which suggested that fear of negative reviews



and customer loss is a proximate motivator for adopting them. Third, divergence: whereas the quantitative data reflected primarily negative overtourism conditions, the qualitative divergent theme showed that some operators interpret high arrivals as a market success rather than a management failure — a distinction in interpretation, not in the underlying facts, that has direct implications for how readily any given operator will adopt dispersal strategies voluntarily.

Read together, these findings support all four of the study's theoretical anchors: TALC, in that persistent concentration in a handful of destinations is consistent with those destinations approaching consolidation/stagnation; the Carrying Capacity Framework, in that infrastructure and environmental strain indicate thresholds being approached or exceeded; Psychological Carrying Capacity, in that both tourist satisfaction and practitioner well-being are shaped by perceived — not only physical — crowding; and Stakeholder Theory, in that tour operators and travel agencies function as active governance participants rather than passive service providers.



DISCUSSION

The findings collectively indicate that overtourism in the study's primary destinations has moved beyond an emerging concern to an entrenched operational reality with measurable statistical signatures and a consistent experiential texture across independently interviewed practitioners. Three implications follow.

Overtourism as a Catalyst, Not Only a Cost

The strong positive correlation between overtourism conditions and dispersal-strategy implementation ($\rho = 0.713$) suggests that overtourism, while costly, also functions as a catalyst for managerial innovation: operators do not respond to mounting pressure passively but by measurably intensifying itinerary redesign, secondary-destination promotion, and digital marketing. This reframes tour operators and travel agencies as adaptive agents whose behavior is shaped by, and in turn shapes, destination-level outcomes — a more active role than much of the existing overtourism literature, which centers on destinations and policy rather than intermediary behavior, has generally assigned them (cf. Busalla, 2025; Mihalic, 2024).

The Gap Between Operator Promotion and Tourist Uptake

A more cautionary finding is the gap, within Table 3, between operators' own promotional effort for secondary destinations ($M = 3.66$) and reported client receptiveness to that promotion ($M = 3.44$). This is consistent with the qualitative finding that iconic destinations “continue to dominate preferences” (Participant 6) even where alternatives are actively marketed. It suggests that supply-side dispersal strategies alone are necessary but insufficient: sustained demand-side shifts likely require complementary interventions — pricing incentives, destination-quality parity, and coordinated marketing at the national level — that lie partly outside any individual operator's control, aligning with this study's Policy Implications below.

The Philippine Integrated National Sustainability Tourist Dispersion Framework (PINSTDF)

Building on the convergent, complementary, and divergent patterns identified through triangulation, this study proposes the Philippine Integrated National Sustainability Tourist Dispersion Framework (PINSTDF) as an overtourism readiness model. The framework integrates six components, summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. PINSTDF Components, Strategic Activities, and Responsible Agencies

Component	Strategic Activities	Responsible Agencies	Expected Outcome
Destination Diversification	Promote secondary destinations and thematic tourism circuits	DOT, LGUs, tour operators	Reduced tourist concentration
Smart Tourism Management	Real-time visitor monitoring and digital information systems	DOT, TIEZA	Balanced visitor distribution
Collaborative Governance	Establish tourism councils and stakeholder partnerships	LGUs, private sector	Coordinated tourism management

Component	Strategic Activities	Responsible Agencies	Expected Outcome
Infrastructure Development	Improve transport, accommodation, and tourism facilities	TIEZA, DPWH, LGUs	Enhanced destination capacity
Sustainability Management	Carrying-capacity monitoring and environmental protection	DENR, LGUs	Sustainable destination development
Community Participation	Strengthen local involvement and cultural preservation	Communities, NGOs	Inclusive tourism growth

The framework is intended to operate cyclically rather than linearly: destination-level monitoring (Smart Tourism Management, Sustainability Management) generates the evidence base that informs Destination Diversification and Infrastructure Development priorities, while Collaborative Governance and Community Participation ensure that these interventions are implemented with, rather than for, host communities and the tourism intermediaries who operationalize them daily. Consistent with the recommendation embedded in the original study, formal validation of PINSTDF — for example through a Delphi process involving DOT officials, tourism scholars, tour operators, and LGU representatives — is recommended as a distinct next step and is treated here as an area for future research rather than a completed validation.

Theoretical, Policy, and Industry Implications

Theoretically, the findings extend Butler's TALC by evidencing a mechanism — tourist dispersal initiated by intermediaries, rather than solely by destination managers or policymakers — through which mature destinations may pursue rejuvenation. They reinforce the Carrying Capacity Framework by showing infrastructure and operational strain as observable, practitioner-reported signals of threshold pressure, and extend Psychological Carrying Capacity Theory by documenting that perceived crowding shapes not only tourist satisfaction but practitioner emotional experience. They further support Stakeholder Theory by positioning tour operators and travel agencies as governance actors with genuine influence over destination sustainability outcomes.

For policy, the findings are directly relevant to the Department of Tourism, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), Local Government Units, and Regional Tourism Offices. The Department of Tourism may strengthen integrated marketing of secondary destinations; TIEZA may prioritize infrastructure investment in emerging destinations ahead of further concentration in established ones; LGUs may adopt carrying-capacity monitoring and visitor-management zoning; and Regional Tourism Offices may develop interregional tourism circuits to distribute benefits more equitably.

For industry, tour operators and travel agencies may strengthen competitiveness by expanding off-peak promotion, further diversifying itineraries, and deepening the use of digital platforms — while recognizing, per Section 4.2, that promotional effort alone may not close the gap in tourist demand for alternative destinations without complementary destination-level investment.



Conclusion

This study found that overtourism is strongly evident across the primary Philippine destinations examined, manifesting in tourist concentration, environmental and infrastructure pressure, and declining visitor experience, and that tour operators and travel agencies have responded with a correspondingly high level of dispersal-strategy implementation. The strong, statistically significant positive relationship between the two ($p = 0.713$, $p < .001$) indicates that overtourism functions as a catalyst for adaptive managerial response rather than a condition to which intermediaries remain passive. The qualitative findings enrich this picture by showing that this adaptive response coexists with genuine operational and emotional strain, and that stakeholders do not uniformly regard rising visitor volumes as a problem — some view them as validation of market success, contingent on management quality rather than visitor numbers per se.

Integrating these findings, the study concludes that tourist dispersal strategies are an effective and increasingly institutionalized mechanism for addressing overtourism, and that a comprehensive, collaborative, and sustainability-oriented framework — the proposed PINSTDF — is needed to move beyond fragmented, operator-level responses toward coordinated destination-level management. Tour operators and travel agencies emerge from this study not as passive service providers but as active agents of tourist redistribution, whose lived experience constitutes essential evidence for tourism governance in the Philippines.

Limitations

The study's purposive sampling frame, restricted to tour operators and travel agencies marketing established "best-seller" destinations within the National Capital Region and selected provinces, limits generalizability to intermediaries serving other destination types or regions. The cross-sectional design captures conditions at a single point in time and cannot establish causal direction between overtourism conditions and dispersal-strategy adoption, despite the strength of the observed correlation. Finally, both strands rely on self-reported data from tourism intermediaries rather than independent measures of visitor volume or infrastructure capacity, which may be subject to social-desirability or recall bias.

Recommendations

For Tour Operators and Travel Agencies

Continue strengthening itinerary diversification by incorporating more secondary and emerging destinations; expand digital marketing and online booking platforms to build awareness of alternatives; and implement flexible scheduling and visitor-management systems during peak periods.

For the Department of Tourism and Local Government Units

Intensify promotion and development of secondary destinations to distribute arrivals more evenly; establish destination carrying-capacity guidelines and visitor-management policies; and invest in transportation, accommodation, and public infrastructure to relieve capacity constraints.

For Local Communities and Tourism Stakeholders

Strengthen community-based tourism programs that showcase local culture and heritage to attract visitors to alternative destinations; ensure community participation in destination planning; and foster collaboration among tourism establishments, government agencies, transport and accommodation sectors, and local communities to implement integrated overtourism-management strategies.

***For Future Researchers***

Replicate this study in other Philippine regions to validate and compare the effectiveness of dispersal strategies across contexts; formally validate the PINSTDF through expert consultation (e.g., a Delphi process); and examine additional factors — technology adoption, tourist behavior, destination carrying capacity, and policy implementation — that may further explain variation in dispersal-strategy effectiveness.



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