

Spatial framing in tourism advertising: the linguistic construction of exoticism in Indonesian destination campaigns

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ABSTRACT

Background: Tourism advertising in Indonesia not only promotes destinations but also constructs spatial and cultural imaginaries that influence global perceptions and local policies. **Objective:** This study aims to examine how Indonesian tourism campaigns linguistically and visually frame destinations as “exotic,” “authentic,” and “pristine,” and to uncover the ideological narratives embedded in these representations. **Method:** Using a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis framework that integrates Spatial Discourse Analysis, Barthesian semiotics, and Critical Discourse Analysis, the research analyzes national promotional videos, regional brochures, and official social media content from 2020–2023. **Results:** The findings reveal that linguistic framings rely heavily on spatial metaphors (“hidden paradise,” “beyond the ordinary”) paired with sweeping visuals to evoke remoteness and exclusivity; visual exoticism is constructed through saturated color palettes, traditional costumes, and symmetrical compositions that aestheticize culture; and ideological narratives reproduce a curated tourist gaze that privileges external audiences while marginalizing local agency. **Implication:** The study implies that policymakers and tourism marketers should adopt more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches that balance promotional appeal with authenticity, community agency, and sustainability. **Novelty:** This study shows how multimodal tourism discourses construct spatial imaginaries that simultaneously enhance nation branding while reproducing selective representations that marginalize local agency and cultural complexity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism advertising in Indonesia does more than sell vacations; it manufactures ways of seeing national space. In the race for post-pandemic recovery and nation branding, campaigns such as *Wonderful Indonesia* and *#ItsTimeforBali* circulate powerful images and phrases that repeatedly frame destinations as “hidden paradises,” “untouched,” or “authentic.” This spatial framing matters because it shapes investor interest, visitor flows, and community expectations, while also risking the erasure of contemporary local life in favor of consumable idylls. When oceans are tinted aquamarine and villages are captioned as “timeless,” the promotional text does cultural and political work: it renders nature passive, communities hospitable, and modernity elsewhere. Such framings can unintentionally reproduce colonial hierarchies of looking, positioning Indonesia as an exotic periphery for metropolitan audiences. Hence, scrutinizing how these campaigns linguistically and visually construct space is urgent, both to understand their persuasive force and to assess their ethical implications for representation, sustainability, and inclusion.

Scholars have long examined tourism imaginaries and the “tourist gaze,” showing how advertising organizes desire through authenticity tropes, picturesque compositions, and host–guest asymmetries [1], [2], [3]. Semiotic studies unpack how color palettes, attire, and smiling bodies connote purity, hospitality, and safety [4], [5], [6], [7], while critical discourse analyses reveal how economic development rationales normalize unequal benefits and cultural stereotyping [3], [8], [9]. Spatial theory further notes that places are socially produced, not merely found, and that media texts materialize imagined geographies [4]. However, few studies integrate spatial discourse analysis with Barthesian visual semiotics and CDA in a single, multimodal framework. The Indonesian case—spanning national videos, provincial brochures, and algorithmically amplified social media captions—remains under-mapped for the pandemic and recovery years (2020–2023). A little attention is also given to compare how the same destination is framed across formats, or how “exotic” labels travel between state portals and verified social channels to stabilize meaning over time.

This study addresses those gaps by asking: (1) How do Indonesian tourism campaigns linguistically frame destination space, particularly through spatial metaphors, deictics, and narrative sequencing that suggest remoteness, purity, or timelessness? (2) What visual signifiers—color schemes, costumes, camera angles, and compositional grammar—construct exoticism in print and video materials? (3) Which ideological assumptions about development, culture, and nature are reproduced or contested in these texts, and how do they align with or diverge from a colonial/neo-colonial gaze? Methodologically, we analyze a corpus comprising national promotional videos and regionally produced brochures/leaflets, alongside verified social media posts. Spatial Discourse Analysis identifies linguistic framings of place; Barthesian semiotics interprets connotation and myth; and Critical Discourse Analysis interrogates power/knowledge relations. By triangulating across media and institutions, the study traces how textual and visual elements co-produce a persuasive cartography that invites tourists while disciplining what counts as “authentic.”

Our provisional argument is that Indonesian destination campaigns systematically rely on spatial metaphors of discovery and distance (“untouched shores,” “worlds away”), chromatic cues of purity (blue-green seas, golden light), and choreographies of smiling, traditionalized hosts to naturalize an exotic imaginary. These choices help the state and industry align competitiveness with a feel-good ethics of hospitality, while sidelining urban modernity, environmental pressures, and plural local temporalities. We hypothesize that videos intensify immersion through drone vistas and voice-over deixis (“here,” “beyond”), brochures stabilize meaning via curated iconography and maps, and social media captions operationalize virality via portable clichés (“hidden gem”). If supported, the findings imply both theoretical and practical contributions: advancing a multimodal, spatially attuned framework for tourism discourse; offering diagnostic tools to avoid reproducing colonial gazes; and informing policy guidelines for inclusive, sustainability-aligned messaging that foregrounds living cultures, environmental limits, and community agency.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Spatial framing in tourism

Spatial framing refers to the linguistic and visual strategies used to construct a particular way of seeing space, especially in mediated texts such as tourism advertising. Rooted in critical geography and discourse studies, it posits that space is not a neutral backdrop but a socially produced entity shaped by narratives, metaphors, and visual codes. Scholars like Inkinen (2024) and Kondoh et al (2008) argue that spatial representation is always ideological, encoding power relations and selective visibility [4], [5]. In tourism contexts, spatial framing emphasizes distance, remoteness, and novelty to create desire among audiences. Definitions vary: some emphasize its cognitive function in organizing spatial perception [6], while others stress its rhetorical and political functions in legitimizing development agendas [7]. This divergence affects how researchers interpret “exotic” representations—either as benign marketing tools or as perpetuations of historical inequalities. In this study, spatial framing is understood as an integrated linguistic-visual practice that organizes tourist imaginaries.

Spatial framing in tourism advertising can be broken down into three primary aspects. First is *lexical framing*, where specific spatial metaphors (“hidden paradise,” “gateway to adventure”) and deictic markers (“here,” “beyond”) position destinations in relation to the tourist. Second is *visual composition*, including camera angles, framing, and color palettes that create an impression of scale, depth, and isolation—techniques aligned with cinematic grammar. Third is *cartographic and diagrammatic representation*, such as maps and infographics that spatially fix destinations within a desirable geography. According to Wulandari et al (2026), these aspects work together to create “discursive cartographies” that simplify complex spaces into consumable experiences [10]. In Indonesian tourism campaigns, these elements converge to reinforce narratives of authenticity, remoteness, and natural purity. Recognizing these categories helps unpack how both textual and visual signs are orchestrated to produce persuasive tourist imaginaries.

2.2. Exoticism in tourism representation

Exoticism, in the context of tourism, refers to the portrayal of destinations and cultures as alluringly different from the norm, often through a lens of novelty, primitivism, or timelessness. Historically tied to Orientalist discourse [11], exoticism can romanticize and commodify cultural difference for external consumption. In tourism advertising, it functions as a persuasive device that stimulates curiosity and desire, often by emphasizing “authentic” traditions, unspoiled landscapes, or a slower pace of life. Contemporary scholarship distinguishes between *benign exoticism*, which celebrates cultural diversity, and *exploitative exoticism*, which reduces complex realities to stereotypes [3]. Others frame exoticism as a double-edged concept: it can enhance cultural visibility but also perpetuate unequal host–guest dynamics [8]. For this research, exoticism is defined as a representational mode that constructs cultural and environmental otherness as a desirable tourism commodity.

Exoticism in tourism advertising manifests across several dimensions. The first is *aesthetic exoticism*, conveyed through visual markers such as traditional clothing, ceremonial performances, and lush natural scenery, often saturated with vivid colors to suggest vibrancy and purity. The second is *narrative exoticism*, embedded in storylines that depict destinations as “timeless” or “unchanged by modernity.” The third is *sensory exoticism*, which evokes imagined sensory experiences—sounds of waves, scents of tropical flowers—through both textual description and sound design in audiovisual materials. Scholars such as Zhou and Edelman (2024) identify these dimensions as integral to the symbolic economy of tourism [9], where the exotic is sold as an experience rather than a physical location. In the Indonesian context, campaigns for Raja Ampat or Wakatobi often combine all three dimensions to maximize the perception of remoteness and cultural authenticity, reinforcing the marketability of the exotic.

2.3. Ideology and the tourist gaze

The concept of the “tourist gaze” describes how tourists perceive destinations through socially constructed expectations, often shaped by media and marketing [12]. Ideology operates within this gaze, directing what is seen, how it is valued, and what remains invisible. In critical discourse theory, ideology in tourism advertising is not merely about persuasion but about reproducing specific power/knowledge structures—such as development narratives, heritage authenticity, or neo-colonial relations [13]. There is a scholarly divide between those who see the tourist gaze as inherently exploitative and those who argue it can be reconfigured for ethical, sustainable tourism [1], [2]. For the purposes of this research, ideology is treated as an organizing principle that informs the selection, arrangement, and omission of linguistic and visual signs in tourism campaigns, shaping both the gaze and the marketed reality.

Ideological structures in the tourist gaze can be analyzed through three interrelated aspects. The first is *representational ideology*, which determines whose stories are told and how local people and spaces are depicted—whether as active agents or passive scenery. The second is *economic ideology*, framing tourism as an unquestioned engine of development, often omitting environmental or social costs. The third is *cultural ideology*, which fixes certain traditions as emblematic of “authentic” identity, sometimes at the expense of lived cultural dynamism. Sudarmadi (2023) notes that these aspects operate synergistically, shaping both visitor perception and local policy priorities [3]. In Indonesian campaigns, representational ideology often privileges postcard-ready landscapes over urban realities, economic ideology emphasizes job creation while downplaying labor precarity, and cultural ideology freezes tradition into performative spectacles. By unpacking these aspects, researchers can better critique and potentially reform the ideological underpinnings of tourism advertising.

3. METHOD

The material objects of this research are multimodal tourism promotional materials that linguistically and visually frame Indonesian destinations as “exotic,” “authentic,” “untouched,” or “natural.” These include state-led campaigns, regionally produced brochures, and verified social media content from 2020–2023. The focus is on both verbal elements (keywords, metaphors, slogans) and visual elements (color palettes, composition, iconography). Following Campbell and Olteanu (2023), such multimodal artefacts are treated as cultural texts that encode ideological and spatial meanings [14]. This corpus enables a comparative analysis of how spatial framing and exoticism are constructed across platforms.

This study adopts a qualitative, multimodal discourse analysis design, integrating Spatial Discourse Analysis (SDA), Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This approach allows examination of both micro-level textual/visual features and macro-level ideological structures. Multimodal discourse analysis is chosen because tourism advertising communicates meaning through the interplay of words, images, colors, and layout, requiring an integrative lens [15]. SDA identifies how space is linguistically framed; semiotics interprets connotation and myth in visual representation; CDA interrogates underlying power relations and ideological narratives. The design is interpretive and inductive, seeking to

uncover patterns of representation rather than test a priori hypotheses. This combination of approaches ensures depth in analyzing the complex semiotic orchestration that constructs Indonesian destinations for domestic and international audiences.

Table 1. Unit analysis of research

Category	Examples	Sources
National tourism videos	“Wonderful Indonesia” (2020–2023), “#ItsTimeforBali” (2021)	indonesia.travel, YouTube @indtravel
Regional brochures/leaflets	Raja Ampat, Wakatobi, Labuan Bajo, Toraja	Provincial/Regency Tourism Offices, national tourism expos
Social media posts	Instagram captions (“hidden paradise”), Facebook narratives (“tropical oasis”)	@wonderfulindonesia, @pesona.indonesia (verified accounts)

Primary data are drawn from three main sources to ensure representativeness and triangulation. First, official national tourism videos from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, accessible via the official portal (*indonesia.travel*) and YouTube channel (@indtravel). Second, regional tourism brochures and leaflets collected from Provincial or Regency Tourism Offices, and from physical exhibitions such as the Wonderful Indonesia Travel Fair. Third, official social media content from verified accounts (@wonderfulindonesia and @pesona.indonesia) on Instagram and Facebook, focusing on captions that contain spatial metaphors and exotic descriptors. Secondary data include scholarly literature on tourism discourse, exoticism, and spatial representation, which guide the analytical framework. Using verified and official sources minimizes authenticity concerns and ensures that findings reflect the state-sanctioned image of Indonesia’s destinations. This corpus composition allows exploration of how representations are shaped across video, print, and digital media, revealing both consistency and variation in framing.

Data collection was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, all national promotional videos from 2020–2023 were downloaded and archived, with accompanying transcripts of spoken and written text. In the second stage, brochures and leaflets from selected destinations (Raja Ampat, Wakatobi, Labuan Bajo, Toraja) were obtained through direct requests to tourism offices and by photographing materials distributed at national tourism expos. In the third stage, social media data were gathered using purposive sampling, selecting posts with high engagement that explicitly use spatial descriptors such as “surga tersembunyi” (hidden paradise) or “pantai perawan” (virgin beach). Each item was cataloged with metadata: source, date, medium, and thematic tags. Following Jick (1979), triangulation across media types and institutional sources was used to enhance validity [16]. Ethical considerations included respecting copyright and ensuring attribution to original creators. This systematic collection enables cross-comparison of linguistic and visual patterns in tourism representation.

Data analysis followed a sequential, multi-method process. First, Spatial Discourse Analysis (SDA) was applied to identify linguistic constructions of space, including metaphorical expressions, deixis, and narrative sequencing. Second, Roland Barthes’ semiotic framework was used to analyze visual signs at both denotative (literal) and connotative (mythic) levels, focusing on color schemes, compositional arrangements, and symbolic markers of exoticism. Third, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), based on Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, was employed to uncover ideological assumptions and power relations embedded in the texts, linking micro-level linguistic/visual choices to broader socio-political contexts. Coding was conducted manually and with the aid of qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo) to track recurring themes and intermodal relationships. The integration of SDA, semiotics, and CDA allows for a holistic interpretation of how Indonesian tourism campaigns construct spatial imaginaries and reinforce—or challenge—hegemonic narratives about place, culture, and development.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Linguistic framing of destination space

One illustrative example of linguistic framing in Indonesian tourism promotion is a screenshot from the *Wonderful Indonesia* campaign video “The Journey to a Wonderful Indonesia” (2022), published on the official YouTube channel of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (@indtravel). The frame shows overlaid text reading “Discover a Hidden Paradise” against a panoramic aerial shot of Raja Ampat’s turquoise waters. The phrase “hidden paradise” employs spatial metaphor to imply remoteness, exclusivity, and unspoiled beauty. According to Almela (2017), such descriptors situate the viewer in a discovery narrative, positioning the destination as unknown to the mainstream [17]. The lexical choice “hidden” suggests a treasure awaiting revelation, while “paradise” invokes religious and mythological connotations of

perfection. This combination constructs a mental map in which the location exists outside modernity, accessible only through a transformative journey. The visual-textual pairing becomes a strategic anchor in spatial discourse aimed at high-value tourism markets.

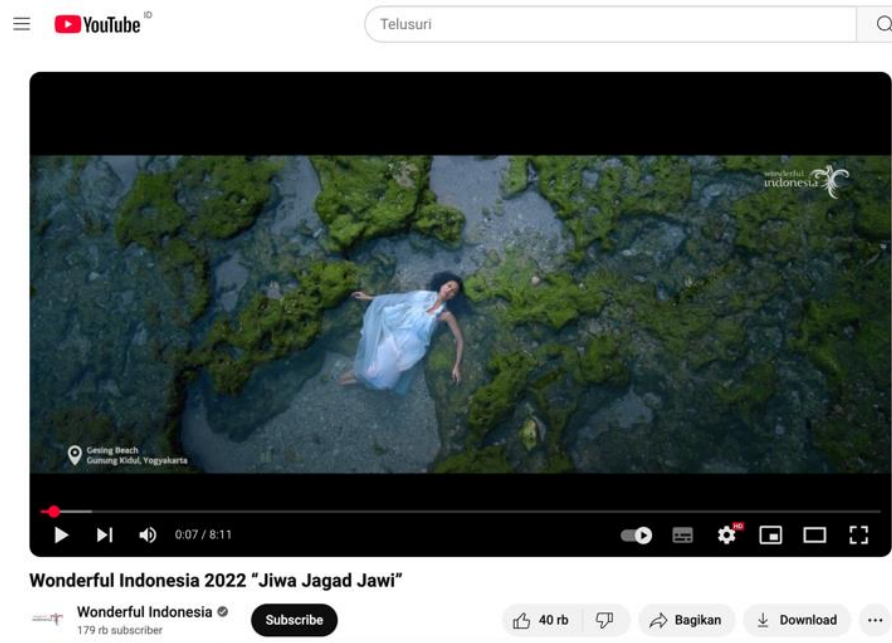


Figure 1. Wonderful Indonesia 2022 “Jiwa Jagad Jawi”
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dIBUHhDOQU)



Figure 2. Trip of Wonders: Raja Ampat the Heavenly Paradise - Indonesia Travel

Figure 1 and Figure 2 reveal a recurring pattern in national tourism campaigns: spatially loaded descriptors are paired with sweeping, high-altitude visuals. In the Raja Ampat example, the drone footage emphasizes vast open spaces and layered horizons, reinforcing a sense of distance from urban density. The typography is bold and centrally aligned, ensuring the phrase “hidden paradise” dominates the visual field, while the surrounding seascape acts as a contextual frame. Similar patterns occur in *#ItsTimeforBali* and

Wonderful Indonesia videos, where terms like “oasis of tranquility” or “beyond the ordinary” are synchronized with visuals of beaches, mountains, or rural landscapes. This co-occurrence is not incidental; it reflects an intentional alignment of linguistic and visual cues to anchor the viewer’s spatial imagination [18]. As Sobarna et al (2025) note, multimodal coherence enhances persuasive impact by making verbal and visual modes mutually reinforcing, guiding the audience toward a singular, idealized reading of the place [8].

Analytically, this pattern operates on two levels. First, it enacts a spatial othering, positioning destinations like Raja Ampat as removed from modernity—pristine and almost divine. Such framing taps into the “anticipatory gaze,” in which tourism imaginations are structured around discovery and novelty. Second, it reflects ideological tensions: while the framing may boost tourism, it risks reinforcing neo-colonial gazes, whereby distant places are exoticized and objectified for consumption. The figure of the “heavenly paradise” cloaks real places in myth, potentially overshadowing environmental stresses, local socio-economic realities, and cultural dynamism [19], [20]. In this light, linguistic and visual framing does more than sell; it shapes what and how the world imagines Indonesia—a matter worth unpacking in deeper analysis.

4.2. Symbolic construction of exoticism in visual tourism campaigns

The image presented above features Balinese dancers clad in intricately adorned traditional costumes, complete with gilded headdresses and expressive gestures, captured in a still composition that reads as both ceremonial and staged. The coloration is vivid—brilliant golds, deep reds, and lush greens—visually amplifying the sense of cultural opulence. This visual is emblematic of Indonesia tourism campaigns that mobilize traditional performance as a marker of exotic authenticity. The stylized presentation aligns with what Qeidari et al (2024) regard as aesthetic exoticism—the visual crafting of cultural otherness through striking, sensory-rich imagery [12]. Similar iconography appears across *Wonderful Indonesia* print and digital materials, where traditional dance is a privileged symbol used to suggest timeless cultural continuity and mystical allure [21]. The photograph resonates with marketing logic, positioning Balinese culture as not just heritage but a living commodity for the visual appetite of global audiences.



Figure 3. Balinese dancers with traditional costumes

Figure 3 reveals a consistent pattern in tourism campaigns: traditional cultural elements are foregrounded through meticulously arranged composition, saturated hues, and performative tableaux. The dancers, often framed symmetrically, become living icons rather than individuals, abstracted into motifs of cultural purity and spectacle. The headdresses and costumes, with their elaborate ornamentation, catch the eye and signal exoticness through visual excess and ritual association. Backgrounds are minimized or blurred to keep attention on the performers themselves, thereby isolating the culture as an aesthetic object. As Liu (2025) would argue, the myth-making process here converts a complex, dynamic tradition into a simplified sign of “authentic” Indigeneity [7]. This stylization aligns with the semiotic economy of tourism branding, where cultural heritage is condensed into instantly recognizable, exotic shorthand.

This pattern of visual exoticism operates strategically to align with tourist expectations shaped by global narratives of cultural otherness. The aesthetic choices—vivid colors, ritual pose, iconic staging—are not merely decorative, but function to evoke longing for cultural authenticity in a commodified form. Drawing on Chang and Amalina (2025), such representations can reinforce host–guest asymmetries: hosts are

positioned as spectacles rather than agents, inviting consumption rather than engagement [22]. From a semiotic standpoint, the staged ritual becomes a signifier—a myth—suggesting that culture in Indonesia is unchanging and inherently visual. Ideologically, this plays into postcolonial critiques of exoticism (Said, 1978), whereby non-Western cultures are essentialized to fit Western fantasies. Therefore, while such imagery may be visually compelling, it also risks reducing complex cultural life to consumable visual tokens, neglecting local voices, interpretations, and evolving realities.

4.3. Ideological narratives and tourist gaze in destination promotion

The above image depicts a traditional Toraja funeral procession, complete with symbolic artifacts such as wooden effigies (*tau-tau*), ornate red-and-black textiles, and structured seating arrangements for participants and onlookers. Captured from a slightly elevated angle, the photograph offers a panoramic view of the ceremony, blending human subjects with the architectural backdrop of Toraja's distinctive tongkonan houses. This visual, promoted through official tourism channels, reflects the *tourist gaze*: a curated perspective that privileges certain moments of cultural life as visually consumable events [23]. In this framing, the funeral—an intimate and spiritual community ritual—is recontextualized into a cultural spectacle accessible to outsiders. The combination of traditional iconography and ceremonial choreography constructs an image that is both culturally specific and globally marketable, reinforcing ideological narratives about “authentic” traditions persisting untouched in the face of modernity.



Figure 4. Traditional funeral rites in a Toraja village, Rantepao, Tana Toraja

Figure 4 emphasizes collective participation and performative order, with participants aligned in rows, signaling social harmony and cultural unity. The bright ceremonial garments stand in stark contrast to the earth tones of the surrounding architecture, drawing the viewer's eye toward the human focal points. Background elements, such as the tongkonan houses and carved panels, serve as spatial anchors that authenticate the location and situate it within Toraja's ethno-cultural landscape. The elevated camera perspective positions the viewer as an observer, slightly removed from the ritual yet able to take in the entire scene. This perspective mirrors a common trope in cultural tourism imagery: the visitor is granted a privileged, omniscient vantage point from which to “witness” tradition [24]. The visual thus encodes not only the cultural practice itself but also the intended mode of consumption—passive, observational, and imbued with a sense of respectful distance.

Analytically, this image enacts an ideological framing that situates Toraja culture within a development-friendly heritage discourse. By transforming a living ritual into a visual attraction, it aligns with what Hansen (2020) terms “heritage staging,” where cultural events are mediated to fit narratives of nation

branding and tourism growth [25]. The elevated perspective reflects a power dynamic: the audience—largely external—is placed in a position of controlled visibility, engaging with the culture through a curated lens. This aligns with postcolonial critiques of the tourist gaze, where the act of viewing becomes an exercise in selective framing, revealing certain aspects while concealing others [26]. While this promotes cultural visibility and potentially economic benefit, it risks commodifying sacred traditions and altering community practices to meet visitor expectations. The ideological narrative, therefore, oscillates between preservation and performance, shaping how culture is represented, consumed, and valued in the tourism economy.

5. DISCUSSION

The linguistic framing of destination space in Indonesian tourism campaigns functions as both a persuasive device and a cultural filter. By employing spatial metaphors such as “hidden paradise” and “beyond the ordinary,” these campaigns amplify destination appeal by evoking exclusivity, remoteness, and purity. Functionally, this enhances Indonesia’s competitiveness in the global tourism market by positioning its destinations within premium, experience-driven segments [18]. However, the dysfunction emerges when such framings oversimplify complex local realities, leading to potential misalignments between tourist expectations and on-the-ground experiences. These linguistic constructions can obscure socio-economic issues, environmental pressures, or the everyday modernity of host communities. In the long term, over-reliance on idealized spatial metaphors may undermine authenticity if visitors perceive a gap between the marketed image and lived reality. Thus, while effective for branding, this strategy must balance allure with accuracy to avoid ethical and reputational risks.

The underlying structure driving these linguistic framings is rooted in the semiotic economy of tourism, where language acts as a symbolic currency to differentiate destinations. Spatial discourse operates within a competitive global field where remote and pristine imagery aligns with tourist imaginaries shaped by Western and global travel media [23]. The correlation between high-value tourism markets and “discovery” narratives incentivizes the Ministry of Tourism to adopt descriptors that map Indonesian destinations onto global fantasies of the exotic. Structurally, this is sustained by policy frameworks promoting cultural and nature-based tourism as pillars of national development [26]. Consequently, linguistic framing is not merely a stylistic choice but an institutionalized practice, embedded in tourism governance and branding strategies. This explains the consistency of such metaphors across media formats and years, reflecting both market-driven imperatives and state-led narrative control over national spatial representation.

The symbolic construction of exoticism in visual tourism campaigns serves a dual function. On one hand, it acts as a cultural amplifier, visually showcasing Indonesia’s heritage assets—such as Balinese dance—in ways that are immediately recognizable and aesthetically appealing to global audiences. This supports cultural preservation by embedding traditional motifs within the tourism economy, potentially generating pride and economic benefit for local communities [8]. On the other hand, the dysfunction lies in the risk of commodification and cultural essentialism, where traditions are frozen into a performative state for external consumption. The hyper-visual exoticism may marginalize contemporary cultural expressions, reinforcing stereotypes that cultures remain static and primarily visual. This can create tension between cultural evolution and market expectations, especially when communities feel pressured to conform to “authentic” performances that align with tourist imaginaries rather than local lived realities.

The persistence of visual exoticism stems from structural and ideological factors. Tourism marketing systems rely heavily on high-impact visuals that can be rapidly circulated and recognized in competitive digital environments [3]. Cultural performances such as Balinese dance fit this need, offering striking color palettes, symmetrical compositions, and ritualized gestures that translate well into still and moving imagery. These aesthetics align with historical orientalist tropes [7] that position non-Western cultures as visually rich and spiritually deep but temporally frozen. Structurally, the integration of cultural heritage into tourism branding is supported by UNESCO heritage frameworks, national cultural policies, and private sector marketing strategies, creating a feedback loop that rewards the replication of exotic imagery. This explains why such representations remain prevalent: they are both ideologically resonant and economically advantageous, despite ongoing critiques from cultural scholars and community advocates.

The ideological narratives and tourist gaze embedded in destination promotion shape how cultural practices—such as Toraja funerals—are perceived, consumed, and valued. Functionally, these narratives can increase cultural visibility, attract niche tourism segments interested in heritage tourism, and generate income streams for local economies. They also position Indonesia as a culturally diverse nation with living traditions, enhancing its soft power. However, dysfunction occurs when these narratives commodify sacred rituals, transforming them into staged spectacles for the camera and visitor consumption. This risks altering the meaning and practice of the rituals themselves, potentially eroding their social and spiritual significance within the community [2]. Moreover, the reliance on an external gaze privileges outsider interpretations,

potentially marginalizing local voices in deciding how and when cultural practices should be shared or mediated for tourism purposes.

The correlation between ideological narratives and the tourist gaze is underpinned by historical and structural conditions. Postcolonial tourism economies often operate within representational systems that privilege external validation and visual consumption [4]. In Indonesia, national and regional tourism agencies curate cultural events to fit broader nation-branding narratives, aligning with global heritage tourism markets. This process is reinforced by media production norms—elevated camera angles, panoramic shots, and curated crowd compositions—that construct the viewer as a detached but privileged observer. Structurally, such practices are sustained by the interplay between local government tourism policies, national development goals, and international marketing benchmarks. The result is a stable but contested system where cultural representation serves both as a tool for economic growth and as a site of ongoing negotiation over authenticity, ownership, and agency in the portrayal of living traditions [20].

6. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Indonesian tourism campaigns employ a consistent multimodal strategy to frame destinations as remote, pristine, and culturally rich, achieved through the interplay of spatial metaphors, visual exoticism, and ideologically curated narratives. The key lesson is that tourism discourse is not merely descriptive but performative—it constructs spatial realities and cultural identities in ways that shape global perceptions and local policy priorities. The research's strength lies in its integration of Spatial Discourse Analysis, Barthesian semiotics, and Critical Discourse Analysis into a unified framework, enabling a holistic reading of linguistic, visual, and ideological layers. By systematically examining national videos, regional brochures, and social media content, this study extends existing literature on exoticism and the tourist gaze, introducing a multimodal, cross-platform analysis that deepens understanding of how nation branding operates in Southeast Asian contexts.

While the findings are robust, the study's scope is limited to official and verified promotional materials, which means alternative or counter-discourses from independent creators, local communities, and critical media are not included. This creates a partial view of the representational landscape, privileging state-sanctioned narratives over grassroots perspectives. Additionally, the temporal focus on 2020–2023, while capturing the pandemic and recovery period, may not reflect longer-term shifts in tourism discourse. Future research should expand the corpus to include unofficial, user-generated, and oppositional media, enabling comparison between institutional and grassroots framings. Longitudinal studies could track how linguistic and visual framings evolve over decades, particularly in response to global tourism trends, environmental changes, and digital media transformations, providing a more dynamic account of spatial and cultural representation.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Pandu Hidayat: conceptualization (lead), analysis (lead), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (lead).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee.

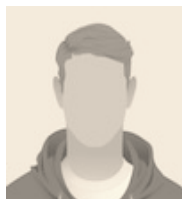
DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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