

# Reconceptualizing Tourism Promotion: The Impact of Drone Photography on Marketing Tuba Island Through Szarkowski's Theoretical Framework

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## ABSTRACT

This research initiative intends to evaluate how drone photography might help the visual marketing of Tuba Island. Using Szarkowski's theoretical framework, this study explores the comparative strengths of conventional eye-level photography and modern drone photographs in boosting the island's appeal on tourism websites. The results reveal that drone photography is a more successful instrument for tourism promotion, delivering novel perspectives that greatly boost the visually appeal and emotional impact of Tuba Island. The visual comparative analysis and the poll results demonstrate a strong preference for aerial (drone) imagery over standard eye level photography when advertising Tuba Island as a tourist attraction. Overall, this research demonstrates that drone imagery is regarded to be a very useful tool for tourist promotion, enabling unique techniques to promote island areas such as Tuba Island. These findings underscore the necessity of introducing drone photography into tourism marketing activities to create more beautiful and engaging visual portrayal of destinations.

**Keywords:** *Drone photography, Szarkowski's theoretical framework, Tuba Island tourism, Visual portrayal*

## INTRODUCTION

Showcasing the tourist hotspot with effective visual representation is a crucial motivator in recruiting visitors. Photography has become an essential tool for tourism promotion in the internet age, allowing places to exhibit their distinct landscapes, culture, and experiences, as mentioned by Jenkins (2003) the classic phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" is most true in the context of travel. The act of looking (photographing) is central to this experience (Li et al., 2022). However, standard eye-level photography frequently fails to portray the full extent and context of a destination's offers. In his writing, Coker (2024) suggested that many photographers keep the camera angle standard by just standing and pointing the camera straight ahead, which might get a little uninteresting, and this style resulting in an impact, especially for isolated and lesser-known areas such as Tuba Island in Langkawi. This limitation presents a substantial problem for promoting such sites, since potential visitors may have a limited awareness of their beauty and authenticity.

This study addresses this issue by investigating how drone photography may improve the visual marketing of Tuba Island. In a recent report from Jamliah (2023) when interviewing the Chief Executive of Langkawi Tourism Agency, reported that the number of visitors to Langkawi (including Pulau Tuba) has been on a recent downward trend, and the primary issue is that the island does not have any unique promotions to help revitalize the area. As a result, Langkawi no longer possesses the allure necessary to serve as the primary attraction even for domestic tourists. In promoting the Pulau Tuba tourism industry, photography is an essential component/medium in the industry because of its ability to communicate to a global audience the natural splendor, one-of-a-kind attractions, and diverse cultural heritage of the country.

Using Szarkowski's theoretical framework—The Thing Itself, The Detail, The Frame, Time, and Vantage Point—this study investigates the comparative strengths of traditional eye-level photography and current drone images in improving Tuba Island's appeal on tourism websites. In addition, Rose (2019) emphasizes the theory is the most relatable explanation of the key principles of photography and why they are important. This study examines how drone photography helps bring tourists to the island by showing off its unique scenery. This research intends to provide insights into the potential of drone photography to revolutionize tourism marketing, particularly for isolated sites such as Tuba Island, by combining visual analysis and theoretical application.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature study examines how photography, tourism marketing, and technology promote sites like Tuba Island. Visual communication has long been used to influence tourists' impressions and decisions by presenting a destination's particular attraction. Traditional photography has contributed to this realm, but its inability to capture large landscapes and provide spatial context often underrepresents hidden jewels like Tuba Island. Drone photography has revolutionized destination displays by delivering aerial views. This literature review investigates the theoretical foundations, practical applications, and transformative potential of integrating traditional and drone photography, focusing on Tuba Island's natural beauty, cultural legacy, and eco-tourism appeal. The review examines how photography may be analyzed and improved to produce visually compelling stories for island tourism websites using Szarkowski's methodology.

## **Tourism Marketing and Visual Communication**

Tourism marketing relies heavily on visual communication. Surej and De Villiers (2018) stated it performs a critical role in the marketing and promotion of tourism destinations to attract and engage potential visitors, and photography is one of its most powerful tools. High-quality pictures may leave a lasting impression by effectively communicating a destination's distinct traits, culture, and attraction. Höckert et.al (2018) suggested that this will influence the tourists to photograph whatever appears amusing to them, such as landscapes, wildlife, people, and objects that match with ideas of otherness, as well as anything eye-catching, charming, or passionate. For locations such as Tuba Island, where tourism potential is mostly untapped, visual content is crucial to increasing exposure and stimulating interest among travellers, e.g., adventure seekers, eco-tourists, etc. However, standard eye-level photography frequently fails to convey such faraway locations' vast splendour and subtle details. In addition, Livieri (2024) claimed that creating depth in photos is a common difficulty for photographers who use wide-angle lenses, especially involving eye-level angle. The shots may appear flat and dull if they lack a defined point of interest and a clear visual path that leads the viewer's eye into the scene. Studies have demonstrated that visually appealing material can substantially impact tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes, underlining the need to employ new techniques to create engaging graphics.

In this perspective, drone photography represents a breakthrough answer for tourism promotion. UASLogic (2016) indicates that drones are one of the most recent and effective ways to exhibit tourist sites through aerial photography and video. Drone imagery offers distinct aerial perspectives, allowing viewers to appreciate the beauty of the landscape and or cultural aspects of Tuba Island from a larger perspective. This ability to highlight huge landscapes, gorgeous beaches, and hidden gems is especially useful for places looking to distinguish themselves in a competitive tourism industry. By addressing these visual communication gaps, this study aims to evaluate how drone photography can redefine Tuba Island marketing, highlighting its potential to showcase the amazingsness of its landscape in ways that traditional photography cannot. The study will look at ways to create captivating visual narratives to increase the island's tourism attractiveness using Szarkowski's framework.

## **The Economic Impact of Drone Photography on Tourism Revenues.**

Emerging as a travel trend, drone tourism is where visitors use drones to capture aerial vistas and produce original visual material, therefore enriching their experience. This technology raises the online presence of a location by means of social media and offers fresh angles on attractions and settings. Growing demand calls for sustainable practices and regulatory laws to guarantee safety and reduce environmental and societal impact (Study Smarter, 2024). At around USD 1.2 billion (approximately RM 5.2 billion) in travel and tourism, the worldwide drone market is expected to rise at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.5% from 2022 to 2030. Drone use for aerial photography, video creation, and promotional material—which improve marketing methods in the travel sector—is driving this expansion. Unique viewpoints of tourist locations provided by drones draw more people and boost tourism income. Ritter (2023) stated Singapore is widely recognized as a hub for drone tourism due to its relatively liberal regulations and strong public support, with 65.5% of the population favouring drone photography and videography. Its popularity as a tourist destination has steadily increased over the past two decades.

The tourism sector has been a vital source of revenue for several countries, including Malaysia. Tourism contributes significantly to the economic and cultural growth of destinations around the world, as pointed out by Man (2023), which stated that tourism ranks as the third-largest contributor to Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The advent of drones has revolutionised the industry by facilitating novel and imaginative techniques for documenting and marketing tourist attractions. Aerial videography signifies a novel epoch in tourism promotion.

## **Drone Photography in Tourism**

Drone photography has transformed the tourism business by providing a dynamic approach to capturing and showcasing destinations. Projector Sea (2024) justified that tourist boards and operators use drone footage to highlight the area's diversity and attractiveness. Beautiful scenery, bright cityscapes, and aerial views of historical sites generate visually appealing content that entices potential visitors. Unlike traditional photography, which is generally limited to ground-level perspectives, drones allow you to shoot spectacular overhead views that highlight a location's immensity, patterns, and spatial relationships. This potential is especially useful for destinations like Tuba Island, where the surrounding natural beauty and distinctive topographical factors contribute to their attraction. Drone photography allows for the depiction of complex shorelines, lush forests, and island connectedness in ways that elicit a sense of adventure and wonder. According to research, aerial imagery elicits viewers' emotional responses, creating interest and a stronger connection to the area.

Furthermore, drone technology provides flexibility in framing and vantage points, allowing marketers to present Tuba Island from previously unattainable angles, such as panoramic views of any landscapes or landmarks or close-up aerial shots of unique attractions or activities on the island. This strategy not only improves the island's visual storytelling but also matches current guests' preferences for immersive and visually interesting information. Santos (2024) points out that drones are revolutionizing travel experience by offering novel perspectives, increasing safety and accessibility, and boosting the visual content of tourist locations. As technology advances, its impact on tourism will become more significant, enabling passengers and the industry new ways to discover and enjoy our world.

## **Application of Szarkowski's Framework in Photography**

Introduced by John Szarkowski in 1964, his theoretical features remain implicit (or explicit) elements in photography (Rice, 2019). This framework offers a thorough lens for examining photography, making it a great tool for understanding and improving the visual storytelling of sites like Tuba Island. The framework's five components—The Thing Itself, The Detail, The Frame, Time, and Vantage Point—provide a systematic method for analysing the aesthetic and narrative qualities of images. Each component effects how people see and interact with a photograph. For example, The Thing Itself emphasizes the subject being photographed, drawing attention to certain aspects of Tuba Island, such as historic structures, cultural components, or natural beauty. Similarly, The Detail concentrates on small details that contribute to the overall mood, such as unusual textures, colours, or Tuba Island's flora/fauna, immersing viewers in the scene's intricacies.

Drone photography, with its ability to capture vast overhead views, complements Szarkowski's notions of The Frame and Vantage Point. Drone imagery can present Tuba Island's key features, such as its layout, natural patterns, or architectural highlights, in a compelling and immersive way by presenting new perspectives and framing the island's terrain in creative ways. Meanwhile, time plays a dynamic part in drone photography, as changing angles, lighting conditions, and natural phenomena can be captured to portray a sense of movement or timelessness.

Using Szarkowski's approach to evaluate both traditional and drone photography, this study analyzes how the visual narrative of Tuba Island might be modified to appeal to specific audiences, such as eco-tourists, cultural travellers, or adventure seekers. This application not only integrates theory and practice, but it also demonstrates how photography may increase the island's tourism appeal through intentional visual storytelling.

Hood (2015) described Szarkowski's clarification as still applicable to the modern digital photographer, whether professional or amateur. He gives a foundation for photographers looking to build their photography style, including the elements that make them unique, appealing, and unforgettable. The photographer's objective when building a style must always be to focus on the purpose of the shot, the details, the frame, the decisive moment or some element of reality, and the vantage point or perspective from which the photograph will be taken.

### **The Impact of Visual Aesthetics on Tourists Behaviour**

The impact of visual aesthetics on visitor behaviour has been extensively investigated in tourism research, highlighting the importance of imagery in altering perceptions, emotions, and decision-making processes. Vaia (2024) specified tourism aesthetics can have a substantial impact on a traveller's destination choice by appealing to their visual and sensory senses, resulting in beautiful and memorable places. Visual aesthetics determine how travellers evaluate a destination's appeal, with composition, colour, perspective, and detail all playing important roles in leaving a lasting impression. According to research, high-quality pictures, particularly those that provoke emotions such as amazement, excitement, or tranquillity, can dramatically raise a destination's attractiveness and tourists' inclination to visit.

Drone photography, with its potential to capture unusual vantage points and broad views, has emerged as an effective tool in this setting, providing viewpoints that traditional photography cannot match. Drone imagery creates a stronger emotional bond between potential tourists and the site by providing a full picture of landscapes, natural beauty, and cultural icons.

Integrating Szarkowski's framework improves on this approach by examining how these factors contribute to images' aesthetic and communicative value. This framework ensures that the images are not only visually pleasing, but also meaningful and consistent with the destination's identity. Drone photography could change Tuba Island's tourism marketing methods, increase its appeal and encourage visitor interaction.

### **Technological Trends in Tourism Promotion**

Santos (2024) defines that tourism has evolved and increased substantially, coupled with the growth of technology in cameras and devices that capture everything, with one of the most effective instruments in recent years being the usage of drones, which has transformed the way landscapes and attractions are portrayed. An authored piece by HOSiHO (2024) issued a new era of tourism advertising begins with these flying devices featuring high-definition cameras. They allow viewers to see landscapes from a new perspective. This innovative technology allows aerial photography of stunning scenes. Drones may soar across mountains, skim clear water, and enter dark dungeons to disclose secrets. These aerial photographs immerse viewers visually and emotionally. These technological advancements have enabled tourism marketers to engage potential guests creatively, highlighting the unique selling characteristics of sites such as Tuba Island.

According to StudySmarter (2024), visual media, particularly drone footage, provides new viewpoints of sights and landscapes while increasing internet visibility for locales via social media sharing. As the demand for drone tourism rises, regulatory policies and environmentally friendly methods are being considered to assure safety and minimal impact on local populations and nature. Furthermore, the rise of social media platforms has increased the effects of such visual content, opening opportunities for viral marketing and user-generated content. In the context of island tourism, drone photography has proven useful for capturing breathtaking aerial views of the landscape and conveying a location's natural

beauty and cultural relevance (Enjoy Langkawi, 2024). Szarkowski's paradigm, which focuses on the formal aspects and expressive possibilities of photographic images, provides a useful lens for evaluating the function of drone photography in tourism promotion.

Nevins (2023) in his writing cited that Szarkowski articulate pictures have the unique ability to reveal underlying facts about a subject, allowing viewers to analyze the image beyond its surface. When applied to drone photography in tourism, this approach allows an investigation into how aerial perspectives might highlight an island's essence and impact tourists' perceptions (Unwrapped Media, 2021). The incorporation of drone technology into tourist promotion reflects a fusion of cutting-edge technology and the art of visual storytelling, making sites like Tuba Island more accessible and visually enticing to potential visitors.

### **A Comparative Analysis of Recent Drone Applications in Tourism.**

Recent case studies highlight drones' various applications in tourism, with a focus on improving visitor experiences, destination marketing, and sustainable development. For example, research by Ilkhanizadeh et. al (2020) indicates drones enable virtual tours of Rome's open-space tourist attractions. A study created a mathematical model to estimate the ideal drone deployment, proving the viability and economics of such experiences even under low demand. Similarly, Singapore has emerged as a hub for drone tourism thanks to its lenient rules and strong public backing. According to Ritter (2023), digital media technology such as drones are redefining tourist encounters and boosting representations of urban attractions.

Meanwhile, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) (2018), in their projects used drones to help Seychelles achieve sustainable development by capturing low-cost, high-accuracy aerial imagery. This effort improves natural resource management and promotes environmentally friendly tourism. In Poland, drones are regularly utilised to promote tourism. According to a poll of Polish travellers, drones improve visitor experiences and are widely employed at attractions, hotels, and event venues to document and promote tourism activities (Berbeka, 2022).

Virtual aerial tours are increasingly becoming popular, with businesses such as Nature Eye allowing people to fly drones remotely. Mitchell (2024) in his report claimed that this technology enables people to visit worldwide sites from their own homes, with 360-degree views and interactive controls to enhance virtual tourism experiences. These case studies demonstrate drones' rising importance in tourism, including their benefits to accessibility, visitor engagement, and sustainable tourism development.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The method used in this study will include visual comparison and analysis of both eye-level and aerial pictures, to investigate the function of drone photography in promoting Tuba Island as a tourism destination. The primary data-gathering method will be to capture a series of high-resolution drone photos and compare them to traditional eye-level shots of the same areas on Tuba Island. The eye-level photographs will be gathered from current tourism products or taken during field trips to ensure that they reflect traditional techniques of exhibiting the island's assets. A special emphasis will be focused on comparing how each form of image—eye-level and aerial—highlights the natural landscapes, cultural landmarks, and general aesthetics of the island. The visual comparison will look at how drone photography, with its unique vantage point, highlights nuances and viewpoints that are not evident in

ordinary eye-level images, potentially altering the viewer's experience of the destination.

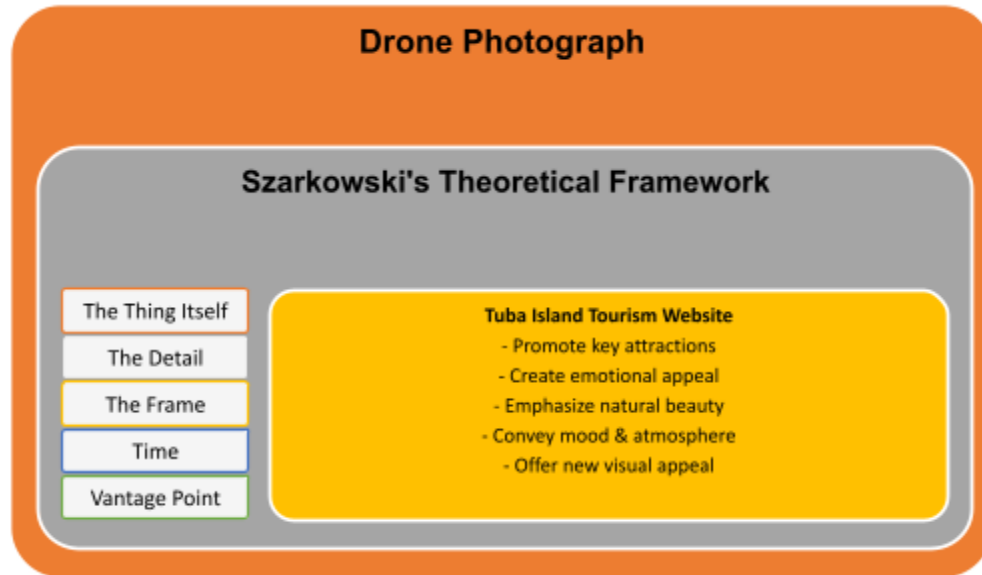
Szarkowski's framework is ideal for analysing tourism photos since it considers the photographer-subject-viewer link and symbolic and aesthetic elements. Szarkowski emphasises the moment, frame, time, detail, and point of view to explain how images convey meaning. Tourism photography benefits from this framework. The moment is crucial because tourism photographs capture transitory moments that define a destination. The frame also determines which landmarks and picturesque views are shown and which are not. Perspective affects tourist photos because the photographer's perspective determines how potential visitors see a destination. Szarkowski's attention to detail helps him understand how lighting and composition affect a photo's emotional impact. Szarkowski's framework also covers tourism imagery's symbolism, which is important because these representations idealise areas to attract tourists. Szarkowski's framework considers both artistic qualities and symbolic messages to understand tourism imagery, making it an effective tool for analysing how images affect tourism perceptions and behaviours. Other frameworks may focus on technical or sociocultural aspects.

These components will lead the evaluation of the photographs' aesthetic and expressive qualities, allowing for a better understanding of how aerial views convey the spirit of Tuba Island vs eye-level shots. The "vantage point" element will receive special attention, since it is critical to understanding how drone photography provides a larger and often more spectacular image of the island's topography that traditional photography may not communicate. The visual comparison will also assess the emotional impact of each perspective, such as whether aerial photos elicit a greater sensation of awe or interest among potential tourists.

In addition to visual comparisons, qualitative methods will be employed, using questionnaires to acquire detailed information on participants' perceptions of drone photography and its role in marketing Tuba Island. The questionnaire is intended to evaluate the efficiency of drone imagery in capturing and exhibiting the island's main attractions, emotional appeal, natural beauty, mood, and ambiance, under Szarkowski's theoretical framework. Participants are shown aerial and eye-level images of Tuba Island and asked questions on their preferences, emotional responses, and the perceived efficiency of each visual approach in conveying the island's appeal. Open-ended and scaled-response questions are used to collect nuanced input and subjective interpretations of the visuals. By assessing replies, the study highlights drone photography's benefits and limits in comparison to traditional approaches, as well as its compatibility with Szarkowski's aspects. The qualitative character of this research enables for a thorough investigation of how visual aesthetics influence tourists' perceptions and behaviours, offering significant insights for improving Tuba Island's tourism marketing and promotion.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This research conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1 integrates Szarkowski's Theoretical Framework and its five major elements—The Thing Itself, The Detail, The Frame, Time, and Vantage Point—with strategic goals for boosting Tuba Island's tourism potential via improving the images in its marketing and promotion, example in tourism website. Combining drone photography with Szarkowski's methodology creates a systematic strategy for picking and analysing photographs that successfully represent the island's attractions, atmosphere, and distinct appeal.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

### **Data Sampling from Online Survey**

The survey was randomly assigned to online participants. Out of the 100 surveys that were administered, only 80 respondents responded, which was deemed sufficient for the comparative (descriptive) analysis. This group was carefully selected to reflect a varied cross-section of the population and provide a well-rounded opinion on the subject. This method of participant selection was critical for gathering a diverse range of perspectives, which were required to make meaningful comparisons. The study used random sampling to avoid bias and improve the dependability of its findings. This sample size was evaluated as viable to deliver useful insights while maintaining a manageable data collecting and processing process.

## **FINDINGS**



The outcomes of the study are separated into two sections: image comparison and an online survey. It demonstrated a thorough comprehension of the visual and fascinating insights into participants' perceptions and preferences.

### **Visual Comparative and Analysis**

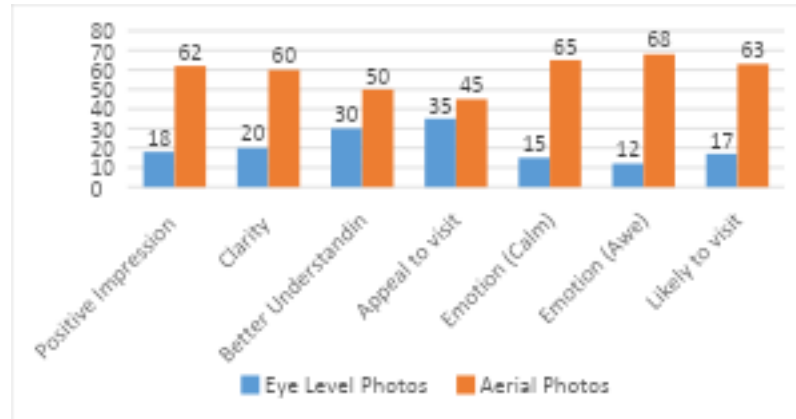
The findings from the visual comparative and analysis, as shown in Table 1, provide a detailed exploration of the comparison between two selected images through Szarkowski's theoretical framework.



**Table 1. Image Comparative Analysis with Szarkowski's Theoretical**

<b>Images</b>		
<b>Source</b>	(Ruzana, 2017)	Mohammad Firdaus Azman (2022)
<b>Szarkowski's Theoretical</b>		
<b>The Thing Itself</b>	This photograph concentrates on a specific structure—a thatched-roof pavilion stretching into the water—surrounded by adjacent flora and a sandy shoreline.	The aerial shot emphasizes the larger interaction between the structure and its surroundings.
<b>The Detail</b>	Details like the texture of the thatched roof, wooden fences, and neighbouring nature are highlighted.	Details like the contour of the shoreline, the placement of palms, and the contrast between the blue-green water and the terrain become apparent.
<b>The Frame</b>	The framing is tighter, focusing on the pavilion and the surrounding flora.	The framing is significantly more wide-ranging, including not only the pavilion but also the road, beach, and flora.
<b>Time</b>	Time appears to be motionless and timeless. The serene river, motionless foliage, and deserted pavilion evoke a moment frozen in time, promoting thought and relaxation.	The aerial view also captures a sense of timelessness but from a spatial-temporal perspective. The geometry and layout of the scene may pique interest in the history and future use of this location.
<b>Vantage Point</b>	The eye-level perspective replicates what a visitor would see, delivering a relevant and immersive experience. The viewpoint point brings the observer closer to the scene, emphasizing its beauty.	The aerial perspective provides a vista that is impossible to obtain organically, instilling a sense of adventure and discovery. It helps the observer grasp the spatial context of the area by displaying the pavilion as part of a wider setting.

## Feedback Findings from Online Survey



**Figure 2. Summary of comparison between eye-level and aerial photos**

The feedback findings shown above is a definite preference for aerial (drone) photography over traditional eye-level photography when promoting Tuba Island. Most participants, particularly those aged 18-34, considered aerial images more appealing, with 45% evaluating them positively vs 35% for eye-level photos. Aerial images were lauded for their clarity, wider perspectives, and ability to better express the island's natural beauty, with 60% ranking them "clear" or "very clear." Participants also believed that drone photographs gave a better understanding of the island's landscape and made the area more appealing to visitors, with 63% saying they would visit based on aerial imagery. In contrast, eye-level photographs were evaluated as less engaging, eliciting calmer emotions such as "calm" and "awe." Overall, the findings indicate that drone photography is a more successful tool for tourism promotion, providing fresh perspectives that considerably improve the visual appeal and emotional impact of Tuba Island.

## CONCLUSION

The visual comparative analysis and the poll results show a high preference for aerial (drone) imagery over traditional eye-level photography when promoting Tuba Island as a tourist attraction. Aerial photographs were regularly scored higher in terms of clarity, emotional appeal, and impact. Participants considered aerial imagery more effective in portraying the island's natural beauty, as it provided a broader and more immersive picture of the area, making the island appear more inviting and appealing.

Drone imagery, when viewed through Szarkowski's framework, proved to be an effective tool for highlighting Tuba Island's unique qualities. The "vantage point" factor, a major component of Szarkowski's study, was particularly visible in the aerial photographs, which provided a perspective that typical eye-level shots could not. The emotional responses evoked by the aerial images—such as awe and excitement—add to the notion that drone photography has the potential to significantly engage viewers and affect their travel selections.

Local stakeholders, including businesses and government organizations, can collaborate to unlock the full marketing potential of drones. Applying Szarkowski's theoretical framework, these stakeholders can work together to produce visually captivating imagery that highlights the island's natural beauty, cultural landmarks, and tourism attractions. Local businesses, such as hotels and tour operators, can

partner with drone service providers to capture high-quality aerial footage for marketing campaigns, social media, and virtual tours designed to attract visitors. Government bodies responsible for tourism and cultural preservation can support these initiatives by establishing clear drone regulations and addressing environmental concerns. This partnership will ensure that drone-based marketing strikes the right balance between visual appeal, cultural authenticity, and sustainability. By incorporating Szarkowski's concepts of framing, point of view, and symbolism, stakeholders can ensure the imagery not only showcases the island's beauty but also reflects its cultural and environmental values, ultimately helping to create a strong and compelling destination brand.

Overall, this study reveals that drone photography is found to be a very efficient tool for tourism promotion, offering novel methods to showcase island places such as Tuba Island. It is obvious that aerial imagery not only improves the visual appeal of a site but also plays an important role in attracting potential tourists by providing unique and captivating perspectives. These findings emphasize the relevance of adding drone photography into tourism marketing initiatives to provide a more attractive and engaging visual portrayal of places.

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