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The 8th International Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) Seminar - Aligning Theoretical Knowledge with Professional Practice

Language for Tourism: A Review of Literature

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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to gain more insight into the role of language in tourism promotional document by reviewing current research on tourism promotion. Search for related article were carried out via the online database using the keywords: *tourism, tourism discourse and language of tourism*. Very few studies focused on tourism websites or blog and on analysing both language and visual aspect of the tourism promotion. This paper concludes with a discussion of a proposed study which will employ a multimodal discourse analysis approach in analysing the tourism websites of top holiday destinations in South East Asia

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**Keywords:** tourism discourse, language for tourism, destination, value and decision making

**1. Introduction**

Tourism promotion is an essential source of information for the potential tourists. It engages people in decision-making of the destination they would like to travel to. In this digital age, greater attention has been given to the development on tourism through such approaches and this has been utilized by most countries in the world, which in turn has encouraged the necessary development of the tourism sector. Since tourism involves the greatest people movement and is one of the largest economic activities in the world [1; 2; 3] hence it has become a popular focus of research.

Language of tourism gives detail portrayal of the potential tourism destination in which attempts to persuade, attract, encourage and seduce the potential tourists to be actual tourists. Therefore, tourism becomes a discourse object; [4; 5]. As a discourse, tourism promotion is established in a persuasive manner in order to attract visitors

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[6; 7; 8]. Hence, the association between persuasiveness and attractiveness in tourism promotion are anchored in different types of media, where the language is utilized to enhance the element persuasiveness and attractiveness.

As a multidiscipline, tourism is one of the exited research areas, in particular the language of tourism. Therefore, in this paper, we, first sketch out key research in tourism and introduce the current scholarly discussions on the relationship between tourism and the language in use. We then illuminate the setup and methodology of our propose study which will carry out a multimodal discourse analysis of tourism websites in South East Asia.

## 2. Tourism and Modernity

Tourism often conjures up images of travelling to romantic and exotic destinations, separating and simultaneously extending the network of relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Scholars and academicians define tourism as a particularly enlightening lens through which to view and make sense of modern and post-modernity [9]. In modern and post-modern time, the discourse on tourism leaves the impression that tourists seek out only authenticity, exoticism and experience in every destination through gaze which rarely engages the real [10; 11; 12; 3]. There is a need for future tourism development to accommodate the nexus between tourism and environmental, economic, social, cultural and technological change under the support of modernity [13].

Several scholars argue that modernity is related with a form of social change which is distant from the perception of tradition as a basic culture and towards westernization and commoditization [14; 15]. Modernity is also viewed as a condition of paradox, contradiction and basic anxiety that greatly demands, and yet concurrently contradicts the conceptualization of meaning and identity [16; 17]. Hence, modernity separates tradition from westernization by conceptualizing identity and providing social change. It is, thus the foundation of a transformation in human consciousness or circumstance.

One particular issue gaining significance in tourism in the context of modernity is authenticity. Much of the research within tourism and modernity has focused on authenticity, traditional or the virginity of the destination [18; 12; 19]. Authenticity is claimed as an aspect which can enhance the recovery of lost, unique, genuine elements; thus, it is utilized as a reference to generate cultural simulacra or cultural image or representation [20]. Warren [21] discusses how tradition and modern are mediated through representational practices of puppeteer and political cartoonist. Consequently, tourism is a form of modern activity in which modernity is conveyed to the destinations and thus, creates changes and sometime problems at the destinations.

Intertwiningly, as vehicle, tourism plays an essential role in modern life prototypes [22]. In recent study, modernity has made possible the accelerating rates of exchange, movement, and communication across spaces; [11]. In addition, while tourism spoils and transforms true meanings of local traditional cultures and places as seen in several destinations, it enhances preservations of local cultures and stimulates the sense of self. The sensibilities of modernity are paradoxical, while a suspicious belief in progress is accompanied by the necessity to improve a sense of authenticity and repair the cracks of modernization as such creating whole new landscape [16].

Therefore, modernity has become an important issue in tourism development debate among scholars and academics, particularly in tourism research. Tourism and modernity provides us with terms in which to understand the authenticity of the tourist destination. Furthermore, as an agent of social change, tourism impacts on key aspects such as economy, tradition, culture, image and even the political landscape of a country.

## 3. Promotional Media

The conception and distribution of knowledge are main factors in the process of development whereby the media have become the instruments for sharing and storing the knowledge. The media play a significant role in business activities including the tourism industry [23]. Furthermore, media can be considered as a combination of content such as TV programs, advertisement, radio, newspapers, films and other product advertisement [24]. The study on promotional media has been conducted by several scholars such as Hudson and Ritchie [25] who

<sup>3</sup> looked at the role of film and as promotional media in introducing tourist destinations. They conclude that there is a high correlation between film and tourism success as well as the proactive efforts of promoting destinations that encourage producers and studios to film at their location. However, there were few research concerned with how the language and images enhance tourist destination. Arguably, both language and image aspects have a significant function, for instance, to persuade and attract potential tourists.

The image of tourism covers a wide range of activities and agencies. The role of image reflects that of promotion aimed at persuading and influencing the audience. Hence, tourism operators utilize the image to portray the product in promotional media, such as brochure, websites, posters and other media advertising [24]. <sup>4</sup> A number of studies have focused on the tourism promotional media, in particular, the role of promotional media in influencing the audience. For example, Burns and Robertson [26] carried out empirical investigation into the role of tourism websites. Pan, Tsi and Lee [27] on the other hand, investigated TV commercial framing of tourist destinations. In fact, Dore and Crouch [28] claim that one of the effective promotional media in tourism context is publicity programs. Recent result from Hvass and Munar [29] revealed that social media is one of the promotional tool which allows tourism operators to interact directly with potential tourists via various internet plat forms, for instance tourism websites.

Another study conducted on informative promotional media suggested that they provided significant knowledge of product or selected destination [30]. More importantly, the study showed that promotional media such as websites, brochures, magazines and other promotional related media are widely accepted as an integral and influential part of travellers' decision making. For example, the role of visual image in the tourism media has been shown as an important aspect in valorising the destination [7]. However, there is still little research on promotional media in the context of tourism which focused on the role of language and visual image. Hence the best way to analyse visual image is through an analysis which take into account not only language but also multimodal elements of communication.

In this modern age, advertising is one of the most appealing disciplines, since it has become a tool of communication that has the potential to manipulate people's attitude towards products, brand names, establishments, and public issues. Advertisement reflects shared values and serves as an index to popular culture. Scholars involved in the various dimensions of production and perception of advertising, for instance, Chand and Chaudhary [31] examined the creation and perception of meaning in advertisement. They argue that advertisements clearly appeared to break old norms and introduce stereotypical norms related to women. Several academician and scholars define advertisement as one of the most important cultural artefacts affecting life and consumption today [32; 33; 34]. Therefore, as social interaction, advertisement becomes the most ambitious area to be investigated, in particular the language use, visual image and persuasive aspects.

A numbers of studies have been concerned with the specific elements of discourse of advertisement that are within language use, visual image, representation and identity [32; 35; 36]. One such study is by; Xiong [36] who analysed the rhetorical moves and discourse strategies in advertisement. He discovered that rhetorical moves play a critical role in promotional advertisement. Advertisement is a good example of the creative use of persuasive strategies which can be demonstrated through language. Patpong [37] analyzed advertisement by employing systemic functional approach and discovered that the use of language in amulet advertisement is one example to demonstrate the persuasive use of language.

A great deal of research has been carried out to investigate the important role of advertisement in different areas, such as in business, tourism and some business activities. Lombard & Snyder-Duch [38] explains that advertisement attempts to persuade, inform, and influence the audience. Advertisers do not only inform their customers about the product, but also stimulate ideas as well as develop their curiosity and interests by creating new meanings from the advertised commodity. On the other hand, the language of advertising consists basically of often propositionally vacuous display of competitive linguistic complexity considered to create a large artificial sense of exclusiveness among status-conscious audience or customer [39]. Hence, persuasiveness and informative values are the essential elements in advertisement. They are developed from the visual image and language used. Furthermore, to advertise is to inform the audience or customer about the product as well as persuading potential tourists in the context of tourism. This is achieved by creating a meaning or value out of it.

Through the utilization of images, verbal language or symbols, potential tourist comes to identify the advertised product or destination in their everyday life.

#### 4. Tourism and Persuasion

Persuasion is needed to influence potential tourists. Persuasive communication can create a reflective and lasting change [40]. It involves the use of verbal messages to influence attitudes and behaviour. Though the framework of persuasion, verbal messages are deliberated to affect the hearts and minds of the audience [41]. Investigations into persuasion in the tourism context have been carried out by scholars such as Priester & Petty [42] who are concerned with how persuasion is reflected in the verbal message. Persuasion involved <sup>19</sup> providing information to visitors about the places they are in and encouraging them to appreciate and care for these places. Gretzels & Fesenmaier [43] found that persuasiveness of preference elicitation serves important cues for personalization which in turn, persuades and influences the potential tourists towards the destination. He further proposes the model of influence in which preference elicitation process is supported by three aspects; relevance, transparency and effort. Those aspects play a significant role in establishing persuasiveness.

Other studies have examined persuasion in the context of tourism by utilizing metadata of the website. One such example is the study by Xiang & Fesenmaier [44] who assessed the use of metadata (META) tags in destination marketing web. META tags are one type of keywords that destination institutions use to promote their destinations on the internet. In practices, diverse keywords are utilized by tourism destinations to illustrate and <sup>32</sup> represent the destinations and portray positive images in order to persuade [4]. Furthermore, Lado [45] examined the <sup>32</sup> persuasive effects of Web sites on the effectiveness of marketing a tourist destination. His findings point to the importance of language use and visual images in transforming message credibility to message strength. Hence, keywords are needed to valorise the destination and persuade the tourist.

Persuasion has become domain force behind tourism promotion in efforts to influence prospective tourists to visit particular destination [1; 46; 47]. Consequently, informative promotion provides potential tourists with information on how a destination is gazed at which is an important aspect in the destination selection process. The power of tourism image on the decision-making for a holiday destination has been considered by various scholars and academicians in consumer behaviour literature [48; 49]. However, few studies have investigated persuasion and tourism from the discourse analytical perspective.

#### 5. Tourism and the Consumption of Place

As a popular activity, tourism sector affects the economic development of a county as it is one source of state revenue in the current era of globalization. In fact, the current tourism environment is experiencing an increase in popularity and demands [3]. People's mobility in tourism context means that the consumption of place becomes a significant aspect in this area [50; <sup>35</sup> 51]. The idea of iconic image provides tourists with a view of the destinations that have to be visited. It indicates a strong sense of visual meaning and enhances the tourist consumption. Hence, <sup>35</sup> to create the iconic image, a destination must be reduced to metonymic characteristics [52]. These characteristics, in addition, can be categorised into two which are defined and commodified [14].

Tourism destination as a product refers to the combination of offering the context resources through the existing tourism operation and media. Some studies have carried out investigation into tourism as the consumption of place such as the study by Thompson-Carr [53] who examined the tourist's experience, the consumption of landscape and performance. Others have shown tourism can be sighted as combination of place and experience [54; <sup>8</sup> 51]. It means that place is a setting for tourism experience in the context of social interaction. Hence, tourism is spaces or venues of cultural, economic, and social live activities. Hence, as a venue of experience creation, destination is endowed with a number of economic activities where tourists acquire additional consumption experience. Shaw et al. [55] conducted a longitudinal analysis of the tourism consumption as an agent of change in redefining the destination, even in sociological or psychological perspectives. Consequently, tourist destination brings change to the tourist experience and consumption.



## 6. Tourism and National Identity

Tourism is officially conceptualized as a means of creating a positive national identity for foreign consumption, with the expectation that a positive national identity will increase foreign investment and support development [56]. The literature on national identity is dominated by studies focusing upon its history and politics. In the fast advances of globalization, the nation remains one of the significant indicators of identity in the post-modern era. Palmer [57] states that tourism is the symbol that helps to construct and to convey a sense of national identity. For instance, history or heritage of a country is one of the aspects which merge to create a national identity. Therefore, tourism tends to create the identity of the nation.

A number of scholars have examined the importance of the nation, and a variety of theoretical positions have been organized to explain its significance. Pretes [58] views tourism sights as a key aspect in the formation and maintenance of a national identity in particular if it is understood as an imagined community. Whilst, Light [59] defines tourism as an important factor in the process of identity-building. For example, Picard [60] notes tourism motivates a paramount concern of identity amongst the Balinese which is called *Balineseness*. National identity has also been conceptualized through empowering the tourism industry.

The study by Kaneva and Popescu [61] examined the use of nation branding to reinvent national image in tourism and this can be viewed as a form of consensus and map which contain a nationalism discourse. Thus, tourism accepts the diversity of culture to produce the value of national identity and inclusivity [62]. Kneafsey [63] discovered that the impact of tourism must be understood in terms of the new social relations which materialize as individuals and institutions interact to commodify the identity of place. Tourism must be viewed as a national identity in which it tolerates the homogeneity of culture to create the value of identity and inclusivity and thus as social interaction.

## 7. Tourism and the Image of Place <sup>36</sup>

The image of place has been the most popular area in tourism research with a number of studies conducted in this area. For instance, Li [64] examined the model of destination image, image identification, image communication vehicles, and image promotion tools. Furthermore, Elliot et al. [65] explore the relationship between the destination, the product and the country's image. The study reveals that cognitive country image has greater influence on product factors than on destination factors, while affective country image has greater influence directly on receptivity than indirectly on beliefs. The result from Alhemoud and Armstrong study [66] indicates that the image of place is determined and depends on the characteristics of destination. A destination should be favourably distinguished from other destination as the competition or optimistically positioned in the mind of the customers.

Tourism images are important to the success of any destination, particularly how they affect the satisfaction with the tourist experience. Therefore, creating and sustaining the image of place can set attractive potential tourist to be actual tourist. Hence, scholars from different array of discipline such as Prentice & Anderson [67], Echtner & Ritchie [68] and Molina et al. [49] have given attention to the imagery of tourist destination. The imagery has been conceptualized, for instance as tourist experience [69], and a source of competitive advantage for the destination [70]. However, very few studies are concerned with the discourse of image and how it emphasizes the destination authenticity and attractiveness. Therefore, more research examining how both the discourse and image are used to visualize and conceptualize the destination image and the nation identity.

## 8. Conclusion

Thus far, the discussion on research into tourism is a multidiscipline phenomenon. It is important to note that the empirical approach of most research have mainly been a content analysis of printed promotional media such as brochures, magazines, pamphlet, booklet, and guidebook. A particularly interesting aspect of promotional media is websites. Typically they are rich with information on the destination and its parts and this is achieved

within limited space. As a subject of research, this type of tourist promotion mode is interesting and the representations of the destination are carefully constructed through the discourses. Few research have been concerned with the analysis of electronic tourism promotion, for instance, websites and blogs. Furthermore, there is also a clear gap in research focusing on the visual aspect as well as the language use in tourism promotional websites and documents

The review of the literature also provides extensive evidence on the importance of persuasion and attraction into tourism development practices, and suggests that little research on tourism discourse has examined in detail. Hence, tourism promotional documents contain detailed description of potential destinations with an attempt to persuade, attract, encourage and seduce potential tourist. Tourism development can provide a more enriching value to the community, not only related to the economical outcomes brought in by tourists, but also to the social capital emerging from their experiences and interaction. However, few research are concerned with the analysis of both the discourse as well as the visual aspects of prom. Hence, studies that focus on the language use in tourism promotional documents point to the role of language in enhancing the value of the tourism destinations. The need for further research which employs a multimodal discourse analysis approach in analyzing tourism websites of the top four holiday destinations in South East Asia is believed to be a significant step forward for research in this area.

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