

# Multimodal Branding of Indonesian Online Promotional Discourse in Hospitality Industries

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**Abstract**—This study aims to look closely at the branding values and semantic ties of the Indonesian online promotional discourse of hospitality industry and eventually to recognize their generic patterns, social implications and interface verbally and visually. 15 online promotional texts of flight, hotel, and tourism destination were scrutinized using SFL meta functions analytical lens to see the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings in an integrated way. Besides, the analysis was also informed by the frameworks of Kress, Leeuwen, and O’Toole. Besides, interviews with three informants were conducted for a more balanced results between the branding values created by the industries and their customers’ branding awareness. The study shows that not all the verbal branding values were translated visually. However, they set up a complementary role to strengthen their promotional functions. In many ways, cultural uniqueness is used as competitive selling points by the management. For pedagogical purposes, an integrated study of verbal and visual texts is believed to be crucial and needs to be accommodated in the curriculum.

**Keywords**—online, branding, hospitality industry, interface

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the immense growth of information technology, promotional genres have undoubtedly been the fastest developing area of discourse. Promotional values have set a strong ground in most professional and academic discourse nowadays. The consumer culture has influenced our discursive activities ranging from business, academic, and even in personal context (Featherstone, 1991). Fairclough (1993) also noted the extensive restructuring of boundaries between orders of discourse and between discursive practices. The genre of consumer advertising has been stepping into professional and public service orders of discourse extensively, opening new paths for novel, hybrid, partly promotional genres.

Advertisement is widely known as the most traditional discourse intended to inform and promote to sell ideas, goods or services to a segmented group of people. The characteristic of advertisement lies in its use of varied and creative uses of lexico-grammatical and discursual forms and rhetorical strategies. The main strategy most often used in straight-line advertisements is the use of product appraisal or claims for excellence. Linguistically, they rely on verbal strategies like the use of clichés and glamorous words. In contrast, image-

building advertisements employ establishing credentials as their primary source of persuasion (Bhatia, 2004 in Kristina, 2016). Picture-caption advertisements, however, rely mostly on visual components. With regard to online advertisements, modern linguists believe that analysis of language alone is considered not enough (Ventola et. al, 2004), mainly because of the ‘shift from the dominance of the mode of writing to the mode of image’ (Kress, 2010: 6).

Online promotion or widely known as online marketing, internet marketing, or e-marketing refers to any promotional efforts done using internet websites. Specifically, online communication can be divided in terms of platform, design, and content. With regards to platform of online communication (<https://delvalle.bphc.org>), we have social networking in which users can directly connect with one another through groups, networks, and location, for examples Facebook, google+, and LinkedIn. Next is the microblogging that enables users to subscribe other users’ content, send direct messages, and reply publicly. Besides, they can also create and share hashtags to share content about related subjects like Twitter. The third is blogging (using publishing websites) that functions to record opinions, stories, articles, and links to other websites, for example WordPress and Blogger. The platform intended for publishing user’s digital photos and share them publicly or privately is photo sharing like Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest. To share videos published by users we have You Tube, Vimeo, and Periscope. Additionally, to obtain services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people, an example would be Ushahidi, Inc. Finally, an aggregator to aggregate social media site feeds in one spot is done by using keywords.

In terms of design, some considerations are put on issues whether the design of the online marketing has interesting and impressive colors, interface, segmentation for specific target consumers, and is user-friendly. Normally, content of the online marketing is made on viewers’ attraction-basis, especially in the verbal ability of the content creators to persuade viewers to make favorable decisions regarding the products or services offered.

In branding their products and services, the producers make use of verbal and visual properties for a more convincing and impactful results. Branding refers to a seller’s

promise to deliver a specific set of features, benefits and services consistently to the buyers (Kotler, 2001 in Kristina, 2016). When the branding activities are done online, a stronger role of multimodal and electronic texts in professional settings has showed its pivotal function that makes images and visual presentations even more important in meaning-making.

Looking closely at Indonesian online promotional discourse of hospitality industry, cultural values and beliefs are inextricably bound up with language. Consequently, their verbal and visual presentations are potentially influenced by cultural factors. These factors are backgrounding their perceptions, verbal and visual languages, learning, as well as communication (Kramersch, 1993).

In the Indonesian context for example, hospitality industry is expected to contribute US \$ 24 billion by 2019 exceeding other sources of the national income from crude oil, coal, and palm oil (<https://detiknews> February 2018). For that reason, tourism industry has received a much serious attention under President Jokowi's governance. Socially and culturally, Indonesians are considered to have an innate notion suitable to serve as good and friendly hosts. Therefore, a more conducive atmosphere and attitude is believed to be in the mind and behavior of the Indonesians and thus provides a strong ground for tourism industry to flourish and excel.

Considering the above phenomena, this paper attempts to have a closer look at the Indonesian online promotional discourse of hospitality industry to recognize their generic patterns, social implications and interface. Eventually, recommendations for future improvement can be drawn from results of the study.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Multimodality refers to a combination of writing, speaking, visualization, sound, music and many others for communication purposes (adapted from Ventola, et.al, 2004). Components of multimodal discourse may cover a combination of texts, gestures, facial expressions, illustrations, lighting, music, color, close-up (film), angle of camera (film), smell, sitting management, and in-door and out-door decorations.

This study of multimodal branding in the online promotion of hospitality industry is drawn from the meta-functions of language proposed by systemic functional linguistic (SFL) advocated by Halliday (1978, 1985, 1994). Under this analytical lens, three register variables, field, tenor, and mode may be realized by both language and other semiotic modes. Choices in text construction therefore is done by accommodating the meta-functions of language namely ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning as an integrated system.

Besides, the study is also informed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), as well as O'Toole (1994) in which images should be perceived as dynamic interplay between verbal and visual realization of the online promotional texts and their social situations where the communication products were created and used. Stockl (2004) adds that language and image form a symbiotic mode integration (mixing) which is guided by the principle of reciprocally balancing out limitations and

weaknesses of the modes combined. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001:20) define multimodality as 'the use of several semiotic modes and their combination within a socio-cultural domain which results in a semiotic product or event'.

With respect to works on linguistics and multimodality in promotional contexts, Sobrino (2015) argued that verbal language has undergone an intensified shift toward multimodality in the context of advertisement. She further claimed that a complex combination of metaphor and metonymy has set up a ground on the continuum of increasing conceptual complexity in the meaning making processes.

Using the paradigm of systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA), Alyousef (2015) investigated the theme and information value in finance assignments written by 19 Masters' students of accounting. He found a high frequency of theme reiteration patterns, rare occurrence of linear themes, and minimal use of multiple theme patterns.

Fei (2016) studied 51 website homepages of two chained luxury hotels as their major e-commerce platforms using corpus linguistic approach for verbal analysis and Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar for image analysis. She concluded that despite some similarities in their web-mediated communication strategies, each has discursive strategies that shows diverging attitudes in semiotic resources to construct their brand identities. She asserted that her study had shown how a multimodal analysis could add insights to brand formulation.

Additionally, Chen (2017) in her study on multimodal CDA of advertisements criticized the problematic notions in research practices and called for an interdisciplinary dialogue towards more promising research methods to highlight new research questions. In the context of online promotional discourse in UK, Al-Attar (2017) investigated five types of promotional discourses namely adverts, posts, comments, reviews, and interviewees' responses guided by Herring's (2007) Biber and Conrad's (2009), Kress and Leeuwen's (1996, 2006, 2008) frameworks. In her study, Al-Attar found that in terms of representational category, adverts were product-centered. Meanwhile representationally, posts, comments, and reviews were customers-featured.

Compared to the previous studies mentioned earlier, the present study differs in terms of context and the semantic ties between the verbal and visual realization of branding messages. 15 online promotional texts in hospitality industry were collected covering 3 texts of commercial flights (Garuda, Lion Air, Citilink), 3 texts of online promotion of hotels, and 9 texts of tourism destinations created by the Indonesian Government and other two commercial agents.

## III. METHOD

The present study belongs to descriptive qualitative study in which phenomena and events were described and explained elaboratively to recognize the generic patterns of the verbal and visual online promotion of the Indonesian hospitality industry and their deepest social reality qualitatively. The sources of data were online promotions of the Indonesian hospitality industry consisting of flights, hotels, and tourism destinations. The top three Indonesian flights were the ones

surveyed by [www.topbrand-award.com](http://www.topbrand-award.com) namely Garuda Indonesia, Lion Air, and Citilink.

Using the same surveying agency, the hotel industry was represented by three popular hotels in the most favorable tourism objects: Aston Jayapura Hotel & Convention Centre, Wae Molas Labuan Bajo, and Citadines Royal Bay Makassar. The tourism destinations selected were Bali, Borobudur from three online providers (<http://www.indonesiatravel.com>, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com>, and <https://www.tripadvisor.com>), and the Borneo orang utan tour (<http://www.orang-utantours.com>, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com>, and <https://www.tripadvisor.com>). Among the three flight corporates, two of them are state-owned (Garuda & Citilink). All of the hotels however are private industries, whereas the online tourism destinations were non-commercial or state-owned (<http://www.indonesiatravel.com>) and two other commercial agencies (<https://www.lonelyplanet.com>, and <https://www.tripadvisor.com>).

To support the triangulation, in-depth interviews with informants were administered. For flight industry, an interview with a frequent-flier was done to address the issue of experience using the three different flight services. Besides, a verbal analysis of the passengers' testimonies was done to examine consistency between the verbal claims of the management and the branding awareness of the users. Regarding selection of hotels to stay, an interview was administered with a frequent user of hotel services, with respect to the online tourism destinations, an interview was also conducted with a frequent traveler visiting different tourism destinations all over Indonesia. Data were then analyzed using the three meta-functions perspective proposed by Halliday (1985) and the multimodal notions informed by Kress and Leeuwen (1996, 2006), Kress (2010), O'Toole (1994) and Stockl (2004). In the process of analysis, focus was mainly put on the branding values and semantic ties between the verbal and the visual realizations of the online promotion.

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Garuda has elaboratively used visual platform to communicate the basic notion of friendliness and serving personality of the flight attendants represented in the photographs. The friendliness and 'eastern' style of attitude and conduct were presented by the body language of the flight attendants who slightly bow when approaching the customers either for help, extra attention or queries. The visual representation of care and kindness was drawn from the cultural resources and manifested physically in the form of body language, body posture, and their working uniforms.



Fig. 1. Flight attendants serving customers

As shown by their promotional pictures of the flight attendants serving customers (Fig. 1), Garuda Indonesia uses friendliness, politeness, helpfulness, and attentiveness of the cabin crew as its selling point visually. By bowing their bodies horizontally to the level of the passengers sitting positions, the realities captured by any viewers were positive and emotionally consoling.

Verbally, some of the branding values are constructed by exposing sustainability 'Embarking upon its 70 years in the aviation industry', international reputation 'Garuda Indonesia has been acknowledged as...', strong historical background 'Indonesia's commercial aviation history began when Indonesian people were in struggle....', revitalizing and restructuring through training crews 'Garuda Indonesia fleet and operations underwent large scale revitalization and restructuring throughout the 1980s'. It is obvious from the online promotion of Garuda Indonesia that the decision making regarding aspects to be exposed visually are selected related to typical Indonesian cultural values recognized by international audience namely their caring behavior and friendly nature.

As suggested by Gobe (2000, in Kristina, 2016) companies today see caring environment as a crucial business point, and that sellers and buyers nowadays are engaged in partnership basis in which the former reach out the later. He further argued that a successful business should position innovation, flexibility and cultural relevance as the most significant selling strategies. Furthermore, angle of the camera suggests different prominent actor as message-bearer of Garuda. The left side picture of Fig. 1 uses the flight attendant as the main resource person telling how helpful and attentive the flight attendant has been to the viewers. Visually speaking, the right photograph echoes how happy the families are with the service provided by Garuda in which the flight attendant functionally compliment the happiness and satisfaction of the passengers.

Additionally, the uniforms of the cabin crew were of Asian taste: polite, attractive, and silhouette-ly sexy. When spaciousness and the feeling of relaxed were presented visually, the branding values were semantically integrated with pictures of modern gadgets and information technology as another competitive value offered when flying with Garuda (Fig. 2). Position of the model who slightly sleeps in her cozy sliding seat with the picture taken from above shows the position of the text producer as telling 'this is what we promise to provide you in the business class cabin of Garuda'. Therefore, in terms of power, the text producer is more powerful as they set up the promise and claim for excellence of the offered product. Visually, a shot done from above strengthens this unequal power between the text producer and the text consumer (Kress, 2010).

With the tagline 'The largest private carrier in Indonesia', the second biggest flight business in Indonesia is Lion Air. Officially, in its online profile, Lion Air management created the branding values in the form of historical excellence in terms of new office, safety, security and quality, number of routes, number and kind of aircrafts, awards bestowing, business expansion and completeness of facilities. However, on the side of the consumers, the branding values received

were in the forms of affordability ‘They’re one of the few affordable options’, punctuality ‘flying throughout Indonesia at the drop of a hat’ (Nick Cornell), friendly cabin crew ‘Lion Air is one of the cheapest and friendliest you can fly’ (Akira Hisakawa), and smooth flying experience ‘the trip was one of the smoothest flying experience’ (Thomas Snitch).



Fig. 2. Picture of Lion Air



Fig. 3. Cabin’s modernity and comfortability

Verbally, the existence of Lion Air business is presented using relational processes like ‘Lion Air is the low-cost airlines’, ‘Lion Air also achieved international certification’. However, visually the picture used to create impression was done on a standard basis, very simple, lacking creativity and innovation. Most of Lion Air visual branding take the forms of pictures of their aircrafts. It strongly shows that Lion Air has not professionally explored and elaborated their visual promotional performance. This area consequently is a room to be improved by the management.

Citilink on the contrary follows its predecessor, Garuda Airways, uses the local touch and casual style to set up a unique identity of the flight by inserting a ‘pantun’ or Indonesian lyrical poems to entertain while giving information to passengers, an example is as follows:

*Pergi ke Nganjuk membeli sirih,*  
(Going to Nganjuk to buy some betels)  
*Sirih dikunyah kuatkan gigi,*  
(The betels strengthen our teeth)

*Jangan merajuk, jangan bersedih,*  
(Don’t be mad, don’t be upset)  
*Citilink bikin badan sejuk lethipun pergi*  
(Flying Citilink makes you fresh and happy)

Citilink branding values were made over issues of accelerated business growth, legal business position, and self-managed company. An example of their verbal realization in the form of existential process is ‘Citilink Indonesia has become the fastest growing airline in Indonesia since 2001’.

Visually, Citilink uses the tree diagram (Martinec & Leeuwen, 2009; Kress, 2010) to impress viewers and prospective buyers in which four very influential persons in the management were proudly handle their awards. Two of them in the central position were holding the awards, signing that these awards bestowed were their main branding values to share to the publics. Additionally, their smiling faces expose their pride on the achievements and that they want to share this happiness with the viewers and prospective passengers.



Fig. 4. Citilink board of directors

The three top brand flight industries certainly have their own strengths and weaknesses. Besides, the branding values created by the management are not automatically accepted by their customers the way they intend to do. In contrast with the other two more senior flights, Citilink seems to set up a mutually-symmetrical branding values between what the management tries to construct and impressions on the services accepted by the passengers as reported by our informant:

Branding Image of Garuda shows that this flight is suitable for travel on duties. Garuda has other positive and negative points too: established flight, on time, professional, caring crews, good food but expensive, less flight frequency, less likely to have go show ticket purchase, formal atmosphere though many games and techno-based entertainments are available. To me Garuda implicitly describe the characteristics of a flight for middle to high social status fliers with polite and positive attitude.

Lion Air reminds me of go-show tickets, low fare, frequent flight schedules, middle to low social class fliers, less friendly crews. With Lion Air, delays and cancellations are normal, payable food and drinks. Socially I can see that passengers of this flight may show less polite and agreeable attitude.

To me Citilink creates a new brand of middle class image, less formal atmosphere with live music performance in certain flights and uses ‘pantun’ (Indonesian poems) for air notice. Most passengers are happy with their landing points especially

in Jakarta. It's on time with relatively cheap tickets, but unfortunately not frequent flights are offered, flights are not at premium time schedule. (Interview done in May 28, 2018).

The next to be discussed further is the promotional texts of hotel. Verbally, Aston Jayapura Hotel & Convention Center employs four branding values as their selling points namely, 'A perfect venue for business meetings and group functions', 'attentive yet unobtrusive service, 'your starting point for Papua adventure', and 'nestled in the heart of Jayapura'. Visually, it offers modernity and luxury with a touch of locality represented by Asmat sculptures, inner home decoration, and uniform of the staff. Among the four branding values, two of them were skillfully explored and exposed by the management, especially their functions as business meeting and group functions. Both the verbal and visual descriptions of the hotel indicate a segmented group of users to target, the executives and businessmen with a high standard of income. An explicit pressure tactic is used by offering a 10 % discount to those booking directly through their website. This pressure-tactic approach is believed to be western-based. Besides, the claiming for excellence is done verbally using evaluative expression like 'A perfect venue for business meetings and group functions' and a verbal process of meaning making 'Aston Jayapura Hotel & Convention Center boasts as the tallest building in the city'.

The Wae Molas Hotel Labuan Bajo in contrast highlights the natural mountainous and sea view as their branding values. Their verbal image building is then translated visually into pictures of outdoor facilities like swimming pool and outdoor sitting arrangements. By detailing the location verbally 'located in Labuan Bajo' and facilities 'the hotel offers an outdoor swimming pool and free WiFi', the management has segmented users in mind, users with high income seeking for natural views and peacefulness.

The sea view semantically attached to the name of Citadines Royal Bay Makassar, seems to be not explored accordingly in their visual form of marketing and promotional features. To the millennials, pictures of the facilities and branding values of the hotel can drag them to favorable decision making or a complete withdrawal as reported by our informant below:

To me, the decision to select a hotel to stay will be absolutely done from the price first. Next, I am seeking for their visual presentation of the facilities offered as claimed by the hotel management. Photographs that expose distinctive products are focus of my exploration for decision making (Interview done in June 25, 2018).

Giving and showing features of their promise visually seems to be a concrete action needs to be taken by Citadines Royal Bay Makassar if they want to win the hearts of the millennial. In terms of branding values, this hotel uses strategic location, facilities, and claim for excellence as the perfect choice for leisure and business travel purposes.

With regard to the promotion of tourism destinations, [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com) for example can manipulate 'new and exciting experience' and verbally uses mental process to create imagination in the mind of the prospective users 'The mere mention of Bali evokes thoughts of a paradise'. Additionally,

they also employ repetition of parallel structures to emotionally impress their readers/viewers 'it's more than a place, it's a mood, an aspiration, a tropical state of mind'. Though the online promotion is done descriptively but it sets a stronger ground for persuasion verbally. For plausibility purposes, the management makes use of testimony made by previous visitors.

The Indonesian Ministry of Tourism in their [www.indonesiatravel.com](http://www.indonesiatravel.com) exposes more of the cultural and historical wealth of Bali. In their long verbal promotion, the text producer exposes one by one things associated with Bali, adventurous sea and mountain-climbing activities, nightlife, shopping centers and souvenir corners, cultural performance and native-mixing life experiences. They manipulate 'gimmick' to set up a more engaging and face-to face like communication, 'begin your ascent from behind the temple'; 'make sure to ask permission first'; 'take the ferry at Padang Bay'. Similar strategies were also done by the government when dealing with Borobudur. The branding values were laid mostly on historical and architectural traits.

A different strategy is employed by lonely planet to sell Borobudur. They prefer to use contrasting strategy comparing Borobudur with other similar tourism objects like Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Bagan in Myanmar. Presumably, using analogy to explain something new is more digest-able to new prospective tourists. On the other hand, [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com) prefers to contradict in their initial description of Borobudur 'Although Indonesia is largely Muslim and Bali a Hindu enclave, the UNESCO World Heritage site of Borobudur – actually located on the neighboring island of Java'. The branding values of Borobudur were set on manipulating social harmony and tangible cultural heritage endorsed by UNESCO.

The orangutan tours promoted online by commercial agencies were taken from [www.oranghutan.com](http://www.oranghutan.com) that uses both verbal and visual strategies to attract users. The core idea behind the branding values is offering experience. Visually, tourists are presented having a living experience of staying with orangutan to see their forest life while verbally they set up an itinerary of activities to make their product looks more concrete and interesting. Relatively similar strategies are also accommodated by other two agencies, [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com) and [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)

The three commercial agencies of orangutan tours are aware of their prospective customers' expectations. Their visual presentation of the advertisements for instance, has offered a stronger visual, mental, and emotional impact to animal lovers and adventurers. This idea is supported by our informant who states that 'pictures tell more convincingly than a thousand words'.

## V. CONCLUSION

The discussion made earlier has shown very strongly how meaning making of online promotional discourse needs various modes to be used in an integrated way in which the verbal and visual realization of messages were complimentary to each other. Consequently, an interdisciplinary perspective of scrutinizing the new media of information is badly needed. To content creators finding the most engaging angle for an

interesting and persuasive description of the products visually and verbally is a real challenge. A stronger ground of understanding in terms of differences and complimentary notions between language and image therefore needs to be addressed in the curriculum of discourse analysis to catch up with digitalization of every aspect of the human life.

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 3. An American traveler - an English teacher
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