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Authenticating the Tourist Destination on the Official Tourism Website of Indonesia: A Multimodal Perspective

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Abstract. *A tourism website is essentially an important domain in enhancing a destination or tourism products. Indeed, official tourism websites can be very powerful in representing the norms and values which travellers should purportedly observe. However, there is only few researchers investigating how official tourism websites promote destinations or products through the incorporation of language and visual elements. This study aims at examining the role of language and visual element used on the OTWI. This study employs discourse analysis to examine how the language and visual elements on a tourism website authenticates the tourism destination. The study revealed that language and visual elements play a significant role in authenticating tourist destinations on the OTWI.*

Key words: Authentic, tourism discourse, tourism website, destination.

Introduction

Indonesia is recognised as the sleeping giant of Southeast Asia. It is a vast archipelago with about 18,330 islands, 6,000 of them inhabited. Indonesia has various languages based on the ethnic groups and has the largest Muslim population in the world. It is the world's largest and most populous country that is situated only on islands. Consequently, Indonesia has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. The main components of tourism in Indonesia are the country's natural and cultural heritage, both of which boast the unique combination of a tropical climate and an island country. Thus, Indonesia has many wonderful tourism resources, such as its natural, cultural, traditional and culinary heritage.

Tourism plays an important role in the Indonesian economy and is a significant source of its foreign exchange revenues. The vast country of the spreading archipelago has much to offer, from natural beauty, to historical heritage and cultural diversity. In 2012, the tourism sector provided around US$9 billion of foreign exchange, which had increased to US$10.1 billion foreign exchange by 2013. Thus, the tourism sector ranks the fourth largest among goods and services export sectors. Therefore, this is closely correlated to the way Indonesia provides significant information for tourists regarding tourist destinations and products.

Tourism promotion is one of the sources of information for potential tourists. With technological advancements, such as social media, and website tourism, promotion is growing increasingly more efficient and effective in providing key information about products and destinations to potential tourists. The potential tourist has to be offered reasons as to why he/she should visit Indonesia. Thus, promotional media play a significant role in authenticating the destination. For instance, the utilisation of websites has become major tool in conjunction with printed media to

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promote and market the destination.[1] Websites are considered an effective method for achieving promotional mediation, as this tool uses a variety of different discourses to authenticate the tourist destination or the product.[2] Therefore, this current study examines how language and visual element portray the authentic of Indonesian tourism destinations and products.

In addition to promotion, information concerning places and events related to tourism is provided to tourists in different forms of promotional tools. Particularly, it is interesting to note that online or electronic media typically provide an easily accessible information source. As a promotional tool, the tourism website is a rich source of information, using both language and visual elements for the purpose of promoting the authentic tourist products and destinations. As a subject of research, the tourism website is interesting, as the representations of the destination are cleverly constructed through various discourses of tourism. The aim of the tourism website is to portray destinations or tourism products in a positive light and in an attractive way. This applies especially to authenticate destinations and products via textual and visual means.

As a discourse, tourism has become one of the most common community discourses, with many people involved in its construction regarding the plethora of communicative situations. From a promotional perspective, tourism, in the interpretations of tourism experts, has its particular discourse .From this perspective, the language of tourism is therefore significantly more than a representation. Through still or moving pictures, written texts, and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism tends to 'persuade, lure, woo, and seduce' people and, in doing so, it transforms them from potential into real tourists.[3]

Furthermore, language and visual images are the representation and neutral reflections of reality in the world .Tourism website is an ideal for discovering the language and visual images offered to potential tourists, as they improve the understanding and perception of the products and destinations. Therefore, the interrelation between text and visual elements may represent and portray the tourist products and destinations on tourism websites.

A significant number of studies have examined tourism promotional media, from TV commercials and publicity programs to more current online platforms, such as social media.[4] However, few researchers have explicitly addressed the role of

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[1] R. Lawa, S. Qi, D. Buhalis, "Progress in tourism management: A review of website evaluation in tourism research," in *Tourism Management*, XXXI (2010), p. 297–313.

[2] M. Loda, "Comparing Websites: An Experiment in Online Tourism Marketing," in *International Journal of Business and Social Science,* XXII (2011), no. 1, p. 70-78.

[3] G., Dann, "Remodelling a Changing Language of Tourism: from Monologue to Dialogue and Trialogue," in *Pasos, Revista de Turismoy Patrimonio Culture,* X (2012), no. 4, p. 56-70.

[4] L. Dore, C. Geoffrey, "Promoting destinations: An exploratory study of publicity programs used by national tourism organizations," in *Journal of Vacation Marketing,* IX (2003), p. 137-151.
G., Kerry, N. Mark, "Internet promotional material and conservation volunteer tourist motivations: A case study of selecting organizations and projects," in *Tourism Management Perspectives,* I (2012), p. 17–27;
K. Hvass, M. Ana, "The take-off of social media in tourism," in *Journal of Vacation Marketing,* XVIII

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language and visual elements in these promotional platforms in portray authentic of the destination. These studies focus mainly on the content that appears on the tourism websites, and so often overlook this important aspect of the discourses of tourism promotion. Indeed, language and visual elements are the aspects that generate specific discourses, in particular, the image and identity of destinations.[5] Given tourism websites' use of both language and visual image to enhance the tourist destination,[6] there is a need for further research that extends the analysis not only to consider language but also to consider the use of visual images. Therefore, this current study investigates how language and visual elements are utilised in the OTWI to authenticate the tourist destinations and products.

The Discourse of Tourism

Tourism comprises the direct interaction between cultures and consists mainly of culture and heritage, folklore, customs, gastronomy, dancing, rules, etc. Indeed, in tourism, many people perceive their annual holidays as an experience that offers romance and exoticism, and this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This desire encourages people to look for romantic and exotic locations in pursuit of an unspoiled, primeval aspect of nature. Responding to this demand, the tourism industry stakeholders and practitioners offer a variety of holiday places or destinations in which the images highlight the beautiful scenery in conjunction with an old culture.

Hence, tourism promotion as a discourse through its textual and visual resources has become instrumental in introducing the tourist destination to potential tourists. The relationship between language and tourism has been examined by several scholars, such as MacCannell,[7] who argue that tourism development depends on how language is used to construct and define the tourist experience and destination images. Several studies have explored the significance of the tourism discourse, in particular, the tourism promotional document. In addition, many have conducted content analysis of promotions in offline media, such as brochures, guide books, and booklets. However, few researchers, if any, have conducted an analysis of both the language and images found in tourism promotional tools .Therefore, this study, which embarks on an analysis of both the textual and visual resources utilised in online tourism promotional platforms, will provide a more holistic insight and understanding of the different discourses of tourism.

Tourism Promotion

(2012), p. 93-103; S. Pan, T. Henry, L. Jinson, "Framing New Zealand: understanding tourism TV commercials," in *Tourism Management* XXXII (2011), p. 596-603.

[5] G. Jo´hannesson, E. Huijbens, Tourism in times of crisis: exploring the discourse of tourism development in Iceland. *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol. 13(5), 2011, pp. 419–434; N. Morgan, P. Arnette, *Tourism promotion and power creating image, Creating Identities*. Chicchester, John Eiley & Sons, 1998.

[6] A., Josiassen, A.G., Assaf, L., Woo, F. Kock, "The imagery-image duality model: An integrative review and advocating for improved delimitation of concepts," in *Journal of Travel Research,* V (2015), p. 76-84.

[7] D. MacChannel, *The Tourist. New Theory of leisure class*. Berkely: Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1976.

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Tourism promotions can be divided into two categories: print media, for instance, advertisements, brochures, magazines and guidebooks; and electronic media, such as the internet or websites, and social media, such as travel blogs and Facebook. Thus, the website is the most popular tool used by tourists to explore destinations, as most tourists prefer using online mediation to gain information about a particular tourist destination.[8] Other study shows how 24% of tourists used the website as a source of information for exploring destinations in Indonesia followed by promotional media, with approximately 8 to 15%. Therefore, the website is the leading tool used by holiday-makers as a source of information about the destination. Due to advances in information technology, the use of the website tends to continue to increase while printed media, such as brochures, booklets and advertisements, remain as a secondary tool for tourists in decision-making.

As a key source of information for potential tourists, tourism promotion plays a significant role in portraying the destination. In fact, tourism development has become a priority for governments and stakeholders. Many countries improve the value destination and tourism product through such approaches including the utilisation of online media. Knowledge conception and distribution have become central aspects in the practice of development whereby the media have become the instruments for distributing and sharing knowledge. The media have a significant role in enhancing the value of the destination or product. Additionally, media can be a combination of content, such as TV programmes, advertisements, radio, newspapers, films, and other product advertisements.

Tourism promotion has gradually incorporated visual images in order to allow potential tourists to experience the destination and the tourist products. However, there are only a few studies concerned with how the language and images enhance the portrayal of the tourist destination. Debatably, both linguistic and image aspects have important functions in enhancing the value of the destination. Consequently, both language and images in tourism promotional media play an important role to attract potential tourists and persuade them to make a decision.

In addition, tourism promotional materials include hidden messages, which are conveyed through certain images. The images offer the positive and attractive aspect of the destination for tourists. The most important facets of the tourism promotion tools are the use of language and image to present the tourism destination by manipulating the tourist's emotions. A number of studies have investigated the role of language and image to enrich and valorise tourist destinations.

In the tourism industry, image plays a significant role in enhancing the tourist destination. Hence, how the promotional media portray and valorise the destination are important factors that can influence the number of tourist arrivals. Tourism promotional material covers important information in which language and visual images are employed to present and create the image of the destination. Thus, the

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[8] E. Cohen, "Toward a sociology of international tourism," in *Social Research*, XXXIV (1972), p. 164-182; C. Santosa, Y. Belhassenb, K. Catona, "Reimagining Chinatown: An analysis of tourism discourse," in *Tourism Management*, XXIX (2008), p. 1002–1012.

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language and visual images play a significant role in portraying and enhancing the tourist destination. For instance, the use of lexical and syntactical aspects as a discourse strategy can enhance and valorise the destination.

It seems that tourism promotional methods, such as websites, advertisements, and brochures, as discourses are vital mediations to develop communication between the tourism stakeholders and the holidaymakers. As discourses, such methods represent the destination and the tourism product. As Indonesia is one of the major tourist destinations in Southeast Asia, the main concern of this study is to examine how language and visual images construe the meaning to enhance the tourist destinations on the OTWI.

Tourism Website

The rapid development of information technology in general and the Internet in particular has dramatically changed the paradigm of the tourism industry. It is generally acknowledged that the electronic media can assist as an effective promotional tool in the tourism industry .A website, for example, is a valuable mediation for both stakeholders and customers for information broadcasting, communication, and online purchasing. A website can offer new and updated content, with well-arranged information and a well-designed layout. Furthermore, the boundary of a website is usually tempting, with simple texts and various high-quality photos. These features have transformed websites into an interactive online communication method between travellers and stakeholders.

The effectiveness of a website can be seen from how the different discourses portray the authentic product including the tourist destination. Moreover, many scholars state that the effectiveness of a website may be measured from the information, the content quality, the design perspectives, the simplicity of the text and the high quality of the images used. Hence, tourism websites have a very important role to play in providing information and in portraying the tourism as well as maintaining the relationship with current tourists. All this is achieved through the language and visual images used, which may also play an important role in valorising the destination through the different tourism discourses.

Methodology

This study employed multimodal discourse which aimed to investigate the role of language and visual elements in portraying the tourist destinations. The data were the language and visual images used in the OTWI. OTWI was chosen since this website is currently and officially used to portray the tourist destinations. This study was interested to investigate the ways in which the promotion of Indonesian tourist destination in the OTWI can be construed as destination image. The aims of this study were i) to explore the roles of language and visual elements in portraying Indonesian tourist destination, and ii) to analyse the ways in which portrayed the authenticity of Indonesian tourist destinations such as the authentic nature and culture in tourism website can be construed as Indonesian destination image.

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It is interesting to note how language and visual elements can be used in the construction of discourses of tourism. The findings of a study on tourism websites show that language and visual elements are employed officially by government in publicising information to their patrons, and it is found that both, language and visual elements complement each other as a persuasive tool. In this study, taking into account of the manifestation of language and visual elements, the data were therefore analysed using the theory of multimodal discourse.

Result and Discussion

Indonesia straddles the Equator between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Indonesia's many tourism resources make Indonesia an excellent tourist destination. For example, Indonesia has abundant cultural heritage, and natural resources, throughout the country. It has pristine and virgin tropical forest and an authentic heritage. Therefore, Indonesia promotes and markets itself as Wonderful Indonesia, and the slogan is quite true, although not necessarily always in good ways.

Authentic nature of Indonesia

The beautiful natural resources of Indonesia are a major concern for the government to promote and market Indonesia to potential tourists. The Indonesian official tourism website provides significant information through different discourses. In this study, the discursive theme *"wonderful nature"* was linked largely through an emphasis on the beauty of nature, the variety of flora and fauna, and the underwater park and beaches. The wonderful themes available on the OTWI are recognized through the linguistic and visual elements. The linguistic resources focused on the lexical and syntactical choices, while the visual resources focused on the visual elements, which are found on the OTWI, such as modality, salience, and collage.

At first glance, it may seem that the theme of "wonderful" clearly describes the authentic, beauty and exotic nature of the destination. However, upon closer review, it is easy to see that it actually functions in othering Indonesian tourist destinations.

The first discursive category accentuated Indonesia as a wonderful destination full of authentic attractions. As an archipelago, Indonesia has the potential to serve as a tourist attraction. In fact, Indonesia has an abundance of tourist attractions, which are offered to the potential tourist. The exotic nature is one of the 'wonderful' elements, which may play a role in beautifying the touristic facet of Indonesia:

Extract 1 and 2 Bali appeals through its sheer natural beauty of looming volcanoes and lush terraced rice fields that exude peace and serenity.

This text, linguistically, describes how Indonesia offers an attractive, authentic and wonderful tourist destination, which differs from what other countries in particular western countries, can offer. This sentence promises that Indonesia is known for its variety of wonderful places, which are rich in natural beauty, whether under the sea, in the beautiful mountains, or the tropical forests.

Furthermore, exploring the exotic nature of Indonesia is an almost endless activity, and Indonesia is recognized as offering beauty as a touristic aspect of the country due to the variety flora and fauna. This natural touristic aspect can create

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images of the preserved landscape of the Bali Barat National Park and differentiate it from other places. For instance, in Extract 2, use of the phrase "pristine tropical nature" indicates a dominance of tourism over naturalism, which portrays the park (in particular, its fauna) as needing conservation ('it is worth protecting them'). Thus, it approaches the destination from an exotic nature perspective through the commoditization of the nature, but also tries to preserve and maintain the wonderful and diverse fauna that draws on the tourism discourse for its representation.

Extract [3] There are 13 species of coral reefs in this park, dominated by edge ridges and block ridges of rocks. The most attractive view is the steep vertical sloping coral reef that plunges down as deep as 25-50 meters.

Extract [4] Feast your eyes on 91 types of fish found in the Bunaken National Park, amongst which are the locally known gusimi horse fish (Hippocampus), the white oci (Seriola rivoliana), yellow-tailed lolosi (Lutjanus kasmira), goropa (Ephinephelus spilotoceps and Pseudanthias hypselosoma), ila gasi (Scolopsis bilineatus) and others.

Tourism promoters try to build on the unique benefits of locations, and by feeding upon and representing discourses from other genres and forms of communication, to represent nature through prototypes. The marketing of Indonesian nature is no exception; analysis of the OTWI showed that it has drawn heavily on an authentic discourse of nature. The use of the personal pronouns you and yourself in the text reflects the sense of familiarity of the meaningful aspect of the destination. Extract 6 confirms that the authentic nature makes the visitor familiar with the destination. Therefore, the text may have shown that the OTWI attracts the tourists to be a part of the destination through specific lexical and syntactic elements, for example, Ever fancy yourself being a mermaid? You will encounter a real "mermaid" and you can also get a glimpse of sea life here. Those utterances emphasize the wonderful aspect of the nature, which is different from other destination (see Extract 5).

Extract [5] Ever fancy yourself being a mermaid? Being able to swim along with other creatures of the sea, moving to the rhythm of the waves? In the Bunaken Marine Park, you will encounter a real "mermaid", and you can also get a glimpse of sea life here

In line with the linguistic resources, visual elements on the webpage illustrate the nature of Indonesia as the representation of some destinations such Bali, Manado etc. The photo also shows a sea view with a beautiful mountain under the clear blue sky, illustrating how the natural landscape of Indonesia is a charming destination for the tourist. This image plays a significant role in evoking the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural perspectives of the potential tourist in decision making (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Bunaken

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Figure 2 illustrates the wonderful natural landscape of Indonesia. The image shows the diver is diving in very clear and clean sea water with beautiful coral in the foreground. In fact, Indonesia's natural resources have become a main concern of the tourism authorities for marketing Indonesia to potential tourists.

Figure 2: Breath-taking underwater life

Authentic Cultural Heritage

Lexical analysis is universally used to study the theoretical association of discourses, because various discourses can be identified through key words and syntactical choices. Specifically, lexical analysis is used to analytically organize the lexis used for the representation of the cultural heritage by placing them under the concept of authenticity. The notion has to be very specific in order to describe and cover a wide range of meaning in terms of cultural heritage. The notion of authenticity can be used to represent the specific form of the cultural heritage discourse in the OTWI (e.g. original, real, and pristine).

In the contemporary literature, has formulated an assumption on modern tourism as the communization of the culture, also called 'staged authenticity', which may destroy the local culture.

As shown in Extract 6, the OTWI describes the history of the heritage area and discusses how it has been used for economic activities in the past. In fact, the text clearly explains the function of the harbour as the main trade centre in Indonesia. Given that this site has become one of the more important places for the tourist gaze, it can be seen that the text used in the OTWI presents the destination as the processes of contextualizing and globalizing the culture heritage, which is provided not only for tourist consumption but also for authentic historical tourism, for example, "Batavia was known as "The Queen of the East" and "the Jewel of Asia"". Thus, the web provider authenticates the historical site in order to attract potential tourists:

Extract [6] In its heydays in the 16ᵗʰ century, Batavia was known as "The Queen of the East" and "the Jewel of Asia". Its Sunda Kelapa harbour was abuzz with merchant vessels from Europe, China, India and from throughout the Indonesian archipelago, loading in and sailing away with precious nutmegs, pepper, tea, coffee, ceramics, cloths and other exotic products of the time. The warehouses were stacked with spices, tin and copper. The successful trade in Batavia filled the coffers of the Netherland's Treasury.

Furthermore, this extract supports the previous statement that the historical site presented on the OTWI is a process of contextualization. For example, Extract 7 states, "Later the city expanded to the west bank of the Ciliwung river, where the

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Dutch built a fortress, a city wall and canals, outside which was Chinatown and the homes of the indigenous people'. It clearly states that this historical site was constructed to be more authentic.

Extract [7] Centre of the VOC Dutch East India Company's administration was the Stadthuis with its wide front plaza, around which were the Court of Justice, banks and other important buildings. Later the city expanded to the west bank of the Ciliwung river, where the Dutch built a fortress, a city wall and canals, outside which was Chinatown and the homes of the indigenous people.

The OTWI also presents the authenticity of the world's biggest monument, as shown in Extracts 8, 9 and 10. It seems that authenticity is a key focus when describing the cultural heritage of Indonesia, for example, the use of the special terms, 'an ancient site' and 'seven wonders of the world'. These key words indicate the uniqueness of the destination. Moreover, the text demonstrates its otherness in which the cultural heritage is shown in the pristine site, and so it differs from other destinations: 'There are enough indigenous scenes and elements incorporated to make Borobudur uniquely Indonesia','' the original home of Batak people' and '… dance and dramas are an inseparable part of daily temple devotion and celebrations, and many are held to be sacred'. The culture and heritage of Indonesia are mostly presented on the OTWI as authentic.

Extract [8] The magnificent Borobudur temple is the world's biggest Buddhist monument, an ancient site widely considered to be one of the world's seven wonders. Built in the 9th century during the reign of the Syailendra dynasty, the temple's design in Gupta architecture reflects India's influence on the region, yet there are enough indigenous scenes and elements incorporated to make Borobudur uniquely Indonesian. This awe inspiring monument is truly a marvel. After a visit here you will understand why it is Indonesia's most visited tourist attraction and a famous icon of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

Extract [9] The original home of the Batak Toba people, the island has many traces of ancient days including stone tombs and traditional villages, such as at Ambarita which has a courtyard with stone furniture where in the old days convicts were tried and beheaded.

Extract [10] In Bali, dance and dramas are an inseparable part of daily temple devotion and celebrations, and many are held sacred. Each village has a different date of festivities, and a visitor may therefore, accidentally watch dance performances that are not staged for tourists.

Similar to the linguistic analysis, visual elements play an important role in portraying the cultural heritage on the website. The first image illustrates the authenticity of Borobudur temple as one of UNESCO's seven wonders world heritage sites. This first picture in figure 3 shows a Buddha statue in the foreground and some stupa behind him. The second image illustrates one of the historical buildings, now used as a museum, called Museum Fatahillah. Therefore, both the Borobudur temple and the Fatahillah museum are heritage buildings which help to portray the authenticity of the cultural heritage on the OTWI (see Figure 3).

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Figure 3: Heritage

In addition, the images in Figure 4 start off with the first image on the left shows an image of a man and a woman bringing offerings, with a temple as the background. This image illustrates the religious ceremony, which is a ritual for *Baliness*. Religious offerings and rituals usually take place in the Hindu temples called *'Pure'* in Bali. This image is followed by an image of a group of people wearing *Batak* traditional custom, with the traditional *Batak* house in the background, welcoming the potential tourists to visit and observe the authenticity of the cultural heritage in Indonesia. Interestingly, the images in Figure 4 deliberately show the wonder of the authentic Indonesian culture, which is one of the representations of Indonesia. As mentioned earlier, participants in an image can be people, places, or things.[9] However, the images in Figure 1 comprise participants to demonstrate the authenticity of Indonesian cultural heritage**.**

Figure 4: Tradition

Conclusion

The tourism industry usually proposes a combination of themes in its promotion process in order to generate an attractive offer for potential clients. The combination of domains allows the sender to transform multiple messages, which may reach a wider audience and make them more lucrative than if the classification of concepts were exceptionally selective. The webpages of the tourist destinations of Indonesia, which are intended to appeal to a wide market segment of patrons with varying interests, offer an example of verbal communication and visual images that tries to capture the interest of as many potential tourists as possible through the application of a complex mesh of specific discourse areas. Although some concepts may be more obvious than others, destination websites generally employ different discourses, which aim to satisfy all types of interests.

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[9] G. Kress, T. Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, London, Arnold, 2001.

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Specifically, this study focused on the language use and visual elements of the tourism website of Indonesia, in which a dialectic regarding the notions of nature and culture heritage is revealed. The findings of this study provide insights into the way language and visual elements are purposefully utilised to portray the description of Indonesia authenticity as a famous tourist destination. This investigation improves the understanding of the Indonesian tourist destination, which is highlighted through specific discourses, such as authentic nature and authentic culture heritage.

The theoretical and practical implications for this study recommend that enhancing the tourism destination of Indonesia signifies the commoditization of Indonesian authenticity, uniqueness and otherness, in which language and visual elements are emphasized and developed to suit the tourist gaze and consumption.[10] As noted, this study emphasizes that it is important to pay careful attention to how the OTWI promotes the different tourist attractions, such as the authentic nature, and authentic cultural heritage, through a combination of language and visual elements. This outcome yields a wide understanding of the multimodal discourse analysis. However, the study could be improved by widening the data source; for example, a more extensive investigation could include videos, which would offer a considerable data source to obtain an in-depth understanding of certain effects in the field of tourism discourse.

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