

# *Representation Of Indonesian Local Culture In English Language Tourism Promotion In Digital Media*

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**Abstract** – *This study examines the representation of Indonesian local culture in English-language tourism promotion on digital media from a communication studies perspective. Focusing on tourism promotion as a form of strategic and mediated communication, the research explores how cultural meanings are constructed, framed, and circulated for global audiences. Using a qualitative interpretive-critical approach, the study integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to analyze verbal and visual elements in official tourism content published on Indonesian tourism websites and social media platforms between 2022 and 2024. The findings show that local culture is predominantly communicated through aestheticized and exoticized representations, supported by persuasive and evaluative English expressions. Culture-specific terms are frequently retained through borrowing and brief explanations to signal authenticity, yet this communicative strategy often simplifies complex cultural meanings. The analysis further reveals power relations in tourism communication, where local communities are positioned more as visual objects than as active communicative agents. The study underscores the need for more ethical and inclusive tourism communication strategies that balance global market demands with cultural sustainability.*

**Keywords** – Tourism Communication, Local Culture Representation, Tourism Discourse, English-Language Promotion, Multimodal Analysis, Indonesia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as the largest archipelagic country in the world, has extraordinary cultural wealth with more than 300 ethnic groups and 700 regional languages (Statistics Indonesia, 2020). This cultural diversity is an important asset in the tourism industry, which contributes significantly to the national economy. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2019), the tourism sector contributes 5.5% of Indonesia's total GDP and employs more than 13 million workers. In the era of globalization and digitalization, tourism promotion through digital media has become a key strategy for reaching international tourists, with English serving as the lingua franca in global tourism communication (Dann, 1996; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010). However, the use of English in representing Indonesia's local culture poses its own challenges regarding how unique cultural values can be effectively translated and communicated to a global audience.

Digital media has fundamentally changed the landscape of tourism promotion, creating new opportunities for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to interact with potential tourists (Hays et al., 2013). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and official tourism websites have become the main channels for disseminating information and building the image of tourist destinations (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). The Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has actively used digital media

with campaigns such as "Wonderful Indonesia," which targets international markets through English-language content (Rosalia, 2020). However, the effectiveness of representing local culture in English-language digital content remains an important question, given the complexity of Indonesian culture that must be translated into a context that is understandable to a global audience without losing its authenticity (Salazar, 2012).

The representation of culture in tourism discourse has become the focus of critical tourism studies, which criticize how local culture is often distorted, simplified, or even commodified for tourist consumption (MacCannell, 1973; Urry, 1990). Previous research shows that there is a tendency toward "exoticization" and "othering" in the representation of non-Western cultures, where local cultures are depicted as primitive, exotic, or different in order to attract the attention of Western tourists (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). In the Indonesian context, several studies have found that tourism promotion often highlights aspects that are considered "exotic," such as traditional rituals, dances, and handicrafts, but ignores the more complex socio-cultural context behind these practices (Adams, 2006; Cole, 2007). This raises questions about whether these representations reflect the reality of local culture or instead create new stereotypes that can impact tourists' perceptions of Indonesia.

The use of English as a medium of communication in tourism promotion adds a layer of complexity to the representation of local culture. Language not only functions as a tool of communication, but also carries certain ideological and worldview connotations (Kramsch, 1998). In the context of translation studies, culture-specific items often face challenges when translated into other languages, especially if there are no exact equivalents in the target language (Newmark, 1988). Several researchers have examined translation strategies for cultural terms in tourism texts, such as the use of borrowing, literal translation, cultural equivalents, or descriptive translation (Venuti, 1995; Aixelá, 1996). However, research that specifically examines how Indonesian local cultural terms are represented in English-language tourism promotion texts in digital media is still very limited, even though understanding the linguistic and semiotic strategies used is very important to ensure effective and authentic communication.

In addition to linguistic aspects, cultural representation in digital media also involves complex multimodal dimensions, including the use of images, videos, colors, typography, and other visual elements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Multimodal discourse analysis studies show that meaning in digital texts is not only generated through verbal language, but also through the interaction between various semiotic modes (Jewitt, 2009). In the context of tourism promotion, visual imagery plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and the appeal of destinations (Pan & Ryan, 2009). Previous studies have explored the use of photography in tourism brochures (Dann, 1996) and tourism websites (Govers et al., 2007), but research that integrates linguistic and visual analysis in the context of representing local Indonesian culture in digital media, particularly with a focus on English-language content, is still very rare.

Various previous studies have examined aspects related to the promotion of Indonesian tourism, such as destination branding strategies (Pauwels & D'Hauteserre, 2017), the use of social media in tourism marketing (Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015), and tourists' perceptions of Indonesia as a tourist destination (Schellhorn, 2010). However, most of these studies focus on aspects of marketing strategy, consumer behavior, or economic impact, with little attention to the linguistic and semiotic dimensions of cultural representation. On the other hand, research in the fields of applied linguistics and translation studies that examines tourism discourse tends to focus on the European or Western contexts (Francesconi, 2014; Gandin, 2014), with minimal research exploring the Southeast Asian context, particularly Indonesia. This situation creates a research gap regarding how Indonesia's complex local culture is represented in English-language tourism promotion in the digital age.

A comprehensive study that integrates the perspectives of critical discourse analysis, multimodal analysis, and translation studies to understand the phenomenon of representing Indonesian local culture in English-language digital tourism promotion. First, there has been no research that systematically analyzes the linguistic strategies used in translating and communicating unique Indonesian cultural concepts to a global audience through English. Second, the interaction between verbal and visual elements in the construction of cultural representation on digital media platforms has not been explored in depth. Third, how these representations position local culture in global-local power relations and whether there is a process of cultural appropriation, commodification, or preservation in the digital context still requires further investigation. Understanding these aspects is important not only for academic purposes but also for developing more effective, authentic, and sustainable tourism promotion strategies that can increase the

competitiveness of Indonesian tourism in the global market.

Thus, this study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by critically examining how Indonesian local culture is represented in English-language tourism promotions across various digital media platforms. Through a critical and multimodal discourse analysis approach, this study will explore the linguistic and semiotic strategies used, the ideology behind these representations, and their implications for the preservation and commodification of local culture. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the study of tourism discourse and translation studies, as well as provide practical implications for Indonesian tourism stakeholders in developing more effective and responsible communication strategies in promoting Indonesia's cultural wealth to the international community.

## II. METHOD

This research uses qualitative research with an interpretive-critical paradigm that aims to explore and analyze in depth the representation of Indonesian local culture in English-language tourism promotion in digital media (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research design applied is descriptive-analytical with a multimodal content analysis approach, which allows researchers to examine not only the linguistic dimensions but also the visual and semiotic dimensions of tourism promotion texts (Rose, 2016). This approach was chosen because tourism promotion in digital media is a complex and multidimensional communication phenomenon, where meaning is constructed not only through verbal language but also through the interaction between text, images, colors, layout, and other multimodal elements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This research is naturalistic in nature because it examines data in its original context without manipulation or intervention from the researcher, thereby revealing how local cultural representations are authentically constructed in the practice of digital tourism promotion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The analytical approach used in this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) combined with Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). CDA is used to reveal the ideology, power relations, and discursive practices that underlie the representation of local culture in English-language tourism promotion texts (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2008). Through Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional analytical framework, which includes textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and sociocultural practice analysis, researchers can identify linguistic strategies, patterns of representation, and the socio-political implications of cultural constructions in tourism discourse. Meanwhile, MDA with the grammar of visual design framework from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is applied to analyze how visual elements such as images, colors, composition, and typography interact with verbal text in constructing meaning about Indonesian local culture. The integration of these two approaches enables a holistic analysis of the phenomenon of cultural representation in the context of digital media, which is inherently multimodal (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

The data sources in this study are English-language tourism promotion content published on the official digital media of the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and the provincial tourism offices in Indonesia. The types of data collected include primary data in the form of verbal text (captions, descriptions, narratives) and visual data (photos, videos, infographics) from social media platforms such as Instagram (@wonderfulindonesia, @indtravel), Facebook (Indonesia Travel), YouTube (Wonderful Indonesia), and the official website indonesia.travel and regional tourism websites selected purposively based on geographical representation and cultural diversity. The research focused on posts and content that specifically promoted aspects of local culture such as traditional ceremonies, traditional dances, local cuisine, local crafts, and cultural festivals published between 2022 and 2024 to ensure relevance and up-to-date digital context. The selection of this time period also took into account the post-COVID-19 pandemic tourism recovery phase, during which there was an intensification of digital tourism promotion (UNWTO, 2022).

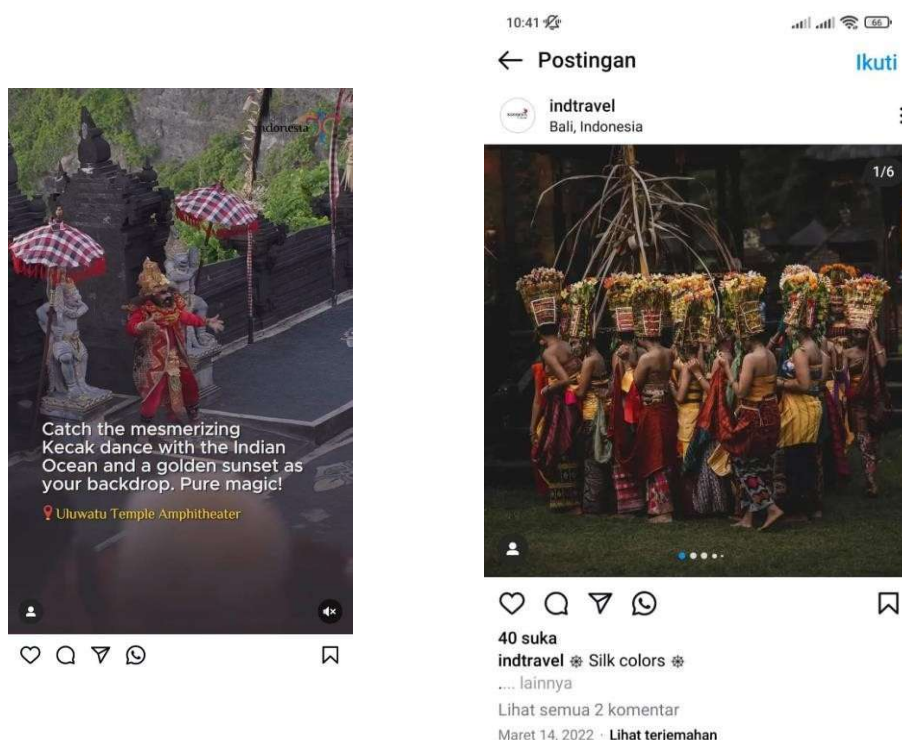
Data collection techniques were carried out using digital documentation methods with systematic steps: (1) identification and selection of social media accounts and official Indonesian tourism websites as data sources; (2) collecting data through screenshots and downloading content relevant to the research inclusion criteria; (3) categorizing data based on the type of local culture represented, media platform, and multimodal characteristics; and (4) compiling a data corpus in the form of an organized digital archive with a coding system to facilitate analysis (Kozinets, 2015). To ensure data validity (trustworthiness), this study applies four qualitative research evaluation criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely: (1) credibility through triangulation of data sources from various digital media platforms and triangulation of theory using multiple theoretical frameworks (CDA and MDA); (2) transferability through detailed thick descriptions of the research context,

data collection and analysis processes, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings in other contexts; (3) dependability through an audit trail that documents the entire research process transparently and systematically; and (4) confirmability through reflexivity, in which researchers explicitly acknowledge their subjectivity and biases that may influence data interpretation, and conduct peer debriefing with experts in discourse analysis and tourism studies to validate research interpretations and findings (Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). This combination of validation strategies ensures that the research findings not only reflect the researcher's perspective but are also grounded in credible empirical data that is academically accountable.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis of English-language tourism promotion content published through Indonesia's official tourism social media show that local culture is represented through discursive strategies that tend to highlight visual and symbolic aspects that are easily recognizable by a global audience. Cultural elements such as traditional dances, traditional ceremonies, traditional clothing, culinary specialties, and cultural landscapes are presented as key visual icons that serve to build Indonesia's image as an exotic, authentic, and tradition-rich destination. This representation shows a curative pattern of cultural selection, in which elements that are considered "marketable" internationally are more often featured than narratives about the socio- cultural life of local communities in a more contextual and in-depth manner.

**Representation of Local Culture as an Exotic Attraction in the Digital Tourism Discourse** The findings show that Indonesian local culture in English-language tourism promotion on social media is represented primarily as an exotic attraction aimed at a global audience. Cultural elements such as traditional dances, rituals, regional clothing, and cultural festivals are presented as key visual



symbols that build Indonesia's image as a "unique" and "different" destination. This pattern is in line with the characteristics of global tourism discourse that tends to emphasize cultural differentiation as a marketing strategy to attract international tourists.

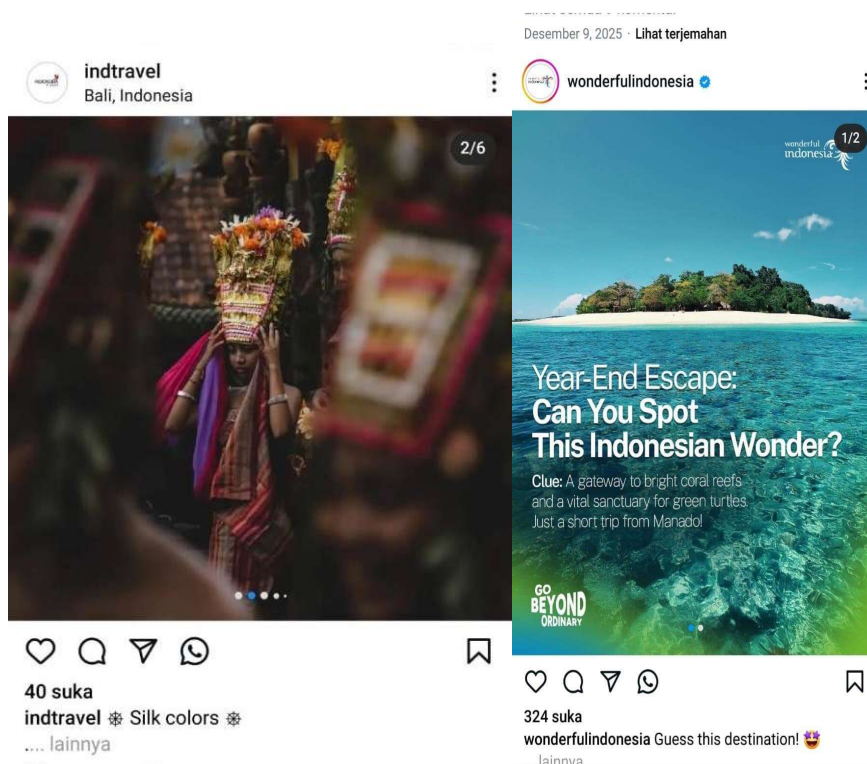
In this context, local culture is not fully presented as a living and dynamic social practice, but rather as an aesthetic object ready for visual consumption. This type of representation reinforces the criticism in critical tourism studies that tourism promotion often constructs local culture within a framework of exoticization, where the complexity of cultural meaning is reduced to images that are easily recognizable and attractive to the global market. As a result, local culture risks being understood superficially, limited



to visual symbols without an understanding of the values, history, and social context behind them. Linguistic Strategies in the Representation of Local Culture in English

From a linguistic perspective, the use of English in digital tourism promotion shows a consistent pattern of evaluative and persuasive vocabulary. Words and phrases such as authentic tradition, timeless culture, local wisdom, and unforgettable experience are used to build a positive image while framing local culture as a high-value tourist experience. This strategy shows how language functions not only as a tool for conveying information, but also as an ideological instrument in shaping tourist perceptions.

From a linguistic perspective, the use of English in tourism promotion texts shows a tendency to use evaluative and persuasive vocabulary such as unique, authentic, timeless tradition, hidden paradise, and rich cultural heritage. This lexical choice serves to build emotional appeal while strengthening Indonesia's positioning in the global tourism market. However, the analysis also shows that many local cultural terms—such as the names of traditional rituals, traditional foods, or specific cultural concepts—are retained in their original language (borrowing) and then described descriptively in English. This strategy signifies an effort to preserve cultural authenticity, although at the same time it has the potential to simplify complex cultural meanings into brief explanations that are easily consumed by international tourists.



In addition, this study found that certain local cultural terms tend to be retained in the source language (Indonesian or regional languages) through the borrowing strategy, followed by a brief explanation in English. This practice can be understood as an effort to maintain cultural authenticity, while also bridging cross-cultural differences in understanding. However, brief and descriptive explanations are often unable to represent cultural meanings in their entirety, so that local culture remains within a framework of interpretation that is adapted to the logic of global tourism consumption.

#### Commodification of Local Culture in Social Media Tourism Promotion

Critical discourse analysis shows a tendency toward commodification of local culture in digital tourism promotion content. Culture is positioned as a product with market value, where aesthetic aspects and tourist experiences are prioritized over social

functions and cultural significance for local communities. Promotional narratives generally place tourists as the main subject, while local communities appear as visual objects or backgrounds that reinforce the appeal of the destination.

Critical discourse analysis reveals that the representation of local culture in digital tourism promotion is not entirely neutral, but rather laden with the ideology of global tourism. Local culture is often positioned as an object of visual consumption and tourism experience, rather than as a dynamic and contextual practice of life. This can be seen from the dominance of narratives that place tourists as the main subject ("experience, discover, explore") while the local community is present as a backdrop or visual complement. This pattern is in line with criticism in critical tourism studies which states that tourism discourse tends to construct local culture within the framework of commodification, where cultural value is reduced to the selling value of a destination. This condition reflects the global-local power relations in the tourism industry, where cultural representation standards are largely influenced by international market tastes and expectations. Although cultural commodification does not always have a negative impact, the findings of this study show that without a reflective and ethical approach, this practice has the potential to obscure the voices of local communities and reduce the space for more equitable and contextual cultural representation.

#### The Role of Visual and Multimodal Elements in the Construction of Cultural Meaning

Multimodal analysis shows that visual elements play a dominant role in constructing representations of local Indonesian culture on social media. Images and videos depicting natural landscapes, cultural activities, and expressions of local hospitality are combined with short, persuasive English texts. The interaction between visual and verbal modes produces a cultural narrative that is harmonious, peaceful, and aesthetically appealing.

However, visual dominance also implies a simplification of cultural reality. Cultural representations tend to be homogeneous and idealistic, with minimal depictions of social dynamics, modernity, or the challenges faced by local communities. Thus, social media is not only a means of promotion, but also a space for the production of meaning that shapes the way Indonesian culture is perceived globally.

**Implications of Cultural Representation for the Sustainability of Cultural Tourism** The findings of this study have important implications for the development of sustainable cultural tourism. Local cultural representations that are overly oriented towards exoticism and commodification have the potential to create a gap between the image of the destination and the socio-cultural reality on the ground. In the long term, this can affect the tourist experience as well as the relationship between the tourism industry and local communities.

Therefore, a more reflective and inclusive English-language tourism promotion strategy is needed, one that provides space for cultural narratives that portray local communities as active subjects, not merely visual objects. This approach not only enriches the representation of Indonesian culture in digital media, but also supports cultural preservation and local community empowerment in the context of global tourism.

From a multimodal perspective, the interaction between verbal text and visual elements reinforces the construction of meaning about Indonesian culture as something harmonious, peaceful, and traditional. The use of warm colors, visual compositions that highlight nature and cultural activities, and the depiction of local communities with friendly, smiling expressions form a visual narrative consistent with the "Wonderful Indonesia" branding. However, this consistency also implies the homogenization of cultural representation, where the social diversity, dynamics of modernity, and contemporary realities of Indonesian society are underrepresented in English-language tourism promotions on social media.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study aims to critically examine how Indonesian local culture is represented in English-language tourism promotions on social media through a critical and multimodal discourse analysis approach. The results show that the representation of local culture in digital tourism promotions tends to be constructed through discursive and visual strategies that emphasize the aesthetic, unique, and exotic aspects of culture as the main attraction for global audiences. Local culture is positioned as a symbol of destination identity that is easily recognizable, but is often reduced to visual images and brief narratives tailored to the logic of

international tourism marketing.

From a linguistic perspective, the use of English in tourism promotion shows the dominance of evaluative and persuasive vocabulary that serves to build a positive image of Indonesia as an authentic and valuable cultural destination. The strategy of translating local cultural terms through borrowing and brief descriptions shows an effort to maintain authenticity, but at the same time indicates limitations in conveying the complexity of cultural meaning in its entirety to a global audience. Language, in this context, is not only a medium of communication, but also an ideological tool that frames local culture in the perspective of tourism consumption.

Critical discourse analysis reveals that the practice of cultural representation in digital tourism promotion is inseparable from the process of cultural commodification. Local culture tends to be positioned as a visual object and tourist experience, while local communities are rarely portrayed as subjects with a voice and agency in promotional narratives. This condition reflects the global-local power relations in the tourism industry, where cultural representation standards are largely influenced by international market expectations and destination branding needs.

Meanwhile, multimodal analysis shows that the interaction between verbal text and visual elements plays an important role in constructing meaning about Indonesian culture as something harmonious, traditional, and visually appealing. However, the dominance of homogeneous and idealistic visual representations has the potential to obscure the more complex and dynamic socio-cultural reality. Thus, social media not only functions as a means of tourism promotion, but also as a space for the production of meaning that shapes global perceptions of Indonesia's local culture.

Based on these findings, this study emphasizes the importance of a more reflective, ethical, and sustainable approach to tourism promotion. The representation of local culture in English in digital media should not only be oriented towards market appeal, but also provide space for cultural narratives that are contextual, inclusive, and respectful of local perspectives. Theoretically, this study contributes to tourism discourse studies by integrating linguistic, visual, and ideological analysis in the Indonesian context. Practically, these findings can serve as a reference for tourism stakeholders in designing communication strategies that are more responsible and balanced communication strategies to promote Indonesia's cultural wealth at the global level.

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