

Article

Overtourism Communication and Public Visitor Guidance in Kyoto, Japan: A Soft Urban Governance Perspective

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Abstract

Overtourism management increasingly uses public communication to frame how visitors are expected to move, behave, and understand their responsibilities in pressured destination spaces. Yet, in heritage cities, such communication is often examined through isolated signs, etiquette campaigns, visitor advisories, or congestion notices rather than as part of a wider visitor-management communication system. This paper examines Kyoto as a case of overtourism communication in an urban heritage setting. Using document-based content analysis supported by exploratory statistical tests, it maps 64 public-facing communication artifacts published between 2016 and 2025 and codes them by message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus. The findings show that exclusionary messaging does not dominate Kyoto's public-facing overtourism communication within the analyzed corpus. Dispersal and behavioral guidance is the most common orientation, while restriction is targeted and secondary, and invitational place guidance remains comparatively limited. Message orientation is significantly associated with artifact type, with restriction concentrated in signs and posters and invitational place guidance appearing mainly in guides and brochures. Semi-institutional actors account for most artifacts, indicating the central role of destination-management organizations and other visitor-facing tourism bodies in translating management concerns into public guidance. Spatially, guidance-oriented communication appears broadly across the city, while restriction has its clearest place-based concentration in Eastern Kyoto, especially Gion-related areas. A smaller set of messages invites visitors to explore wider Kyoto or less conventional places beyond standard guidebook routes. Drawing on the lens of soft urban governance, the paper argues that public-facing overtourism communication can be understood as one visible layer through which visitor-management expectations are framed, spatially differentiated, and made publicly legible. As a document-based analysis, the study does not measure visitor reception, compliance, or behavioral effects, which remain priorities for future research.



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1. Introduction

Overtourism is commonly understood as a condition in which tourism pressure becomes excessive enough to reduce residents' quality of life, visitors' quality of experience, or both ([World Tourism Organization \[UNWTO\]](https://www.wto.org/), 2018). In urban and heritage destinations, however, the issue is rarely only the total number of tourists. It also concerns how visitor pressure becomes concentrated in particular streets, neighborhoods, transport nodes,

cultural sites, commercial corridors, and times of the day. As a result, overtourism is experienced unevenly across the city, with some spaces and times bearing more pressure than others. This unevenness helps explain why overtourism has increasingly been approached not simply as a problem of crowding, but as a wider governance problem involving mobility, public space, residential life, cultural sensitivity, and the everyday negotiation of acceptable visitor conduct (Koens et al., 2018; Peeters et al., 2018).

Responses to this problem in various destinations have often centered on visible and formal interventions, including visitor caps (Azzahra & Nugrahani, 2022), taxation (Barlow, 2023), zoning and regulation of short-term rentals (Celata & Romano, 2022), policing of visitor behavior (Peeters et al., 2018), infrastructure planning (Fistola & La Rocca, 2017), and destination dispersal (Bouchon & Rauscher, 2019). Such interventions remain central to overtourism management, but they do not exhaust the range of practices through which destinations respond to tourism pressure. One important part of this broader response occurs through public communication. For instance, cities may ask visitors to avoid crowded areas, check congestion information, travel at different times, observe local manners, reduce luggage on public transport, refrain from intrusive photography, or respect residential spaces, as seen in destinations such as Kyoto and Venice (City of Kyoto & Kyoto City Tourism Association, 2026; Città di Venezia, 2024; Kyoto City Tourism Association, 2023, n.d.). Such messages show that overtourism management also takes communicative form, as management concerns are translated into visitor-facing expectations, reminders, warnings, and invitations.

The problem, however, is that these ordinary forms of communication are often read in isolation, rather than as part of the wider communication environment in which they operate. This creates an important interpretive risk, particularly in contexts where debates about foreign visitors, local disruption, resident protection, and cultural respect have become increasingly sensitive, making even a few restrictive signs or warnings easily read as evidence of a destination's broader stance toward tourists. Such messages may therefore be interpreted as hostile, exclusionary, or anti-tourist, even when they are only one element within a wider communication environment that also includes behavioral guidance, congestion information, visitor education, and more invitational forms of place guidance. A system-level analysis is therefore necessary to understand how these different messages fit together, which forms dominate, which actors circulate them, and how they are distributed across urban tourism spaces.

This system-oriented perspective also clarifies why public communication should be treated as more than the transmission of information. Rather than governing tourism only through formal law, infrastructure, policing, or direct enforcement, destinations also communicate expectations through norms, warnings, classifications, spatial cues, and practical instructions (e.g., Yachin et al., 2025). This understanding is supported by governmentality-oriented work, which has shown that conduct can be shaped through indirect techniques that organize how people understand and regulate their own behavior (Foucault, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992). In overtourism contexts, this means that a manners poster, a congestion forecast, a photography warning, or a responsible-travel pledge should not be treated as trivial. Such materials form part of tourism management by seeking to frame expected conduct and spatial awareness, although their presence alone cannot show whether visitors noticed, accepted, or followed them.

Kyoto offers a useful case for examining this problem because its tourism pressure is highly visible, spatially uneven, and closely tied to heritage, residential life, cultural sensitivity, public transport, and visitor conduct. The city has attracted renewed concern as tourism has recovered, with official data showing that visitor numbers in 2024 exceeded both 2023 and pre-pandemic 2019 levels (Kyoto City, 2025). Kyoto's tourism planning

documents also identify crowding, tourist etiquette, and visitor dispersal across time and place as continuing management challenges (Kyoto City, 2026). These conditions make Kyoto a suitable setting for examining whether overtourism communication is mainly exclusionary, mainly guidance-oriented, or more differentiated across message types, formats, source environments, and spatial contexts. They also make Kyoto theoretically relevant beyond its visibility as a well-known overtourism case, because tourism pressure in the city is negotiated across heritage spaces, residential streets, transport systems, cultural districts, and everyday urban routines.

The present study therefore maps Kyoto's overtourism-related public communication as a city-level visitor-management communication system. It analyzes 64 public-facing communication artifacts published between 2016 and 2025 and classifies them by message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus. The study asks three connected questions: first, which message orientations dominate Kyoto's public-facing overtourism communication, and what they reveal about the balance between restriction, dispersal and behavioral guidance, and invitational place guidance; second, how these orientations are distributed across artifact types and source environments; and third, how they vary across Kyoto's tourism regions and broader spatial contexts in ways that can be interpreted through a soft urban governance perspective.

By addressing these questions, the paper contributes to overtourism and destination-management research by showing how different message functions, formats, source environments, and spatial scopes combine to produce a differentiated visitor-management communication system. Empirically, it provides a structured account of Kyoto's overtourism communication within the analyzed corpus. Methodologically, it shows how communication artifacts can be mapped across message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus rather than treated as isolated signs, advisories, webpages, or campaigns. Conceptually, the paper uses soft urban governance as an interpretive lens for examining how public communication frames expected conduct, spatial sensitivity, visitor mobility, and engagement with less conventional places. This contribution lies not in proposing a new theory or demonstrating behavioral effects, but rather in showing how document-based mapping can make the organization of overtourism communication visible while leaving questions of visitor reception, compliance, legitimacy, and behavioral outcomes for future research.

2. Conceptual and Empirical Background

2.1. Public Communication in Visitor-Management Governance

Visitor management has long been shaped by the tension between access and control. Destinations depend on visitors being able to enter, move, consume, learn, and enjoy, yet they also need to protect places from the impacts generated by that access. In protected-area, heritage, and visitor-impact research, this tension has been addressed through carrying capacity, limits of acceptable change, zoning, visitor-flow management, interpretation, and impact-monitoring frameworks (Stankey et al., 1985; Hall & McArthur, 1998; Manning, 2007). For overtourism research, the relevance of this literature is not limited to the management of visitor numbers. It also lies in the way destinations define acceptable use: which behaviors can be tolerated, which should be discouraged, which spaces require special care, and which forms of visitor presence become problematic under pressure.

Communication is one way this acceptable use is made visible to visitors. Unlike gates, fines, policing, ticket limits, or legal prohibitions, it does not usually compel behavior directly. Instead, it works through interpretation, advice, warning, explanation, reminder, and moral expectation. This is why the indirect visitor-management literature treats education, information, low-impact guidance, and interpretation as important tools in the

governance of visitor behavior, alongside more direct controls (Marion & Reid, 2007; Manning, 2007).

The codes-of-conduct literature develops this point further by showing how ethical, environmental, and socio-cultural concerns can be translated into practical expectations for tourists. Mason and Mowforth (1996), for example, show how codes attempt to construct responsible tourist conduct, while Cole (2007) cautions that such codes are only meaningful when they are developed, communicated, implemented, and evaluated in ways that visitors can actually encounter and understand. That caution is important here because the presence of a pledge, poster, or manners guide does not itself demonstrate effective management. Such materials may define desired conduct, but they may also remain symbolic, poorly coordinated, weakly visible, or detached from actual visitor behavior. The issue, therefore, is not whether communication solves overtourism, but what kinds of conduct it publicly marks as desirable, acceptable, risky, or unacceptable.

Heritage interpretation extends this argument by showing that communication does more than transfer information. Tilden's (1957) classic formulation treats interpretation as a process of revealing meaning rather than merely presenting facts, while later work connects interpretation to mindful visitor engagement, conservation awareness, and behavior in heritage and nature-based settings (Moscardo, 1996; Ham, 2007). In urban heritage destinations, this is relevant because even ordinary guidance messages can shape how visitors understand the spaces they enter, not only how they behave within them.

Yet heritage communication also has a political and social dimension that a purely managerial visitor-management framework cannot fully capture. Critical heritage scholarship treats heritage not as a neutral object to be protected, but as a field of memory, value, participation, recognition, and social action (Harrison, 2013; Waterton & Smith, 2010; Byrne, 2008; Avrami et al., 2019). This matters for overtourism communication because messages about photography, private streets, cultural performers, residential manners, or sensitive districts are not only instructions to tourists. They also express judgments about whose practices, spaces, and values require protection in a shared urban heritage environment.

Much of the visitor-management and interpretation literature, however, has been developed around relatively bounded settings such as parks, museums, trails, monuments, or managed attractions. Urban overtourism, by contrast, is less contained. Visitors move through transport systems, temple approaches, commercial streets, private roads, residential alleys, and digital information environments. These movements bring tourism pressure into ordinary spaces of residence, mobility, consumption, and local social life. Ashworth and Page (2011) describe cities as multifunctional tourism spaces rather than single-purpose visitor sites, while Colomb and Novy (2016) and Novy and Colomb (2019) show why urban tourism must be read through wider struggles over public space, urban life, and place use. Work on touristification and urban change further shows that tourism pressure can reshape everyday neighborhoods and intensify conflicts around residence, authenticity, consumption, and access to urban space (Sequera & Nofre, 2020). In heritage cities, these conflicts are also spatial and symbolic: heritage is attached to streets, districts, routes, performances, memories, and everyday practices, rather than only to officially designated monuments or attractions (Graham et al., 2016). That transition from bounded sites to urban settings also changes who communicates with visitors. The communication environment is therefore more fragmented across public, private, and community-based actors. Because these actors differ in authority, local proximity, and responsibility for implementation, the source environment of a message becomes part of its communicative and governance-related significance rather than merely a descriptive detail. This fragmentation is consistent with broader concerns in tourism sustainability communication,

where messages about responsibility and appropriate conduct are shaped by multiple actors, channels, and purposes, and where scholars have noted continuing challenges in connecting sustainability claims with credible and behaviorally meaningful communication (Tölkes, 2018).

The concept of soft urban governance helps specify how public communication can participate in visitor management without being equated with formal regulation or direct enforcement. In this paper, soft urban governance refers to the use of non-coercive or weakly coercive public communication to frame expected visitor conduct, indicate sensitive spaces, encourage self-regulation, and make destination-management concerns publicly legible. It is soft because it works mainly through guidance, norms, warnings, spatial cues, and self-regulation rather than through direct enforcement alone. It is urban because these messages operate across shared city spaces where tourism intersects with residence, mobility, commerce, heritage, and public life. This framing does not treat communication as a substitute for formal regulation, infrastructure, or enforcement. Rather, it identifies public communication as one visible layer through which destinations translate management concerns into everyday expectations for visitors.

Governmentality-oriented work shows that conduct can be shaped through norms, classifications, expectations, and self-regulation rather than through command alone (Foucault, 1991; Dean, 2010). In tourism, this logic appears when visitors are addressed as responsible, considerate, respectful, congestion-aware, or culturally sensitive, although such communication should not be equated with behavioral change. Research on sustainable tourist behavior has repeatedly shown that awareness and intention do not necessarily become action (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014), while social-norm research shows that behavioral messages depend on how they are framed, specified, and made meaningful to the audience (Cialdini, 2003). For this reason, the present study treats public communication neither as a minor supplement to management nor as a sufficient solution to overtourism. It approaches communication as a set of visitor-management messages whose organization and meanings still require closer empirical attention. Existing research explains how communication can educate, warn, interpret, persuade, and encourage self-regulation. What remains underexamined, however, is a system-level account of how such messages are organized across message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus within a pressured urban heritage destination. That gap leads directly to the question of function: public communication cannot be treated as one general category of visitor information when different messages, actors, formats, and locations frame visitor conduct in different ways.

2.2. Message Orientations, Formats, and Communicative Functions

The first step in examining overtourism communication as a system is to ask what different messages ask visitors to do and what kinds of visitor-management expectations they make visible. A message addressed to tourists may sound polite while still encouraging self-regulation, yet another may be restrictive without amounting to a general rejection of visitors. What matters analytically, therefore, is the function a message performs. Does it prohibit, warn, guide, explain, redirect movement, normalize manners, or invite visitors to use the destination differently? These differences can be obscured when diverse messages are grouped under broad labels such as “responsible tourism” or “visitor guidance,” even though they do not frame visitor conduct, mobility, or spatial sensitivity in the same way (Peeters et al., 2018).

Restriction is where this ambiguity becomes most visible. Prohibitions, warnings, sanctions, access-control notices, and photography bans tend to attract attention because they resemble conflict. They also sit close to the harder edge of overtourism management,

where destinations respond through regulation, policing, or direct control of visitor behavior, as discussed in [Peeters et al.'s \(2018\)](#) review of overtourism policy responses. Yet restrictive communication should not be treated as one uniform type. [Milano et al. \(2019\)](#) show that overtourism can generate oppositional politics and anti-tourist sentiment, but not every restrictive message carries that same oppositional meaning. A slogan telling tourists to leave does not perform the same function as a notice asking visitors to stay out of a private road, avoid following cultural performers, refrain from photographing residents, or keep a narrow street clear. The latter messages may still restrict, but they do so by drawing boundaries around specific conduct in specific places. In urban contexts, where tourism pressure is often entangled with housing, public space, resident rights, and everyday urban life, this distinction is crucial ([Colomb & Novy, 2016](#); [Sequera & Nofre, 2020](#)). In heritage settings, it is also important because boundary-setting may be tied to the protection of cultural practice, resident privacy, and place-based values rather than to tourist rejection as such. Restriction may express exclusion, but it may also protect residents, cultural practices, or fragile urban spaces from behaviors that have become disruptive.

A second set of messages works through adjustment rather than prohibition. Dispersal and behavioral guidance ask visitors to move differently, travel at different times, check congestion, reduce luggage, follow local manners, or behave more carefully in shared spaces. [World Tourism Organization \[UNWTO\] \(2019\)](#) treats dispersal as one possible response to urban tourism congestion, while [Bouchon and Rauscher \(2019\)](#) caution that dispersal does not automatically solve overtourism because it can also spread pressure into new areas. This makes dispersal analytically ambivalent. A congestion map or alternative-route message may appear neutral, but it still frames some movements, times, or routes as preferable to others. Behavioral guidance works through a related but distinct logic. It does not necessarily send visitors elsewhere, but asks them to queue, take photographs, speak, carry luggage, use transport, or relate to residents differently within the same space. In this sense, communication as information provision and communication as behavioral guidance should be distinguished. A congestion webpage may provide practical information, but when that information asks visitors to change when, where, or how they move, it also becomes a form of behavioral guidance. Alongside restriction and dispersal and behavioral guidance, this paper uses the term *invitational place guidance* for messages that encourage visitors toward alternative places, routes, times, practices, or ways of engaging with the destination. The term is descriptive rather than evaluative and does not place these messages above restriction or behavioral guidance. Rather, it identifies a different communicative function: not “do not do this,” and not only “behave properly here,” but “consider experiencing the destination in this other way.”

The function of a message also depends on the form through which it reaches visitors. A warning on a street sign is encountered at or near the point of behavior, and its force partly comes from that immediacy. A webpage can prepare visitors before arrival or while they are planning movement through the city. A brochure or guide has more space to explain routes, areas, and alternative experiences, while policy texts carry formal authority even if they are not always the most accessible format for visitors. Interpretation research is useful here because it shows more broadly that communication is not simply content detached from setting, meaning, or audience engagement. [Tilden \(1957\)](#) treats interpretation as meaning-making rather than factual transfer, [Moscardo \(1996\)](#) links it to mindful visitor engagement, and [Ham \(2007\)](#) connects interpretation to how audiences think, feel, and possibly act. Artifact type therefore affects not only what is communicated, but when, where, and with what degree of immediacy visitors are likely to encounter it. For this reason, the present study treats artifact type as analytically important, while recognizing that classifying a sign, webpage, brochure, or policy document according to its communicative

role in the corpus does not establish its actual visibility, uptake, or behavioral effect. These questions would require separate visitor-centered evidence.

The actor behind the message further shapes its meaning. A municipal notice, a destination-management webpage, a tourism association campaign, a transport advisory, and a locally co-authored message do not speak from the same position. [Ashworth and Page \(2011\)](#) describe cities as complex tourism spaces in which visitors and residents share infrastructure and symbolic environments. In such contexts, source environment helps show whether communication is framed mainly as official regulation, destination management, operational advice, community protection, or shared place stewardship. Its significance lies in the different public meanings that a message asking tourists to avoid a street, respect residents, or use another route may carry depending on whether it is voiced by a city authority, a tourism organization, a transport operator, or a local community actor. The source environment therefore helps distinguish communication that simply provides visitor information from communication that translates management, heritage, or residential concerns into publicly visible expectations.

Spatial focus completes the analytical frame. A citywide code of conduct, a transport advisory, a neighborhood warning, and a regional guide do not place the problem of tourism pressure in the same way. The first treats the issue as general visitor behavior, the second as mobility management, the third as a local boundary around sensitive conduct, and the fourth as a wider geography of possible visitation.

Seen separately, these dimensions reveal only partial features of overtourism communication. Seen together, message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus make it possible to examine public messages as a differentiated visitor-management communication system rather than as isolated signs of welcome, warning, or rejection. The soft urban governance perspective becomes analytically useful when messages frame behavioral expectations, spatial boundaries, mobility choices, or alternative place engagements in ways that make overtourism management publicly legible. This framing positions the later analysis at the intersection of visitor management, communication, and urban-heritage scholarship. Rather than treating message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus as separate descriptive categories, the framework uses them as connected dimensions for examining how overtourism-related expectations are publicly articulated through communication.

2.3. *Kyoto as an Empirical Case of Overtourism Communication*

Kyoto provides a useful case for examining overtourism communication because the city combines high tourism visibility, heritage sensitivity, residential concern, and spatially concentrated visitor pressure. As a former imperial capital with a dense concentration of temples, shrines, historic districts, and World Heritage components, Kyoto occupies a central place in Japan's tourism image. Yet the pressures associated with this visibility are not distributed evenly across the city. They are felt more strongly in highly visited areas, transport corridors, heritage approaches, and cultural districts where tourism intersects with everyday urban life. Official data show that Kyoto recorded 56.06 million visitors in 2024, exceeding both the 50.28 million recorded in 2023 and the 53.52 million recorded in 2019 ([Kyoto City, 2025](#)). Kyoto's Tourism and MICE Promotion Plan 2030 also identifies crowding, tourist etiquette, and the dispersal of visitors across time and location as continuing management challenges ([Kyoto City, 2026](#)). These conditions make Kyoto a relevant case not only because it is heavily visited, but because visitor pressure has become a concrete urban management issue, with concerns about mobility, manners, residential life, and heritage sensitivity repeatedly translated into public-facing guidance.

These figures, however, do not fully explain Kyoto's relevance as a case. Research on the city has linked tourism pressure to wider processes of urban change, including tourism gentrification and population decline in areas affected by concentrated accommodation development (Kato & Takizawa, 2022). Burtis and Wise (2024) also connect overtourism in Kyoto to overcrowding, public-transport strain, waste accumulation, and resident quality-of-life concerns. More broadly, research on heritage-town management also shows that stakeholder perceptions are important for understanding how tourism pressure, destination competitiveness, and management priorities are negotiated in heritage settings (Nag & Mishra, 2023). Taken together, these studies move the case beyond a simple story of "too many tourists." They show that tourism pressure is tied to questions of livability, neighborhood change, mobility, and the everyday use of urban space. In this sense, Kyoto is not only a destination where overtourism is visible; it is a city where tourism pressure has to be negotiated across shared spaces that are simultaneously residential, cultural, commercial, and infrastructural. This makes Kyoto theoretically useful for the present study because the problem is not only whether tourism pressure exists, but how that pressure is publicly named, spatially located, and communicated to visitors.

Visitor conduct is central to this negotiation. In areas such as Gion and Southern Gionmachi, the problem is not only crowding, but also how tourists behave in culturally and socially sensitive spaces. Official guidance stresses that Southern Gionmachi is not a theme park but a place where people live their daily lives. Visitors are asked not to stop, touch, or follow geiko and maiko, and not to take unauthorized photographs or videos of them; the guidance also warns that nuisance behavior reported by residents may lead to police intervention (Kyoto Travel, n.d.-b). More recent Kyoto Travel guidance similarly asks tourists to respect Gion's culture, avoid trespassing, and behave appropriately in sensitive heritage spaces (Kyoto Travel, 2026). These examples show why communication in Kyoto cannot be reduced to general information for tourists: it marks boundaries around conduct that becomes problematic as sightseeing extends into residential streets, private lanes, and living cultural environments. Their evidentiary value for this study lies in showing how expected conduct is defined, rather than in whether visitors understood, accepted, or followed the guidance.

Kyoto's communication environment, however, is not limited to restriction. The Kyoto Traveler's Promise encourages visitors to avoid congestion, check real-time and forecast crowding information, travel with less luggage, and respect local life (Kyoto City Tourism Association, n.d.). Related responsible-travel guidance links etiquette, mobility management, and neighborhood respect by asking visitors to travel safely and considerately in Kyoto (Kyoto Travel, n.d.-c). These initiatives show a broader communication environment in which visitor conduct is framed through guidance, manners, congestion information, and appeals to responsibility. Kyoto's official tourism platforms also present the city through tourism regions and wider-area guidance, making it possible to examine how communication is organized across different spatial contexts rather than only around individual hotspots (Kyoto Travel, n.d.-a). Together, these features make Kyoto a focused setting for examining how an urban heritage destination publicly organizes overtourism-related messages across formats, source environments, spatial contexts, and the three message orientations of restriction, dispersal and behavioral guidance, and invitational place guidance. The following section explains how these public-facing materials were identified, coded, and analyzed.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design and Unit of Analysis

This study uses a document-based content analysis to examine how public-facing overtourism communication is organized within Kyoto's visitor-management communication system. This design is appropriate because the evidence consists of publicly accessible materials through which destination actors frame visitor conduct, crowding, spatial use, local norms, and appropriate tourism behavior. Rather than treating these materials as neutral background information, the analysis approaches them as documents through which institutional and social meanings are made visible (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003). Structured content analysis is then used to classify the artifacts by message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus, making it possible to examine the organization of the communication system without treating the documents as evidence of visitor reception, compliance, or behavioral effects (Neuendorf, 2017).

The unit of analysis was the individual communication artifact, defined as a distinct publicly accessible item containing a bounded visitor-facing message about tourism presence, visitor conduct, crowding, destination use, spatial behavior, or destination meaning. The corpus included signs, posters, official webpages, downloadable codes of conduct, guides, brochures, press releases, policy-related materials, and visitor-facing advisories. This artifact-level approach made it possible to compare how different formats and source environments carry visitor-management communication functions within the same urban destination.

3.2. Corpus and Retrieval Strategy

The corpus was constructed from materials first published between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2025. This period was selected to capture the late pre-pandemic overtourism debate, the disruption caused by COVID-19, and the rebound period in which concerns about tourism pressure and visitor behavior re-emerged in Kyoto. It therefore defines the analytical corpus window without implying that Kyoto's overtourism communication began or ended within these dates. Materials published in 2026 were not included in the 64-artifact corpus, but were only used as contextual post-corpus examples where needed to explain the current policy setting. Purposive retrieval was used because the study aimed to map public-facing overtourism communication, not to estimate the total population of tourism-related materials produced in Kyoto. The final corpus comprised 64 Kyoto artifacts.

Materials were included when they were publicly accessible, directly connected to Kyoto, and contained an explicit or strongly implied stance on tourism presence, visitor conduct, spatial use, crowding, tourism pressure, or destination meaning. They were excluded when they were purely commercial advertisements, duplicates or near-duplicates, or journalistic reports that discussed a message without reproducing it in a codable form. Where a source contained several visitor-facing messages, segmentation was applied only when each component functioned as a distinct communication unit. This rule avoided both under-counting distinct visitor-facing messages and artificially inflating the corpus by splitting materials that functioned as a single communication artifact.

Retrieval was organized through a Kyoto-specific channel map covering official city and destination-management channels, conduct-oriented campaign microsites, prefecture-wide and regional tourism platforms, downloadable repositories, and co-authored guidance pages; the channel map is provided in Supplement S2. Materials were identified through channel screening, keyword searches, structured external searches, and snowball retrieval from hyperlinks, QR codes, or explicit references. Search terms included English and Japanese terms related to overtourism, crowding, congestion, etiquette, rules, prohib-

ited behavior, private roads, photography restrictions, and dispersal. The full retrieval and archiving strategy, including search terms and auditability fields, is provided in Supplement S5. Japanese-language materials were read in the original where possible, with translation support used for verification, and date uncertainty was recorded in the corpus log when exact publication dates were unavailable. To support transparency and auditability, each artifact was saved in a stable format, assigned a unique identification number, and recorded in a corpus log (Supplement S1), following principles of transparent document retrieval (Dalglish et al., 2020). The main text summarizes the retrieval procedure, while Supplements S1, S2, and S5 provide the audit trail for the corpus log, channel map, search strategy, retrieval paths, and archiving decisions.

3.3. Coding Framework for the Kyoto Communication System

After retrieval and documentation, each artifact was coded across four analytical dimensions: message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus. These dimensions were selected because the study examines overtourism communication as a differentiated visitor-management communication system. Coding therefore aimed not only to identify what a message was about, but also to examine how it was carried, who circulated it, and where it located the problem of tourism pressure. The full coding manual, including definitions, decision rules, and procedures for ambiguous cases, is provided in Supplement S4.

Message orientation captured the dominant communicative function of the artifact rather than its assumed effect on visitors. Three orientations were used. Restriction covered messages dominated by prohibition, warning, sanction, exclusion, access control, or boundary-setting. Dispersal and behavioral guidance covered messages that organized visitor movement or behavior through etiquette, routing, congestion information, time-shifting, luggage guidance, manners, or practical advice. Invitational place guidance covered messages that encouraged visitors toward alternative places, routes, times, practices, or ways of engaging with Kyoto. In this study, invitational place guidance is used only as a message-orientation category within the Kyoto communication system, not as a broader theory or measurement framework.

Artifact type identified the format through which the message was communicated, including signs and posters, webpages, guides and brochures, policies and regulations, and press releases. Source environment identified the institutional or social position from which the artifact was issued or circulated. This distinction made it possible to separate government and official public channels from destination-management organizations, tourism associations, public-facing tourism platforms, and collaborative materials involving local or community-based actors. Sources were therefore coded as institutional, semi-institutional, or co-authored.

Spatial focus identified the main spatial scope emphasized by each artifact. Where possible, coding used Kyoto's tourism-region structure: Central Kyoto, Eastern Kyoto, Northern Kyoto, Southern Kyoto, and Western Kyoto (Kyoto Travel, n.d.-a). However, not all artifacts were tied to a single tourism region. Some addressed Kyoto generally through citywide visitor conduct, transport, congestion, luggage, seasonal crowding, responsible travel, or broader tourism-management guidance. Others referred to selected places or routes across more than one Kyoto tourism region, or invited visitors toward wider Kyoto and alternative areas beyond standard guidebook routes. Spatial scope was therefore coded according to the main spatial focus of the artifact rather than the simple presence of place names. Specific places mentioned only as examples within a broader Kyoto-wide message did not change the coding. The final spatial-scope categories were

Citywide Kyoto, Central Kyoto, Eastern Kyoto, Northern Kyoto, Southern Kyoto, Western Kyoto, Multi-region Kyoto, and Wider Kyoto and alternative areas.

3.4. Coding Procedure and Intercode Reliability

Coding followed a rule-based procedure that combined close reading, conservative interpretation, and dominant-message classification. Each artifact was first reviewed as a whole to identify its main visitor-facing purpose. The four coding dimensions were then applied in sequence, with message orientation coded according to the communicative function that most clearly organized the artifact rather than the presence of isolated phrases or secondary elements.

Ambiguous cases were handled conservatively. If an artifact contained both restrictive and guidance-oriented elements, the code reflected the dominant message rather than every possible element within the text. If a message gave general behavioral advice without a clear invitational element, it was coded as dispersal and behavioral guidance rather than invitational place guidance. Coding notes documented difficult decisions, date uncertainty, translation issues, and cases where spatial focus was broad or mixed. For spatial focus, ambiguous cases were resolved by identifying the main spatial frame of the artifact. Place names were not counted mechanically; they were treated as examples when they appeared within a broader Kyoto-wide message, but they defined the spatial code when selected places or routes formed the organizing structure of the artifact.

To assess coding consistency, a second coder independently applied the coding manual (Supplement S4) to a stratified subset of the corpus. The subset included 16 artifacts, representing 25.0% of the 64-artifact corpus, and covered all three message orientations, as well as multiple artifact types and source environments. The subset used for the message-orientation reliability check is listed in Supplement S3 and can be cross-checked against the corpus log in Supplement S1. Because message orientation was the main interpretive category used in the comparative analysis, intercode reliability was calculated using R software version 4.5.3 for this dimension. Agreement was 87.5%, with a Krippendorff's alpha of 0.804, indicating acceptable intercode reliability for interpretive content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Separate reliability coefficients were not calculated for artifact type and source environment because these dimensions were more directly observable from artifact format, source domain, and issuing body, and were checked against the corpus-log metadata. Spatial focus required greater interpretive judgment in citywide, multi-region, and mixed-location cases; these decisions were therefore documented through spatial coding notes in the corpus log and guided by the coding manual rather than subjected to a separate reliability test. The R script used to calculate reliability is provided in Supplement S6. Disagreements in the message-orientation reliability subset were reviewed and used to refine the coding rules before the dataset was finalized.

3.5. Descriptive and Comparative Analysis

After coding was finalized, the analysis proceeded descriptively and comparatively. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial-focus categories. A cross-tabulation was then produced to examine the relationship between message orientation and artifact type, and this association was tested using Pearson's chi-square test. Because some cells in the contingency table were small, the result was interpreted cautiously and checked with a Monte Carlo exact test. Effect size was assessed using Cramér's V. Since the corpus was purposively constructed, the chi-square test was interpreted as an exploratory test of association within the corpus, not as a basis for population-level generalization about all Kyoto tourism communication. The statistical analysis therefore supports within-corpus pattern recognition rather than causal

inference, representativeness, or claims about communication effectiveness. These statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 29, and the supporting SPSS output is provided in Supplement S7.

To extend the analysis spatially, a supplementary descriptive cross-tabulation examined how message orientations were distributed across the final spatial-scope categories. This spatial table was interpreted descriptively rather than inferentially because several spatial categories contained small counts and because some artifacts were citywide, multi-region, or oriented toward wider Kyoto and alternative areas rather than tied to a single tourism region. Accordingly, the analysis was used to describe how different message orientations were distributed across Kyoto's communication environment rather than to test a spatial hypothesis statistically.

4. Results

4.1. Overall Composition of Kyoto's Overtourism Communication

The corpus shows a clear pattern in the distribution of message orientations. As shown in Table 1, dispersal and behavioral guidance is the most frequent message orientation, accounting for 42 of the 64 artifacts, or 65.6% of the corpus. Restriction accounts for 14 artifacts, or 21.9%, while invitational place guidance accounts for 8 artifacts, or 12.5%.

Table 1. Distribution of Kyoto public communication artifacts by message category (N = 64).

Message Orientation	<i>n</i>	%
Dispersal and behavioral guidance	42	65.6
Restriction	14	21.9
Invitational place guidance	8	12.5
Total	64	100.0

To make the categories more concrete, typical restrictive artifacts included Gion-related manner messages asking visitors not to follow, touch, obstruct, or photograph geiko and maiko without permission, as well as poster-style notices concerning private roads, photography restrictions, street smoking, waste, and heritage-site damage. Typical dispersal and behavioral guidance artifacts included congestion-related guidance, luggage and transport advice, responsible-travel cards, cycling guidance, and the Kyoto Traveler's Promise. Invitational place guidance appeared in a smaller set of materials, including quiz-style leaflets and wider-area guidance that invited visitors to consider less conventional places, alternative visiting times, or more culturally meaningful ways of engaging with Kyoto.

The distribution presented in Table 1 indicates that guidance-oriented communication forms the largest part of the corpus. Restriction constitutes a substantial but clearly secondary layer, while invitational place guidance is present but limited. Overall, the sampled communication environment is not primarily exclusionary. Rather, within the corpus, the most common artifacts are those that present guidance on movement, conduct, congestion, manners, transport use, or responsible travel.

4.2. Artifact Types and Source Environments

Kyoto's overtourism-related communication is distributed across several artifact forms rather than concentrated in a single medium. As shown in Table 2, the most common artifact type is signs and posters, with 25 items, or 39.1% of the corpus. This is followed by webpages, with 17 items, or 26.6%, and guides and brochures, with 15 items, or 23.4%. Policies and regulations account for 4 artifacts, or 6.3%, while press releases account for 3 artifacts, or 4.7%.

Table 2. Distribution of Kyoto public communication artifacts by artifact type (N = 64).

Artifact Type	<i>n</i>	%
Signs and posters	25	39.1
Webpages	17	26.6
Guides and brochures	15	23.4
Policies and regulations	4	6.3
Press releases	3	4.7
Total	64	100.0

This distribution shows that the corpus combines physically visible formats with more explanatory or planning-oriented formats. Signs and posters make up the largest artifact group, while webpages, guides, and brochures together account for a substantial share of the communication environment. Webpages are particularly notable because many visitor-facing messages in the corpus are not confined to streets, stations, or printed materials, but are presented through online guidance, responsible-travel pages, congestion information, and campaign sites.

The distribution across source environment is similarly uneven. As presented in Table 3, semi-institutional sources account for the largest share of the corpus, with 46 artifacts, or 71.9%. Institutional sources account for 15 artifacts, or 23.4%, while co-authored sources account for only 3 artifacts, or 4.7%.

Table 3. Distribution of Kyoto public communication artifacts by source environment (N = 64).

Source Environment	<i>n</i>	%
Semi-institutional	46	71.9
Institutional	15	23.4
Co-authored	3	4.7
Total	64	100.0

Taken together, Tables 2 and 3 indicate that the sampled artifacts are concentrated in signs, posters, webpages, guides, and brochures and are issued mainly by semi-institutional actors. This descriptive pattern places destination-management organizations, official tourism associations, and related visitor-facing bodies at the center of the corpus, while formal public authorities and co-authored materials appear less frequently.

4.3. Message Orientation by Artifact Type

A more detailed pattern emerges when message orientation is examined in relation to artifact type. Table 4 cross-tabulates the two dimensions and shows that communicative functions are not distributed evenly across formats.

Signs and posters show the strongest presence of restrictive communication, with 11 of 25 items coded as restriction. This indicates that, within the corpus, restriction appears most often in formats encountered as direct notices, posters, or visual warnings. By contrast, guides and brochures are the main format in which invitational place guidance appears, accounting for 6 of the 15 items in this artifact type. No guides or brochures were coded as restriction, indicating that, within the corpus, these formats were used for guidance, explanation, alternative-place presentation, or responsible-travel messaging rather than for direct prohibition.

Webpages, policies and regulations, and press releases are dominated by dispersal and behavioral guidance. These forms were coded mainly as materials that communicate practical guidance on movement, timing, manners, congestion, public-space use, or responsible visitor conduct.

Table 4. Message orientation by artifact type (counts).

Message Orientation	Signs and Posters	Webpages	Guides and Brochures	Policies and Regulations	Press Releases	Total
Dispersal and behavioral guidance	12	14	9	4	3	42
Restriction	11	3	0	0	0	14
Invitational place guidance	2	0	6	0	0	8
Total	25	17	15	4	3	64

Note: The chi-square test and Cramér's V are reported to describe the strength of the association within the purposively constructed corpus. They are not intended as population-level estimates of all tourism-related communication in Kyoto.

A Pearson chi-square test was conducted to assess the association between message orientation and artifact type. The test was statistically significant, $\chi^2(8) = 26.27$, $p = 0.001$, with Cramér's $V = 0.45$, indicating a moderate within-corpus association. Because the contingency table was sparse and because the corpus was purposively constructed, this result is interpreted as exploratory rather than as a population-level inference about all Kyoto tourism communication. The Monte Carlo exact test also supported the association, $p = 0.002$. Overall, the results show that message orientation varies systematically by artifact type within the corpus.

4.4. Message Orientation by Spatial Scope

Spatial coding extends the analysis by showing where different message orientations are emphasized within the sampled materials. Because several artifacts were not tied to one tourism region, the analysis used the final spatial-scope categories to accommodate citywide, multi-region, and broader-area messages rather than assigning every artifact to a single neighborhood or tourism-region. Some artifacts addressed Kyoto as a whole, especially through guidance on visitor conduct, congestion, transport, luggage, route choice, seasonal crowding, and responsible travel. Others focused on specific districts, selected routes across more than one part of Kyoto, or wider and less conventional places beyond standard guidebook routes. As shown in Table 5, the message orientations are distributed unevenly across these spatial scopes.

Table 5 shows that dispersal and behavioral guidance is the most widely distributed orientation, but the spatial coding clarifies what this breadth means. Most guidance-oriented messages are not tied to one district or to a selected route across several areas. They address Kyoto more generally, especially through practical messages about visitor conduct, transport behavior, luggage, congestion, route choice, seasonal crowding, responsible travel, and broader tourism management. This citywide concentration indicates that the broadest layer of guidance in the corpus is organized around general conduct and mobility expectations rather than around single-neighborhood messaging.

Restriction shows a more concentrated spatial pattern. The clearest place-based concentration appears in Eastern Kyoto, where restriction accounts for 6 of the 11 artifacts. These artifacts are especially associated with Gion-related areas, including Southern Gion-machi, Gion Shinbashi, Hanamikoji, and Kosode-Koji. Eastern Kyoto, particularly its Gion-related areas, therefore represents the principal spatial concentration of restrictive messages in the corpus.

Invitational place guidance follows a different spatial pattern. It is not concentrated in neighborhood-level boundary-setting. Instead, it appears mainly in citywide materials and in a smaller set of artifacts oriented toward wider Kyoto or less conventional places beyond standard guidebook routes. Invitations toward alternative areas are therefore present in

the corpus, but remain modest compared with the stronger citywide layer of behavioral and mobility guidance.

Table 5. Message orientation by spatial scope (counts).

Spatial Scope	Dispersal and Behavioral Guidance	Restriction	Invitational Place Guidance	Total	Dominant Pattern
Citywide Kyoto	26	8	6	40	Dispersal and behavioral guidance-heavy but mixed
Central Kyoto	3	0	0	3	Dispersal and behavioral guidance-only
Eastern Kyoto	5	6	0	11	Restriction slightly dominant
Northern Kyoto	0	0	0	0	No single-region emphasis
Southern Kyoto	2	0	0	2	Dispersal and behavioral guidance-only
Western Kyoto	0	0	0	0	No single-region emphasis
Multi-region Kyoto	5	0	0	5	Dispersal and behavioral guidance-only
Wider Kyoto and alternative areas	1	0	2	3	Mixed, with invitational guidance present
Total	42	14	8	64	

Note: Northern Kyoto and Western Kyoto are retained because they are part of Kyoto's official tourism-region structure, although no artifact in the corpus was coded as having a single-region focus on either area. Because the corpus was purposively constructed and includes citywide, multi-region, and wider-area artifacts, the spatial counts should be read descriptively rather than as representative regional distributions.

5. Discussion

5.1. Guidance-Heavy Communication and the Framing of Visitor Conduct

The main implication of the message-orientation pattern lies not simply in the numerical dominance of dispersal and behavioral guidance, but in what this dominance suggests about how overtourism pressure is publicly translated in Kyoto. Within the analyzed corpus, tourism pressure is most often framed as a problem of adjustment: visitors are asked to move at different times, avoid congestion, reduce friction in transport spaces, handle luggage more considerately, and observe local manners. This framing shows how the artifacts translate visitor-management concerns into public-facing expectations. The artifacts therefore provide evidence of how expected conduct is articulated across the communication environment rather than of how visitors receive or respond to these expectations.

This guidance-heavy pattern complicates a simple reading of Kyoto's overtourism communication as broadly exclusionary. Restrictive messages are part of the corpus and become especially important in the spatial analysis, but the larger communicative register is one of behavioral calibration rather than generalized rejection. In this respect, Kyoto's communication aligns with overtourism-management approaches that emphasize dispersal, congestion management, visitor education, and behavioral guidance as complements to regulation or access control (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2019; Peeters et al., 2018). The Kyoto case also shows why dispersal and behavioral guidance should not be treated as neutral information alone. A congestion forecast, manners reminder, luggage advisory, or responsible-travel pledge may appear practical, yet each frames certain movements, times, and forms of conduct as more appropriate than others.

Read through the soft urban governance lens, these artifacts can be interpreted as efforts to frame expected visitor self-regulation through norms, practical instructions, spatial cues, and appeals to responsibility. This interpretation connects the findings to governmentality-oriented understandings of indirect conduct management (Foucault, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992; Dean, 2010). At the same time, behavioral tourism and communication-effectiveness research cautions that awareness, intention, message expo-

sure, and action cannot be assumed to align (Cialdini, 2003; Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Accordingly, the guidance-heavy pattern provides evidence of how expected conduct is publicly framed within the analyzed corpus, not of resulting behavioral change.

The finding also qualifies instrumental readings of visitor-management communication by showing that guidance-heavy communication is not necessarily apolitical or purely technical. In a city such as Kyoto, messages about manners, congestion, transport use, luggage, and responsible travel are connected to the everyday negotiation of heritage space, residential life, mobility, and visitor presence. The emphasis on guidance may make the communication environment appear less confrontational than one dominated by prohibitions, but it still places responsibility on visitors to adjust their behavior to pressured urban conditions. The contribution of the Kyoto case therefore lies in showing how overtourism communication can be mapped as a structured public-facing communication environment in which expectations are distributed across conduct, mobility, and place, rather than reduced either to tourist information or to anti-tourist restriction.

5.2. Targeted Restriction and Sensitive Urban-Heritage Boundaries

Restriction remains a secondary layer in the corpus, but it is analytically important because it is the message orientation most clearly tied to boundary-making. Its significance lies not only in its lower frequency relative to dispersal and behavioral guidance, but in its concentration where visitor conduct is framed as requiring a more immediate spatial or behavioral limit. In the Kyoto corpus, this is most evident in Gion-related areas. Messages about private roads, photography, following or obstructing geiko and maiko, street behavior, and damage to heritage settings draw localized boundaries around forms of conduct that have become difficult to absorb within ordinary urban and cultural life. The resulting pattern is selective rather than generally anti-tourist: restriction is targeted toward places where visitor presence becomes entangled with residence, privacy, cultural performance, narrow streets, and the tourist gaze.

This is why the spatial concentration of restrictive communication should not be read only as a technical matter of visitor management. Urban tourism scholarship shows that tourism pressure often becomes most contested where visitor consumption enters everyday urban space (Colomb & Novy, 2016; Sequera & Nofre, 2020). Critical heritage scholarship also helps explain why the boundaries marked in such spaces matter. Heritage is not only a set of sites to be consumed; it is also a field of social practice, value, recognition, and negotiation (Harrison, 2013; Waterton & Smith, 2010; Byrne, 2008; Avrami et al., 2019). The Kyoto corpus adds to this literature by showing how these urban-heritage tensions become publicly articulated through restrictive signs and posters. In Gion-related spaces, these artifacts mark the intersection of tourism management, residential concern, cultural practice, and urban heritage value.

Read in this context, a sign or poster asking visitors not to enter a private road, take unauthorized photographs, follow cultural performers, or damage heritage settings does more than communicate a rule. It locates the point at which general guidance gives way to more specific, localized, and less negotiable behavioral expectations. Although the document-based evidence does not reveal how residents, performers, businesses, or visitors evaluate these messages, it shows how the artifacts publicly situate overtourism pressure in specific urban-heritage situations. In this sense, targeted restriction works alongside guidance-heavy communication: it supplements broad appeals to responsibility with clearer boundaries in places where privacy, cultural practice, residential life, and narrow urban space are under pressure.

5.3. *Formats, Source Environments, and the Public Architecture of Guidance*

The association between message orientation and artifact type matters because format is not only a container for content. In the corpus, different formats are associated with different ways of making visitor-management expectations visible. The analysis therefore concerns how communication functions are organized through particular material and digital forms rather than whether one format is more effective than another.

Signs and posters operate closest to the point of boundary-setting, placing messages at or near street, site, or situation in which the targeted conduct occurs. Guides and brochures operate differently because they give more space for explanation, route-making, alternative-area presentation, and responsible-travel framing. Webpages add another layer because they are not tied to a single physical point of encounter and can gather congestion information, etiquette guidance, visitor pledges, route advice, and area-based material in one online environment.

The dominance of semi-institutional sources gives this communication environment a hybrid character. Kyoto's public-facing overtourism communication is not issued mainly through formal regulation or direct municipal command. Much of it is circulated through destination-management organizations, official tourism associations, visitor-facing tourism platforms, and related bodies that translate management concerns into accessible public guidance. Occupying an intermediate position between commercial promotion and formal government regulation, these actors translate concerns about crowding, etiquette, sensitive spaces, luggage, transport behavior, and responsible conduct into visitor-facing language that is practical, polite, multilingual, and often less coercive than direct enforcement.

Webpages add an analytically distinct dimension to this communication environment rather than functioning merely as electronic versions of signs or brochures. Digital communication can assemble several kinds of guidance at once: pre-visit advice, congestion forecasts, transport recommendations, etiquette explanations, responsible-travel pledges, and links to wider-area information. In this sense, online guidance is part of the public architecture through which visitor conduct and mobility are framed before and during travel. This connects the Kyoto case to wider discussions of digital destination management and smart tourism, where online platforms increasingly mediate how destinations communicate, organize, and update visitor information (Gretzel et al., 2015).

The analytical point is therefore architectural rather than behavioral: the corpus shows that Kyoto's overtourism communication is distributed across physical, printed, and digital formats and that these formats make visitor-management expectations publicly legible in different ways. It does not establish whether visitors found the materials, understood or trusted the messages, or changed their behavior after encountering them. The format analysis should consequently be read as an account of how communication functions are organized across media rather than as a test of media effectiveness.

5.4. *From Isolated Artifacts to a System-Level Reading of Overtourism Communication*

The findings return to the problem that motivated the study: individual overtourism messages can be misread when they are treated as representative of a destination's overall stance toward visitors. A restrictive sign in Gion, a congestion webpage, a responsible-travel pledge, and a wider-area guide do not communicate the same thing. They address different behaviors, operate through different formats, speak from different source environments, and locate tourism pressure in different spatial contexts. Read separately, any one of these artifacts may appear to define Kyoto's communication stance. Read together, they show a more differentiated public-facing communication environment.

This system-level view is the main empirical contribution of the paper and adds to the overtourism and visitor-management literature by showing how guidance, restriction, and invitation can be arranged together within the same public-facing communication system. Rather than showing a simple movement from welcome to rejection or a communication environment dominated by prohibition, the corpus revealed a layered arrangement in which citywide behavioral guidance forms the broadest communication layer, targeted restriction marks sensitive thresholds, semi-institutional actors translate management concerns into visitor-facing language, and invitational place guidance remains present but comparatively limited. The limited presence of invitational place guidance suggests that Kyoto's public communication is more developed in telling visitors how to move and behave than in inviting them to imagine the destination through alternative places, routes, times, or practices.

The theoretical contribution lies in conceptualizing public-facing overtourism communication as a structured system through which expectations about conduct, spatial sensitivity, mobility, and alternative place engagement are framed and differentiated, while distinguishing this organization from a measured governance outcomes. Because the study does not measure message visibility, visitor reception, compliance, resident evaluation, or behavioral change, the soft urban governance lens is used to examine the organization of public-facing communication rather than its effects.

Kyoto is analytically useful because it brings together tourism pressure, heritage value, residential space, cultural performance, public transport, and destination-management communication in a compact urban setting. The study can show how these pressures are represented within the analyzed corpus, while determining whether Kyoto's pattern differs from those of Venice, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik, or other overtourism destinations would require comparative research.

The broader lesson is methodological as much as conceptual. Overtourism communication should not be evaluated only through the most visible or controversial messages. A system-level mapping makes it possible to see how restrictive, guidance-oriented, and invitational messages coexist; how formats and actors distribute these messages differently; and how spatial focus shapes the meaning of communication. For destination-management research, this shifts attention from asking whether a destination is simply welcoming or hostile to asking how visitor-management expectations are publicly organized, differentiated, and bounded.

6. Conclusions

This paper examined Kyoto's public-facing overtourism communication through a document-based content analysis of 64 communication artifacts published between 2016 and 2025. The study set out to understand how visitor-management expectations are publicly communicated across message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus. It maps how overtourism-related guidance is articulated in public-facing materials within an urban heritage destination rather than measuring communication effectiveness or visitor behavior.

The findings show that, within the analyzed corpus, Kyoto's overtourism communication is guidance-heavy rather than primarily restrictive. Dispersal and behavioral guidance is the most frequent orientation, while restriction forms a smaller but important layer and invitational place guidance remains comparatively limited. This pattern complicates a simple reading of Kyoto's communication as anti-tourist or exclusionary by showing that restriction, although present, is not the dominant orientation in the corpus.

The analysis also shows that Kyoto's communication environment is differentiated by artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus. Signs and posters are most closely

associated with restriction and boundary-setting within the corpus, while guides and brochures are more closely associated with invitational place guidance. Webpages, policy-related materials, and press releases appear mainly in relation to dispersal and behavioral guidance. Semi-institutional actors account for the largest share of artifacts in the corpus, placing destination-management organizations, tourism associations, and visitor-facing platforms at the center of the sampled communication environment through which overtourism concerns are translated into public guidance. Spatially, restriction is most clearly concentrated in Eastern Kyoto and Gion-related areas, while guidance-oriented communication is more broadly citywide.

Conceptually, the study contributes a system-level way of reading public-facing overtourism communication. Rather than treating signs, webpages, brochures, warnings, or campaign materials as isolated messages, it shows how their functions, formats, issuing actors, and spatial references combine within the analyzed corpus. The soft urban governance perspective provides an interpretive lens for examining this organization of communication while keeping measured governance outcomes analytically distinct.

Kyoto therefore serves as a theoretically and policy-relevant case, while the framework can inform comparative work in other heritage cities without assuming that Kyoto's specific communication pattern is directly generalizable. In other contexts, the same four dimensions—message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus—can help examine how visitor-management expectations are distributed across communication functions, formats, actors, and spaces. Future comparative and mixed-method research is needed to examine whether similar communication patterns appear in other heritage cities and how visitors, residents, and destination actors interpret and evaluate such messages.

7. Implications

The findings offer evidence-informed considerations for how Kyoto and comparable heritage cities can review public-facing overtourism communication. Because the study maps the organization of communication rather than testing behavioral or management outcomes, these implications concern communication review as a step preceding effectiveness evaluation.

For destination managers, the first implication is that overtourism communication should be reviewed as a system rather than as a collection of isolated messages. A city may produce signs, posters, webpages, brochures, guidance cards, policy notices, and campaign materials in response to immediate pressure, but the overall communication environment may still become uneven. The Kyoto corpus suggests that such a review can ask several practical questions: which message orientations dominate, which formats carry which types of guidance, which actors issue the messages, and which spaces receive restriction, guidance, or invitation. Such a review would help managers identify the structure and possible imbalances of the communication environment and establish priorities for subsequent visitor testing or resident consultation.

The second implication concerns format choice. Within the corpus, signs and posters are most closely associated with restrictive and boundary-setting messages, guides and brochures with invitational place guidance, and webpages with dispersal and behavioral guidance. These patterns provide a basis for auditing whether message function and communication format are aligned, while actual visibility, comprehension, and behavioral response require additional evidence.

The limited presence of invitational place guidance is also practically important. Kyoto's public-facing communication appears more developed in telling visitors how to move, behave, avoid congestion, or respect sensitive spaces than in inviting them toward

alternative places, times, routes, practices, or meanings. This does not mean that Kyoto should simply produce more promotional materials for less visited areas. Poorly planned dispersal can transfer pressure elsewhere. Destination managers should therefore examine whether alternative-place communication is coordinated with local capacity, heritage values, transport conditions, and community priorities.

Source environment offers another point for reflection. Semi-institutional actors account for the largest share of the corpus, which indicates that destination-management organizations, tourism associations, and public-facing platforms are central to how overtourism concerns are translated into visitor guidance. This intermediate position matters because such actors often communicate in accessible, visitor-facing language. At the same time, the low share of co-authored materials suggests that community voices are less visible within the sampled communication environment. Although the corpus cannot establish whether residents regard existing messages as legitimate or representative, this pattern highlights the need for closer attention to the participation of residents, local association, and other stakeholder in future communication design.

Finally, the findings suggest that communication evaluation should be treated as the next stage of destination-management learning. The Kyoto mapping identifies what should be evaluated: message orientation, format, source environment, spatial focus, visibility, reception, and resident or stakeholder response. In this sense, communication mapping becomes a preparatory step for evaluation, rather than a substitute for it.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that follow directly from its document-based design. The corpus allows the study to map how public-facing overtourism communication is organized across message orientation, artifact type, source environment, and spatial focus. It does not allow the study to determine whether visitors saw the messages, understood them, trusted them, accepted them, or changed their behavior in response. For that reason, the findings should be read as evidence of how visitor-management expectations are publicly framed, not as evidence of communication effectiveness or behavioral impact.

A second limitation concerns the corpus itself. The 64 artifacts were purposively selected to examine overtourism-related public communication in Kyoto, rather than to represent the total population of all tourism communication produced in the city. This approach supports the exploratory mapping, but it limits the scope of generalization. The study can identify patterns within the analyzed corpus, such as the frequency of dispersal and behavioral guidance, the association between message orientation and artifact type, and the spatial concentration of restriction in Gion-related areas. It cannot claim that these patterns represent every public, private, community-based, or informal communication message circulating in Kyoto.

The temporal scope also matters. The 2016–2025 period was selected to capture recent phases of Kyoto's overtourism debate, including late pre-pandemic pressure, the disruption of COVID-19, and the post-pandemic return of visitor-management concerns. However, the study does not reconstruct the full historical development of Kyoto's tourism governance, nor does it claim that overtourism communication began within this period. Materials published after 2025 may also change the balance of message orientations, formats, and source environments. Future research could extend the corpus longitudinally to examine whether public communication becomes more restrictive, more digital, more participatory, or more invitational over time.

The study also does not examine the intentions underlying the artifacts. Some messages may reflect municipal policy, some may emerge from destination-management practice, and others may be shaped by local pressure, tourism-association priorities, or collaborative ar-

rangements. The source-environment coding identifies the visible issuing context of each artifact, but it cannot show how decisions were made, which stakeholders influenced the wording, or whether residents considered the messages legitimate. Interviews with municipal officials, destination-management organizations, local associations, residents, cultural workers, and tourism businesses would be necessary to examine those questions.

Future research should also examine reception. Visitor surveys, interviews, walking interviews, eye-tracking, field observation, digital analytics, and experimental message testing could help determine whether visitors notice different kinds of communication, how they interpret them, and whether particular messages influence route choice, timing, photography behavior, luggage use, transport conduct, or respect for sensitive spaces. Resident-centered research is equally important because public communication may appear clear from a management perspective while still being perceived locally as insufficient, misdirected, or disconnected from everyday experience.

The digital dimension deserves further study. Webpages form a substantial part of the corpus, but this study cannot determine whether online guidance reaches visitors before or during their stay. Future work could combine content analysis with web analytics, search behavior, social media analysis, QR-code usage data, or visitor-planning research to examine how digital overtourism guidance is encountered. This would be especially useful in destinations where congestion forecasts, responsible-travel pledges, multilingual etiquette pages, and area-based recommendations are increasingly circulated online.

Finally, as a single-case study of Kyoto, the paper does not compare the city with Venice, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik, or other overtourism destinations, and it therefore cannot conclude whether Kyoto's communication system is unique. Comparative research across heritage cities would make it possible to determine which patterns are context-specific and which may be more widely shared. Such work could examine whether other destinations also combine guidance-heavy citywide communication, targeted restriction in sensitive districts, semi-institutional source dominance, and limited invitational place guidance.

Taken together, these limitations define the contribution of the study as a structured mapping of public-facing overtourism communication in Kyoto. The analysis shows how such communication can be examined before claims are made about effectiveness, legitimacy, or behavioral outcomes. Its findings therefore offer a basis for future research that connects document analysis with visitor reception, resident perspectives, stakeholder decision-making, digital communication analysis, and comparative urban heritage studies.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/tourhosp7080232/s1>: Supplement S1: Corpus log; Supplement S2: Channel map; Supplement S3: Message-orientation intercoder reliability subset; Supplement S4: Coding manual; Supplement S5: Retrieval and archiving strategy; Supplement S6: R reliability script; and Supplement S7: SPSS output. These materials are intended to support the transparency, auditability, and reproducibility of the document-based analysis by documenting the corpus construction, retrieval channels, coding rules, reliability procedure, and statistical output used in the study.

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