

Sundanese Culture Representation in Tourism Marketing: A Visual Content and Semiotic Analysis of Website Pictorial Element

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Abstract. *Cultural representations play an important role in tourism marketing. However, it is argued that the representation of Sundanese tradition and culture in the tourism marketing of Bandung is often overshadowed by the modern representation of the city. This paper explores the representation of Sundanese culture on the pictorial elements of the websites that promote Bandung tourism. This study used visual content analysis and semiotic analysis of the representations of Sundanese culture in Bandung promotional websites through pictorial data collections and coding of 83 websites and a total of 658 images. The results indicate that Sundanese traditional food dominates the representation of Sundanese culture in Bandung tourism marketing. Furthermore, this study suggests that Sundanese culture represents closeness to nature, harmony, warmth, egalitarianism, and togetherness. Implications to practice along with recommendations for future research are provided.*

Keywords: *Cultural representation, visual content analysis, semiotic analysis, sundanese culture, pictorial destination image*

1. Introduction

Bandung city is one of the top tourism destinations in West Java, with over 1,8 million total visitors from international and domestic in 2021 (Central Bureau of Statistics of West Java, 2021). Since 1971, the city of Bandung has been developed as the centre of governance, higher education, trade, industry, culture and tourism (Rusnandar, 2010). Bandung is known for its old architecture museums, education, tourism, gastronomy and culinary (Indira, 2013). Bandung city is also being named as the capital of Priangan and becomes the centre of Sundanese culture as well.

Despite its unique tourist attractions, such as thematic culinary destinations and shopping sites, it has been argued that Bandung seems to disregard its cultural identities (Aldianto et al., 2019). Furthermore, as said by the head of

cultural arts of Bandung city, traditional arts and culture in Bandung are on the edge of extinction since the government of Bandung city tends to overlook the arts and cultural heritage of Bandung (Heriyanto, 2015). This somewhat aligns with Wickens (2017), who argued that due to modernization, the portrait of tradition and culture seems to have faded out. Meanwhile, cultural representations play an important role in tourism marketing (De Bernardi, 2019; Grimwood, Muldoon & Stevens, 2019; Zang et al., 2021). The representation of culture in tourism marketing can be shown through texts (titles, captions) and visual/ pictorial elements (graphic designs, photographs, videos), which appear in various platforms, such as conventional media (e.g. Pan, Santos & Kim, 2017), websites (e.g. De Bernardi, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021), and social media (e.g. Khalid & Chowdhury, 2020). The depiction of culture in tourism marketing

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drives tourists to visit the destination (e.g. Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013; Whang, Yong and Ko, 2016) and raises tourists' experience in visiting the destination (García, Muñoz Fernández, and López-Guzmán, 2019).

Previous research has suggested a conceptual model design for Bandung city tourism as the identity of a cultural city called Sunda Culture Center (*Sunda Centrum*) (Aldianto, 2020). The study emphasizes the importance of traditional/indigenous culture as a tourism attraction, in this case, Sundanese culture. Nonetheless, the Sundanese traditional culture's exposure is still lacking in numbers compared to its modern culture. Of course, this should be proved by research, whether it's true that the exposure of Sundanese traditional culture is still minor compared to other cultural features' exposure.

This paper aims to explore the representation of Sundanese culture on the pictorial element of the websites that promote Bandung tourism, testing the previous study's claim on Bandung's lack of cultural representation in its tourism marketing (Aldianto, 2020). The research questions of this study are RQ1: 'what are the dominant attributes of Sundanese culture representation in Bandung tourism marketing?' and RQ2: 'how do the attributes of Sundanese culture in the promotional marketing of Bandung tourism marketing reflect the Sundanese cultural values?'. To answer the research questions, this study used visual content analysis and semiotic analysis of the representations of Sundanese culture in Bandung promotional websites through pictorial data collection and coding. The pictorial element that we used in this study is limited to photographs related to Bandung tourism that appear on government and Destination Marketing Organisation websites. The originality of this research stems from the research method and analysis. Differing from similar studies that mostly used descriptive (e.g. Gusnadi, 2019; Indira, Ismanto and Santoso, 2013), this research used visual content analysis and semiotic analysis. This study also contributes new insights into the existing image

representations of Bandung tourism for Bandung tourism stakeholders including (1) the government of Bandung city, and (2) Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). The result of this research presents some practical implications to implement a more salient and representable image of Bandung in future tourism marketing approaches, suggesting that Sundanese culture portrays some meanings and values that can be further explored to introduce the inherited culture of Bandung city.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Pictorial Agents of Destination Image Formation

The concept of destination image was first coined by Gunn (1972), who identified two types of destination images based on the information sources: organic and induced. Organic image is shaped by non-tourism representatives such as via television, books, or friends' recommendations, whereas the induced image is constructed by the promotional effort or publicity of the tourist destination which is designed to attract tourists to certain tourism destinations. The concept was then further developed by Gartner (1994), who suggested that there are eight agents that play roles in destination image formation, namely: (1) Overt Induced I (traditional types of advertising, e.g. television); (2) Overt Induced II (government, tour operators or tourism organizations); (3) Covert Induced I (celebrities, tourism ambassadors); (4) Covert Induced II (influencers, Key Opinion Leaders); (5) Autonomous (documentaries, news reports); (6) Unsolicited Organic (unrequested information from tourists, e.g. user-generated content on Instagram); (7) Solicited Organic (requested information received from friends/ families); and (8) Organic (actual experience from the trip).

Pictorial information on induced and organic agents significantly affects destination images and is more powerful than texts (Donaire, et al., 2014; Konijn, et al., 2016). A number of

studies have studied the visual dimensions of destination images from pictorial agents such as photographs and videos appearing on websites, blogs or social media (e.g. Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Vu et al., 2017; Zhang, et al. 2019). More specifically, Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) suggested ten dimensions of pictorial destination images, which are: (1) people (e.g. single/ crowd); (2) nature & landscape (e.g. mountain, lake); (3) place (e.g. urban/ rural); (4) space (e.g. public/ private); (5) transport & infrastructure (e.g. bus, highways); (6) activity (e.g. the way of life, daily routines); (7) season (e.g. snowy, rainy); (8) architecture (e.g. buildings, houses); (9) heritage (e.g. historical sites, traditional art, artefacts); (10) state power (e.g. president, policeman, etc).

2.2. Cultural Representation In Tourism Marketing

The use of visual image representations in tourism marketing and place branding fosters people's awareness about certain places and local people's culture (Ge & Gretzel, 2018; Hsu & Song, 2013). In tourism marketing, particularly, culture and ethnicity are often used to construct the projected image of "Otherness" (Grossman-Thompson & Linder, 2015; Khan, 2015). Picard (1997) suggested that the concept of culture is not as broad as the traditions of a group of people, but is subject to the appreciation of aesthetic values, such as arts or heritage buildings, which have become a tourism commodity.

Authorities of states have taken a dominant part in creating the image of the tourism destination through their political roles (Shone, et al., 2016; Zhang, et al., 2016). Bali Island in Indonesia, for example, has been cultivated by the Indonesian government since 1971 as a cultural tourism destination. The state is not only promoting Balinese cultural tourism to gain recognition from the eye of international audiences but also to increase national economic development through the commodification of the Balinese-Hinduism religion, cultural arts and local tradition, and the mixing of the ethnicity and culture of Balinese people (Picard, 1997).

Some researchers have studied the significant roles of Sundanese culture in tourism. For example, Gusnadi (2019), suggests that the commodification of Sundanese culture is one of the tourist attractions, which also can help preserve the cultural heritage in the long run. Another study explored one of the Sundanese traditional instrument performance centres named 'Saung Angklung Udjo' (Syariffudin, 2016) and argued that the place is not only functioned as a show performance centre but also an exhibition centre that displays the cultural artefacts to be more accessible for people to see. Some other studies (e.g. Nurvitasari, 2015; Turgarini, 2018) discussed that one of the Sundanese cultural attributes that are very attractive to tourists is the traditional cuisine, and suggested Bandung is a city of 'foodscape'. Meanwhile, Indira, Ismanto and Santoso (2013), used descriptive methods to explore the brand image of Bandung as a tourist destination and argued that Bandung tourism is still lacking in a tourism branding concept that incorporates cultural images.

Some other studies have also discussed the values and meanings that implied on Sundanese culture. Rohmah (2018) for example, argued that Sundanese culture implies the representation of high spirituality, harmony and tolerance. Meanwhile, studying Sundanese letters/ script, Rahmadhani and Sunarya (2014) suggest that the letters are very sacral as it shows the philosophy of life of Sundanese people. Sunarya (2018) further discussed about the aesthetical elements of Sundanese and how the elements represent the high virtue and appropriateness. The spirit of togetherness and warmth characteristics were argued by Fitriyani, Suryadi and Syam (2015), indicating that Sundanese cultural values are also the representation of the Sundanese people themselves.

3. Methodology

This research was conducted by using both visual content analysis and semiotic analysis of websites that promote the tourism of

Bandung (West Java, Indonesia), whereby the content data are presented in themes to draw an interpretation of the image. Visual content analysis allows tourism researchers to measure the attributes of the destination and to further identify the hidden information that is portrayed in the visual material (Ge & Gretzel, 2018; Hou, 2017). On the other hand, semiotic analysis was used to interpret both the denotative and the connotative information portrayed by the visual media (Hunter, 2016). Semiotic analysis interprets the photo as a whole and investigates how the photo is intended to communicate messages through signs, symbols and meanings (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). It is argued that semiotic analysis plays a significant role in the process of deconstructing the meanings that are hiding behind photograph objects (Hunter, 2016; Park & Kim, 2018; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013).

3.1. Data Collection

The data collection was conducted between October and November 2022 and done through several steps. First, we selected the websites through Google advanced search, checked whether the web pages contained information about the tourism of Bandung city, and listed the validated websites' URLs. Next, we collected and saved the URL of all the photos which appeared on the pages that promote Bandung tourism. We limited our scope of visual study to the pictorial attributes of photographs and disregarded videos or motion pictures that appear on the websites. We also eliminated websites that are user-generated, such as blog sites or forum-based websites, as we focus on induced agents. We cross-checked all the data we collected by thoroughly looking at the images in detail and removing some irrelevant websites and images. From the enormous number of websites on the internet, in total, we obtained 83 websites that promote Bandung tourism, with 658 photographs that depicted the attraction of Bandung tourism.

3.2. Data Analysis

This analysis of this study was done in six phases. Firstly, we classified the websites that induce Bandung tourism into 2 categories: (1) government (e.g. Bandung city official website) and (2) Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) (e.g. tour and travel companies; tourism associations). Secondly, we distinguished the pictorial attributes of destination images (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013) from each photograph that appeared on the collected websites. Thirdly, we manually coded each pictorial attribute according to the ten dimensions and examined the images whether represents the Sundanese culture or not. Next, if the image represents Sundanese culture and tradition, we coded the data by identifying the specific cultural attributes. Then, we further analyzed the data by using the 'Roland Barthes Approach' (1964), an influential semiotic analysis approach that has been widely used in visual research (e.g. Hilander, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Barthes suggests that in semiotic analysis, the level of meanings in denotative and connotative may be distinguished into two levels of signification (the signifier and the signified). According to Barthes (1964), this analysis approach can be recruited for instrumental purposes, for example for analysing marketing semiotics. Lastly, to ensure the precision of the research findings, this study deployed theoretical triangulation by using multiple discipline theories to interpret the data (Decrop, 1999), particularly on the signified 1 (the implicit/ connotation) and signified 2 (the cultural meanings/ concept).

4. Findings and Discussion

From 83 websites that promote Bandung tourism, we identified 4 government websites (4.82%) and 78 DMO's websites that include tour and travel companies and tourism associations (93.98%). Table 1 shows the data from 658 photographs that depicted the attraction of Bandung tourism, sorted in percentage from highest to lowest.

Table 1.
Pictorial Attributes Obtained from Government And Dmos Websites

Dimension	Frequency	Percentage
Space	188	28.57%
Heritage	175	26.60%
Nature & landscape	71	10.79%
Architecture	70	10.64%
Place	59	8.97%
Activity	48	7.29%
People	30	4.56%
Transport	15	2.28%
State power	2	0.30%

This study found that the representation of Bandung tourism that predominantly appeared on government and DMOs' websites is space such as popular destinations in Bandung like Braga street, Alun-Alun, Dago and other public spaces (28.57%) and heritage such as historical sites like Bandung museums, landmarks, or traditional food that have passed on through generations (26.6%). This finding indicates that these two dimensions are the primary topics that are

used to promote Bandung tourism, as induced by local government and most destination organizations. Space and heritage, in the context of Bandung tourism, are somewhat closely related to one another as they typically represent the tourist attractions of Bandung that are renowned for their identity as the heritage from Dutch colonial areas, such as Braga street area or Bandung Old Town (Al Rasyid, 2022).

Table 2.
Sundanese Cultural Representation Appeared On Government And Dmos Websites

Attribute of Sundanese culture	Frequency	Percentage
Traditional food	74	42.29%
Sundanese language text	25	14.29%
Traditional house	24	13.71%
Traditional music instrument (<i>angklung</i>)	17	9.71%
Sundanese decorative ornaments	12	6.86%
Traditional clothes (e.g. <i>kebaya</i> , <i>iket</i>)	10	5.71%
Sundanese puppet art (<i>Wayang golek</i>)	7	4.00%
Sundanese script	6	3.43%

Meanwhile, the findings on the Sundanese cultural representation attributes indicate 8 attributes of Sundanese culture that are portrayed in the pictorial elements of websites, namely (1) traditional food, (2) Sundanese language text, (3) traditional house, (4) traditional music instrument (*angklung*), (5) Sundanese decorative ornaments, (6) traditional clothes (e.g. *kebaya*, *iket*), (7) Sundanese puppet art (*Wayang golek*), and (8) Sundanese script. From the findings, it is found that the top three most represented Sundanese cultural attributes on government and DMOs' Bandung tourism promotion websites are traditional food, Sundanese language text and traditional house. Meanwhile, the least presented ones are Sundanes puppet art and script, which contributed 4% and 3.43% of 658 pictures, respectively. This study revealed that traditional food was placed as the main representation of Sundanese culture in Bandung tourism marketing, where it took

almost half of the total photographs being studied, as exhibited in Table 2. This finding affirms that the most attractive Sundanese cultural attribute is traditional gastronomy, hence it is argued that Bandung is the city of 'foodscape' (Nurvitasari, 2015; Turgarini, 2018). The traditional dishes that appear on government and DMOs websites mostly refer to common homemade Sundanese dishes or snacks, in which the main ingredients were made from simple organic ingredients such as cassava, coconut, or green beans.

Furthermore, by distinguishing the 'signifier' and the 'signified', the result of the semiotic analysis using the 'Roland Barthes Approach' (1964) of this study are presented in Table 3. For the signifier, we identified the denotative image of the respective attributes. Meanwhile, for the signified, we divided it into two layers: the implicit layer/ connotation, and the cultural meanings/ concept.

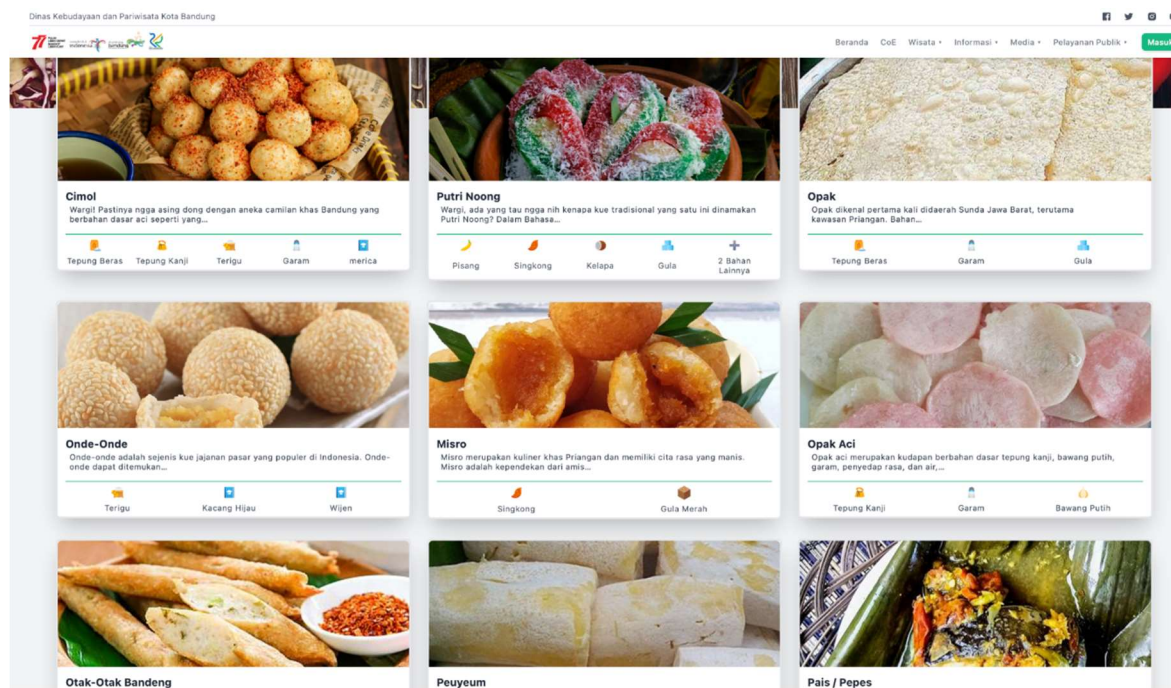


Figure 1.
Bandung traditional culinary promoted by a government website (Source: Bandung city tourism and culture department/ https://disbudpar.bandung.go.id/c_home/kuliner)

Table 3.

The Decoding Semiotic Analysis of Sundanese Cultural Representation

Attribute of Sundanese culture	Signifier (denotation)	Signified 1 (the implicit/ connotation)	Signified 2 (the cultural meanings/ concept)
Traditional food	Organic, raw vegetables, homemade snacks/ dishes	Nature-based, collectivism	
Sundanese language text	Sundanese words in Latin/ alphabet	Warm, welcoming hospitality	Sundanese culture represents closeness to nature, harmony, warmth, egalitarianism and togetherness
Traditional house	Woods, bamboo, pre-industrial	Nature-based, family proximity	
Traditional music instrument (<i>angklung</i>)	Bamboo, simple craftsmanship	Nature-based, harmony, coordinated	
Sundanese decorative ornaments	Floral, referring to nature, decorative, advanced and detailed craftsmanship, highly artistic	Cultured, philosophical esthete,	
Traditional clothes (e.g. <i>Kebaya, iket</i>)	(e.g. <i>Kebaya, iket</i> Sunda	Simplicity, benefaction modesty,	Sundanese culture represents high virtue and appropriateness in the attitude toward oneself
Sundanese puppet art (<i>Wayang golek</i>)	Woods, highly decorative, figurative, advanced, artistically complex and detailed craftsmanship	Role figure, personal characteristic	
Sundanese script	Geometrical shape, non-alphabetical	Ancient, archaic	Sundanese culture represents inherited values

The results of the semiotic analysis indicate that there are three main concepts of Sundanese representation that have been depicted in the government and DMOs' websites that promote Bandung tourism. These cultural meanings were signified from the first layer of signified (the implicit/ connotative), as translated from the denotative image of the photographs, based on the Sundanese culture attribute that appears (see Table 3).

First, this study revealed that the representation of Sundanese culture as portrayed in traditional food, Sundanese language text, traditional house and traditional music instrument (*angklung*) symbolises 'closeness to nature', 'harmony', 'warmth', 'egalitarianism' and 'togetherness'. 'Closeness to nature' is represented by the material used in traditional food (organic/ raw vegetables), traditional houses and musical instruments (wood, bamboo) (Suyatman, 2018; Herdiana,

2020; Sunarya, 2018; Krisdian, 2022). Meanwhile, 'harmony', 'warmth', 'egalitarianism' and 'togetherness' are implied from the collectivist concept associated with traditional food, traditional house, traditional musical instruments (*angklung*), and the usage of Sundanese language, as these cultural attributes are made to create strong relationships between individuals, and highly respect equality (Fitriyani, Suryadi & Syam, 2015; Rohmah, 2018). These findings somewhat align with Susanti, Sinaga, and Perdana (2017) who suggested that the local wisdom in Sundanese culture is always associated with nature and the harmony between human beings.

Secondly, it is found that the representation of Sundanese ornaments, traditional clothes and Sundanese puppet art (*Wayang Golek*) in Bandung tourism promotion connotes 'high virtue and appropriateness in the attitude toward oneself' (Sunarya, 2018). According to Karmila and Widiaty (2016), Sundanese traditional clothes like *iket* (headband), for instance, symbolises the concept of '*masagi*' (knowledge), whereby one must have extensive knowledge to shape themselves into a good leader. Meanwhile, Sundanese ornaments and puppet arts are associated with visual cues that are reflected through colours, shapes, symbols and figure roles, which represent Sundanese cultural philosophy. In particular, Sundanese *wayang golek* is a puppet performance that was historically used by Sundanese people as a medium for life safety and is filled with life tutorial messages throughout the performance (Irfansyah, 2013). As such, these cultural representations reflect the righteous way of attitude and behaviour, that may help individuals to manage their life.

Lastly, we indicated that Sundanese culture represents inherited values (Rahmadhani & Sunarya, 2014), as reflected in the representation of the Sundanese script. The Sundanese script, or *Carakan*, originally came from Pallawa letters, which have been adapted to local culture and later created new letters called Kawi. Back in the ancient age, this type

of script was widely used in the Sunda regions, including Bandung (Raden, Rustopo & Haryono, 2020). Although the script written in Sundanese letters is no longer used as a communication tool, this inherited artefact should be well preserved and appreciated as part of the legacy of Sundanese heritage. As it was inherited from ancient history, it is argued that the representation of *Carakan* letters indicates the reflection of the inherited values, which show the philosophy of life of Sundanese people (Raden, Rustopo & Haryono, 2020).

5. Conclusions

This paper aims to explore the representation of Sundanese culture on the pictorial element of the government and Destination Marketing Organisations' websites that promote Bandung tourism. The first research question of this study (RQ1) 'what are the dominant attributes of Sundanese culture representation in Bandung tourism marketing?' was answered through a content analysis of 658 pictures from 4 government and 78 DMOs websites that include tour and travel companies and tourism associations. Through semiotic analysis, the answers to the second research question (RQ2) 'how do the attributes of Sundanese culture in the promotional marketing of Bandung tourism marketing reflect the Sundanese cultural values?' were disclosed.

This research indicated traditional food, Sundanese language text and traditional house as the top three most represented cultural attributes that appeared on website pages that promote Bandung tourism. This study also argues that the representation of Sundanese culture in Bandung tourism marketing reflects a deeper meaning of Sundanese values, such as closeness to nature, harmony, warmth, egalitarianism, togetherness, high virtue, appropriateness in the attitude toward oneself and inherited values. Quantitatively, the representation of Sundanese culture for the promotion of Bandung City is very little compared to the representation of culture

which is more modern and commercial. Even though it is considered lacking in terms of numbers, it conveys Sundanese culture that represents positive traits, such as harmony with nature, togetherness, and simplicity. The lack of representation of Sundanese culture in the various tourism promotion websites observed also shows a lack of awareness of the potential of Sundanese traditional culture as a tourist attraction, and only relies on what has been clearly proven to be interesting, such as culinary. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that Sundanese culture is not limited to cuisine only, as other cultural attributes are ranging from costumes to script.

This research provides some practical implications for Bandung tourism stakeholders including (1) the government of Bandung city, and (2) Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). The findings of this study suggest that the representation of Sundanese culture in the tourism of Bandung city may implicitly reflect some cultural values that are worth to be exposed in tourism marketing efforts. The representation of Sundanese culture portrays some meanings and values that can be further explored to introduce the inherited culture of Bandung city. On top of that, some cultural attributes that are very rarely appearing in Bandung tourism promotions, such as *wayang golek* and Sundanese script should be more exposed to strengthen their existence as part of a Sundanese culture that also belongs to Bandung city.

This study has several limitations. First, the area of research in this study is limited to Bandung city and Sundanese culture. For further research, it would be worthwhile to study the representation of Sundanese culture in the tourism marketing efforts of other major cities within the Sundanese cultural hemisphere, such as Garut, Tasikmalaya or Sukabumi. Secondly, this study only investigated government and Destination Marketing Organisations' websites that promote Bandung tourism. Future studies are suggested to broaden the scope of research to other induced and organic agents such as

travel magazines, personal blogs, travel forums or social media such as Instagram, Facebook or Tiktok, by also taking into account the virality of the posts on social media (Romadhoni, Siallagan & Mayangsari, 2019). Thirdly, this study only used visual content analysis and semiotic analysis from photographs as the pictorial element of websites. It would be a good idea for future studies to explore a more comprehensive content analysis through texts from articles, captions on websites, or hashtags on social media. The semiotic analysis can also be further explored through user-generated content on personal websites, blogs or social media, as it can uncover the hidden meanings of the pictorial destination image.

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