

Language strategies in tourism branding: A case study of website Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Mandailing Natal

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ABSTRACT

In the digitalization era, language strategy has become an important part of tourism brands to enhance a destination's appeal and image. This study examines the language on the Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office Website (<https://pariwisata.madina.go.id/>), which is used for tourism branding. The research method used is qualitative descriptive analysis with a critical text analysis approach, including data collection from website content. The study results indicate that the language used on this website has several shortcomings, such as less attractive narratives, inconsistent language style, a lack of emphasis on local identity, and a suboptimal information structure. In addition, the visual elements on the website are not supported by relevant narratives. This means that the potential of Mandailing Natal Regency tourism branding has not been fully utilized using a language strategy. They could do a better job with language style consistency, local feeling emphasis, and findability elements. The findings of this study offer strategic recommendations for improving website quality and advancing tourism communication strategies.

Keywords: Branding, Tourism Website, Language Strategy, Mandailing Natal, Critical Text Analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, tourism has become a main pillar of the economy in many regions. In addition to contributing significantly to regional income, tourism plays a vital role in introducing local culture and identity to the international world (Li et al., 2024; Hajar et al., 2024). Tourism branding is a strategic process that builds a destination's image and attracts tourists. The core aspects of tourism branding are local identity, cultural values, and the potential attractions of an area (Kotler et al., 2003). Mandailing Natal Regency, with its rich culture, nature, and history, has the potential to become a leading tourist destination in Indonesia. Mandailing Natal Regency has a lot of cultural wealth, history, and natural beauty that have the potential to be a world-class tourist destination, as Air terjun Sibontar, Air terjun Pagaran Gala-gala, Aek Milas Putusan, Aek Milas Hutaraja, Aek Milas Siabu, Pulau Ilik, Pantai Batu Rusa, and Pantai Batu Badaun. Then, Pulau Tamang, Goa Pastap, Pesantren Musthofawiyah, Bagas Godang, Sampuraga, Saba Sabarang, Sopo Tinjak dan Danau Saba Begu (Antara Sumut, 2023). However, challenges such as limited infrastructure and the lack of effective promotional strategies are the main obstacles to tourism development in this area. Studies on the potential and challenges of tourism in other similar places can provide lessons for Mandailing Natal. Branding strategies that prioritize local cultural identity and the use of digital media can help strengthen the competitiveness of this destination in both national and international markets. However, to make this potential a reality, more strategic work is needed to create an appealing and competitive regional brand, both nationally and internationally.

Language is a paramount element in tourism branding strategies. Language functions as a medium for exchanging messages, forming stories, and captivating tourists (Pions, 2018; Gelter & Fuchs, 2020). A smart communication plan entails persuasive language styles, narratives used in storytelling, and the use of metaphors (Gelter & Fuchs, 2020). Language in terms of tourism is not only a marketing tool but also a tool for receiving a spiritual connection between visitors and the sites. Unfortunately, there is a gap between the tourism potential of Mandailing Natal Regency and the way language is used to attract tourists, primarily through digital media, such as official websites. In the digital era, platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and websites are essential for tourism branding (Yanti et al., 2023; Seniwati, 2024).

The Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office website (<https://pariwisata.madina.go.id/>) is one of the leading promotional media that plays a strategic role in building the image of regional tourism. However, the extent to which language is effectively used to convey the uniqueness and appeal of Mandailing Natal remains an important question. Therefore, a study on the use of language in branding strategies is relevant to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities that can be utilized to increase the competitiveness of regional tourism in the area.

Given this background, this study analyzes the language used in the Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office Website as one of the main components of tourism branding. Our findings have implications for theory as well as for practitioners wishing to optimize the touristic potential of destinations using a more efficient communication strategy. This research examines two aspects: first, how the Mandailing Natal Tourism Office utilizes language in tourism branding, and second, how this impacts the impressions of tourists towards the identity and attractions of the region.

This study will provide a better understanding of the implications of language in tourism branding for the development of more flexible and efficient promotional practices. The benefits of this research contribute to academia and practitioners in tourism and serve as a reference for formulating more market-oriented tourism policies.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Approach

This study used a qualitative approach with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. This approach was chosen to analyze how language is used to build the image and identity of Mandailing Natal Regency tourism through the Tourism Office website (<https://pariwisata.madina.go.id/>). CDA is an approach that makes it possible to examine the relationship between a text and the entity behind the text to determine the structure of the text, ideology, and message in branding strategies.

2.2 Data and Data Sources

The main data of this research are text and images from the official website of the tourism office of Mandailing Natal Regency. The content analyzed included a) description of the tourist destination, b) slogan or tagline, c) articles or information about local culture, history, and attractions, and d) visual elements such as images, infographics, or supporting videos. Other datasets include tourism branding literature, language science literature, and prior studies on the role of language in destination promotion.

2.3 Data Collection Technique

Data collection was performed using the following techniques: a) observations of Website Content: overview of all texts and images that appear on the official website of Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office. b) Documentation: creating and saving screenshots and text descriptions to allow the data to be re-accessed when performing the analysis. c) Literature Review: This refers to volumes of previous books, journal articles, and reports dealing with tourism branding strategies and language analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed through the Fairclough model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which consists of three stages (Fairclough, 2010): a) Textual Analysis: understanding the text format, wordings, language type, and narration used to sell the destination. b) Discursive Practice: analyzing the production, distribution, and consumption of the text in relation to ideology and the underlying message of the text. c) Social Practice: establishing links between text analysis and the social, cultural, and economic backdrop of the Mandailing Natal Regency.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Data Finding of Language Strategy

The research results are presented in table form to make it easier to understand (see Table 1)

Table 1. Language Strategy in Tourism Branding on the Website of the Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office

No.	Category	Deficiency Findings	Information
1	Text Description	1. The narrative is less persuasive and has minimal emotional appeal.	Descriptions like "beautiful place" are too generic and don't convey the destination's uniqueness.
		2. The information is general and does not provide interesting details.	There is no in-depth look at local culture or traditions.
2	Style and Consistency of Language	1. The language style is not uniform (formal vs casual).	Gives the reader an unprofessional impression.
		2. There are many translation errors in the English version.	Grammar and word choice errors can reduce the appeal to an international audience.
3	Local Identity	1. Lack of exploration of local cultures, such as customs, music, or culinary specialties.	The unique culture of Mandailing Natal is not clearly depicted in the website narrative.
		2. No personal cultural stories or storytelling techniques.	There is no unique story that arouses tourists' emotions.
4	Visual Elements	1. Images and videos are not accompanied by supporting text narratives.	The visuals do not provide enough context to support the promotional message.

		2. Lack of creative narrative visualization elements (such as interactive videos or galleries).	Makes the content feel static and less enjoyable.
5	Target Market	1. Language is too generic and does not target a specific traveller segment.	There is no focus on a specific audience, such as cultural or adventure travellers.
		2. No clear call to action.	It does not motivate website visitors to take immediate action, such as booking a trip.
6	Structure and Information	1. Some destinations lack details such as location, accessibility, or activities to do.	The information is not enough to help travellers plan their visit.
		2. Lack of integration with social media or visitor reviews.	The website does not leverage other platforms to strengthen the digital branding strategy.

3.2 Discussion

This study evaluates the language strategy used by the Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office Website for tourism branding. The analysis shows that several strategic shortcomings affect the website's effectiveness as a promotional medium.

3.2.1 Less Engaging and Generic Narrative

The website narratives are generic and less evocative of tourists' emotions. According to [Dann \(1996\)](#) and [Can et al. \(2024\)](#), tourism communication narratives must create an emotional appeal to build strong relationships with the audience. In contrast, sentences such as "beautiful place/*sangat menarik*" or "very interesting/*tempat yang indah*" on a website are more generic and do not describe the special things that make the place special. A study by [Pan and Li \(2011\)](#); [Moin et al \(2020\)](#), [Jo et al \(2022\)](#); [Moreira et al \(2024\)](#); [Ahmed et al \(2024\)](#); [Zhang et al \(2024\)](#), emphasized the importance of storytelling in tourism branding to arouse tourists' imaginations. Websites can improve this by using captivating and relevant local stories such as myths, traditions, or authentic tourism experiences. This strategy can also create personal connections with tourists. The website narratives are generic and less evocative of tourists' emotions. According to [Batubara et al. 2021](#); [Pasquinelli et al \(2022\)](#); [Li and Wu \(2023\)](#); [i Agustí \(2024\)](#); [Confetto et al \(2024\)](#), using social media like Instagram as a means of ecotourism promotion in city branding can shape a city's identity and create the image it wants to convey to the public.

3.2.2 Stylistic Inconsistencies and Translation Errors

Inconsistent use of language between formal and casual areas may come across as unprofessional. [Halliday \(1985\)](#), [Stöckl and Bateman \(2022\)](#), [Stöckl and Pflaeging \(2022\)](#), [Dass et al. \(2023\)](#), [Bernad-Mechó et al. \(2023\)](#), [Stöckl \(2024\)](#), and [Markowitz \(2025\)](#) emphasize that a cohesive language style is crucial for achieving a unified message. Moreover, some translation errors in the English version make it less appealing to the international public. [Evans and Wurster \(2000\)](#), [Dwivedi et al. \(2025\)](#), [Shirdastian et al. \(2025\)](#), and [Shaheen et al. \(2025\)](#) state that in the era of globalization, effective cross-cultural communication is key to digital marketing strategies. Therefore, using professional translation services is necessary to ensure that the message delivered is in accordance with the global target market's expectations.

3.2.3 Lack of Emphasis on Local Identity

The local identity of Mandailing Natal, such as customs, arts, and culinary traditions, is not described in depth in the website's narrative. According to [Pike \(2016\)](#), local identity is key to differentiating tourist destinations. Without this element, a destination will find it challenging to compete in the global market. For example, the Mandailing Natal culture, which is rich in traditional music and dance, can be a significant attraction if it is integrated into a branding strategy. In addition, storytelling that contains local values can

enhance the emotional experience of tourists (Richards & Wilson, 2006). According to Pinontoan et al. (2024), branding cultural tourism destinations through cultural activities can be carried out by the Tourism Office, which becomes the strategy of the Tourism Office to attract interest to tourists with the variety of cultures.

3.2.4 Visuals Not Supported by Relevant Narrative

Visual elements such as images and videos displayed on the website are less supported by engaging narratives. According to Jenkins (2003); Winkler et al (2022); Nikulina et al (2024); and Mohamed (2025), strong visuals must be paired with a narrative to create emotional appeal. The Mandailing Natal website can add in-depth descriptions to provide context to the images and videos displayed. In addition, the use of interactive visual technology, such as virtual tours or 360-degree views, can increase the appeal of websites (Tussyadiah & Wang, 2016). This can be a solution to provide visitors with a more immersive experience. Visual elements such as images and videos displayed on the website are less supported by engaging narratives. According to Batubara et al. (2021), social media is the media of choice for tourism city branding activities because it is practical, affordable, and can reach a large audience.

3.2.5 Language Does Not Target a Specific Audience

The language strategy on the website is not designed to target a specific traveller segment, such as culture lovers, adventurers, or family travellers. According to Kotler et al (2017) and Arnett (2024), effective market segmentation is the core of a marketing strategy. Language that is too general will not attract the attention of a specific audience. In addition, the lack of a clear call-to-action, such as "Visit now!/ Kunjungi sekarang!" or "Book your tour today/ Pesan tur Anda hari ini," makes visitors unmotivated to take concrete steps. A compelling call to action can increase the conversion of website visitors to actual tourists (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Amin et al, 2021). According to Pinontoan et al. (2024), the Tourism Office promotes cultural tourism destinations through hotels and official social media to attract visitors.

3.2.6 Suboptimal Information Structure

Some displayed destinations are not equipped with important information, such as accessibility, activities, or facilities. Buhalis and Law (2008); Sönmez et al (2022); Alshaheen and Tang (2022); Novák et al (2023) believe a well-organized information structure is essential to improve user experience. Websites can increase their competitiveness by providing complete and detailed information about their products. In addition, the lack of integration with social media and visitor reviews is a weakness. Social media, such as Instagram or YouTube, play an essential role in increasing credibility and attracting the attention of millennial tourists (Leung et al., 2013; Jones et al, 2021; Tran and Rudolf, 2022; Saini et al, 2023; García-Haro et al, 2024; Hussain et al, 2024; Shaheen, 2025). The integration of visitor reviews can also help build tourist trust in a destination (Ye et al, 2011).

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study conclude that the language strategies provided on the Mandailing Natal Regency Tourism Office website are still not optimal for promoting the destination. It is plain clumsy and bland, devoid of actual emotional heft, the tone registers inconsistently, mistranslation reduces more international attractiveness, and home cultural identity regions are typically hidden. In addition, the title and image have weak integration, and the text does not provide details that help plan the trip or use calls to action to persuade certain types of visitors. These deficiencies cumulatively undermine the strategic function of the website as a concrete instrument for destination branding. Theoretically, this study contributes to the expanding literature on language tourism and branding by showing how linguistic strategies, or the lack thereof, contribute to destination identity and the role of language in the visualization of tourists. It emphasizes the potential of integrated narratives, local cultural relevance, and multimodal communication channels in branding the tourism asset, especially of a new tourism

destination. The results imply some empirical recommendations for relevant stakeholders. Recommended practices for the Tourism Office include using appealing and culturally rooted stories, maintaining stylistic cohesion across languages, and utilizing professional translation for global audiences. To have an equally important addition to visuals is why they must be accompanied by contextually relevant stories, how target audiences are segmented and how distinct calls-to-action are included to entice tourism. They can also partner with local cultural organizations, storytellers, and digital marketing specialists, making their offer more authentic and competitive.

Through the strengthening of these elements, in the future, tourism from Mandailing Natal could develop its digital presence to be a strong branding element that not only highlights the nature and cultural assets wealth but also positions Mandailing Natal to be a unique and competitive tourism destination in the national or international market. It can be extended in future research examining language strategies across a larger number of regional tourism websites. It allows for a higher-resolution level analysis, which can facilitate a more comprehensive framework for sustainable and culturally appropriate overarching tourism communication strategies.

Ethical approval

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Informed consent statement

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Statement of Disclosure

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes of the Contributor

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