Intercultural Place e-Branding (IPB) of Travel Agent Websites in Special Region of Yogyakarta: A Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) Approach

by Sigit 4 Ricahyono

Intercultural Place e-Branding (IPB) of Travel Agent Websites in Special Region of Yogyakarta: *A Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) Approach*

Agita Risma Nurhikmawati[1,*] Sigit Ricahyono[1]

[1]*English Teaching Department, Universitas PGRI Madiun, Madiun, Indonesia*
[*]*Corresponding author. Email: agitarnurhikmawati@unipma.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine how verbal modes (words) and visual (images) are used to build e-branding, brand design and brand communication in specific, of the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta/ DIY) as a tourist destination for foreigners in the travel agent websites. This is a qualitative study with a netnography and computer mediated multimodal discourse analysis (CM-MDA) approach. The first approach is applied since it is a specific method to analyse computer-based communication, while the latter is used for investigating elements in establishing place branding of the websites. In addition, the writers employed the theory of brand design and communication proposed by Florek, Insch, and Gnoth [1]. The data were collected and selected based on their contents which promote DIY as a main tourist destination, and their offices are located and confirmed in that area as well. A semi-structured interview to the owner, manager, and head of DIY travel agent association was also conducted. There were 12 websites and 3 participants interviewed in total. The results show that the websites tended to use the keywords "tour/ tours" and the name of the area as their website names in order to be remembered easily, and they mostly had domain suffix .com which shows the seriousness in operating the business and maintaining professionalism. Indonesian was the first language option, and to attract foreign market these websites provided English which considered as one of international languages. The websites were carefully designed so that they were attractive and informative at the same time. Based on the analysis of brand communication, DIY has portrayed as the central of Javanese culture and offered natural landscapes. This picture means that the websites relied significantly on DIY pull factors to draw audiences' attention. The studies discussing a specific element which contributes most to persuade tourists are highly recommended.

Keywords: Intercultural, place branding, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a strategic governmental sector to improve Indonesia's economic performance. It is proven by assigning this sector in the Presidential Decree No. 32 of 2011 on the Master Plan of the Indonesian Economic Acceleration and Expansion 2011-2015 (MP3EI) through the corridor 6 Bali - Nusa Tenggara. The government has invested IDR 2.05 trillion and built 475,600 homepages for it. In addition, tourism also plays as the second biggest source in providing Indonesian foreign exchange. By underlining the significance of tourism for Indonesia, hospitality agencies require to improve branding strategy through their respective websites.

According to Hankinson [1] branding is a unique product or service in a market competition and it consists of particular combination of functional attributes and symbolic values. In branding, a city or place can be addressed as "a particular class of product" [2]. It is because a city has such complexity, it is often labeled as a "mega product". Moreover, it can choose its own identity, for the example: "tourist products, investment products, residential products, as social, trade and services products, or even cultural and educational products, including fairs and exhibitions, recreation, sport and other public products" [2].

Basically, place branding can be assessed by looking at the characteristics of its brand identity which consists of brand design, brand behavior, and brand communication [3]. Brand design found in a website is related to its structure including slogans, logos, videos, photo galleries, and maps. While brand behavior is the information activity and type available on the website which accessible to visitors. Brand communication is the way of the website communicates its values and ideas to

the public by providing link, chat room, and contact. Today, online marketing should have switched to the more proactive ways since the tourism market competition is increasing and it is able to reach out wider audiences and serve better product presentations [4].

There are several previous studies discussing e-branding outside Indonesia [5][6][7][8]. Furthermore, Parker [6] applied content analysis approach to investigate online marketing practices by the Canadian Tourism Department by focusing on the homepage design, layout, and information. The result described that, on one hand, only pictures and words were used to build the symbols of cultural diversity in the country. On the other hand, the Canadian Natural Resources which closely linked to the culture did not appear in the homepage. In addition, Florek, Insch and Gnoth [3] examined the characteristics of place branding in the 16 City Council website in New Zealand by focusing on three elements, namely: brand design, brand behavior, and brand communication. The research results indicated that brand communication was the most widely used, then followed by brand behavior and brand design.

It is evident that there have been a substantial number of studies on e-branding in the tourism sector abroad but there is no similar research in Indonesia. Those studies generally use content analysis approach which could not explain how each component of the website contribute to the success of e-branding; therefore, this study uses Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CMDA) approach. Discourse Analysis is the study of how the components within a discourse can build unity so that the meaning can be generated and understood. Discourse is expanded to include all aspects of culture including symbolic system [9]. Consequently, it applies various modes [10] and discourse that combines them such as words (verbal), image (visual), and sound (auditory) system is specifically studied by Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) [11]. Furthermore, the objects of MDA include: the three-dimensional shapes such as buildings, the advertisements in e-media, and the printed media such as magazines, newspapers, and posters.

This study aims to describe how the hospitality agencies in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta / DIY) brand this city as a tourist destination for prospective foreign travelers via their own websites using CMDA approach to explain the contribution of each component, that comes in the form of words, images and sounds, on the performance of e-branding specifically on brand design and brand communication. The result of this study is expected to provide theoretical explanation regarding universality and culture-specificity in intercultural communication practices. Practically, it may serve information, suggestion, and evaluation for those travel agents so that it leads to the

foreign tourist visit increase and the national economic growth in the tourism sector.

2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach as it aims to uncover the meaning of the measurement [12] with a design combining Netnography and MDA. Netnography is an integrated method designed specifically to examine communications including online such as the blogosphere (blogging), microblogging, video casting, podcasting, social networking sites. It is also addressed as online or virtual ethnography.

The sources of data in this study were DIY travel agent websites and informants which consisted of 1 owner, 2 managers, and 1 head of the DIY tourism association. In specific, the researchers focused only on the first pages to take the data since they had a significant role to attract potential tourists to explore the websites. There were 12 websites owned by 12 travel agents that had been selected as the sample using purposive sampling. Furthermore, several criteria were applied to determine these websites consisted of: (1) those found in the first five pages of Google using keywords "Tour and Travel Agents in Yogyakarta", (2) had the main office in DIY by checking their addresses, phone numbers, and/ or maps, (3) employed at least English as a means of communication across cultures (intercultural), (4) were active during the time of research, and (5) offered and pictured DIY only on their first pages of the websites.

The data in this study were collected by using observation, documentation, and interview. The first technique was conducted where the researchers took a passive role [13] observing solely to search both verbal and visual data in DIY travel agent websites to build e-branding. Furthermore, the second one was applied to obtain print-screen data that contain words (verbal), image (visual) and sound (auditory). At last, the interviews used in this study were unstructured or qualitative [13] ones in which the researchers posed open ended questions to the informants to gain in-depth information regarding the e-branding.

In analyzing netnography, the procedures taken were: 1) making a research design; 2) formulating the problems and determining the community or online object to be studied, 3) starting the data collection in the form of words, images, and sounds as well as interactions that exist in computer-mediated-communication (CMC), 4) classifying, coding, contextualizing and generating meaning to the communicative acts found, 5) applying research ethics by encoding the data and the names of the informants [14].

There are three elements of the brand identity, namely: brand behavior, brand design, and brand communication; and this research emphasized on the last two elements since the first one has rarely found on the DIY travel agent websites. The collected data in brand design then are classified into two: pull factor and push factor. The pull factor depicts primary attractions for potential tourists, for the examples: natural beauty and cultural architecture. While the push factor offers alternative attractiveness of the pull factor or in other words, it serves the updated appeals like new creative industry, research travel, culinary, and uniqueness of a community.

To ensure the credibility or truthfulness, this study applied triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation was done by combining observations, interviews and documents [15] while member checking was conducted by arranging the second meeting with the informants to obtain confirmation on the data collected from interviews or websites [16]. The writers conducted peer debriefing by consulting the research process and data to the experts [17].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results provide the description of brand design and the summary of the interview. Brand designs were categorized into verbal and visual elements which then sub-divided into the pull and the push factors.

3.1 Brand Design

Brand design is intended to identify the elements found in websites. Most of websites have more than one pages; however, this study only considers the first page of each travel agent website.

3.1.1 The Website Names and Domains

This section is intended to classify the website names and domains used by travel agents in DIY. The choice of words for these names specifies a value communicated to the potential visitors. In naming those websites, there were four categories applied by using keywords: a) tour/tours, b) travel, c) Yogyakarta/ Jogjakarta/ Yogya/ Jogja, and d) none of the above. The keyword is one of elements in determining the branding direction. Figure 1. depicted the result that 50% websites employed the combination of category a and c at the same time as their website names, for the example: jogjadailytour.com. It was the highest applied since people would mostly search by using the most important keywords to find out the specific information regarding DIY tours.

Furthermore, the word tour in the Collins Dictionary Online [18] described as "an extended journey, usually taken for pleasure, visiting places of interest along the route". While the word travel is "to go, move, or journey from one place to another". The words in bold from the definition have intersecting meanings. Therefore, the selection of key words serves as mental act and mental meaning construction [19] to build an association in the minds of the potential tourists on activities offered by the websites. By using this reason, the combination of keyword b and c was in the second place with 16.7%. There were two websites which classified as d because they usually sell trips outside DIY as well. The least used were the single category a and c which only 8.3% each as in paramitatours.com and jogjawisata.id.
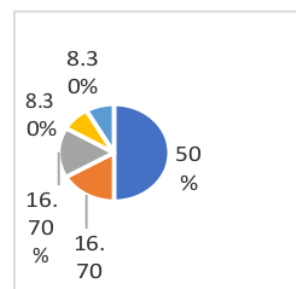

Figure 1. The distribution of the choice of keywords for the website names in four categories.

It can be seen from Figure 2. that almost all websites resided in domain .com, and only one has found in .id. In the dictionary of internet term online, techterms.com [20], it is stated, "A domain name is a unique name that identifies a website. ... Whenever you visit a website, the domain name appears in the address bar. ... All domain names have a domain suffix, such as .com, .net, or .org. The domain suffix helps identify the type of website represents the domain name" [20]. It can be seen that most of DIY travel agent websites pictured their professionalism in managing their business including the image by using the domain suffix .com. While by using .id, a country code, the website tried to provide the information of the location. Furthermore, Parker, Sears & Smith [7] found that 2 travel agent websites were in .com, 2 in .ca, the rests were in .gov. These results are in line with the findings of this study that the domain suffix is used in various ways by the travel agents. It has not been proven that one domain is more effective and is able to fully support the website branding.
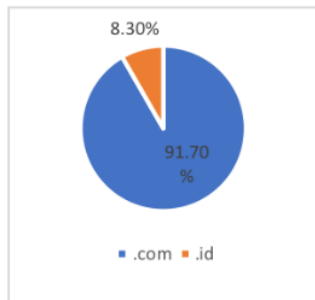
Figure 2. The distribution of the website domains.

3.1.2 English and Other Foreign Languages Used

The availability of foreign languages in those websites determines the target market of the travel agents to build intercultural communication. All of them provided English, and just one web served German as the language option. According to Statistics Indonesia [21], the number of foreign tourists always reaches the peak during January-March which the lowest would be around June; and they were dominated by Malaysian, Singaporean, French, Chinese, German, and American. Furthermore, the interviews confirmed that the travel agents relied on English because the easiness of translation engines like Google Translate would help both the agents and the clients. The travel agents which provided foreign language options other than English did that due to their specific and loyal target market. Usually they already have historical and/ or business ties with their customers, and they wanted the customers to feel homey so that they can maintain the consumer loyalty.

In Canada, the most widely used languages are English and French since these two languages are the official languages of the country and the national identity marker; thus, the Canadian travel agents mostly used those languages in their websites [7]). However, the tourism players in Nova Scotia put German while in Prince Edward Island put German and Japanese as their first language option in the websites which both areas are still owned by Canadian government [7]. This condition was slightly different from the DIY travel agent websites which used Indonesian, the official language, as the first option and English as the second one. In addition, if one of the agents has personal background or cooperation related to non-English speaking clients, they will put the client's language as the third option.

3.1.3 Other Elements

The results show that besides names and language options, all those websites had photo galleries along with the description of the offered packages and contacts which could be the information of address, phone number, social media address, or email address. There were 66.7% and 50% travel agents that put their logos and slogans respectively. The function of both logo and slogan is significant to communicate the service value to prospective tourists in a concise way. In addition, there was no website providing video found in each first page. Basically, video plays a major role for the audiences, especially the potential tourists who will visit for the first time. The presence of video can replace first-hand experience which leads to the audiences' final decision to visit or not. Since there was no video found, it seems that those websites relied on just photo galleries to serve that experience. This could be caused by the expensive budget to create even a short video clip presenting the attractions. Moreover, the web operator should renew the video periodically due to the dynamic changes of the attractions. There was no audio presented and only one website showed a DIY tourism map. Several items used by some websites to complete the whole design were: testimonial section for both previous domestic and foreign clients, price list, newsletter, partner, icon showing agency's strength, icon and description of the number of clients and trips, and calendar. In short, the brand design found in the data recently was simpler than that in 5-6 years ago which mostly exploited the verbal elements in the form of long clauses and paragraphs.

The selection of elements that must be present and absent in the website, the option between minimalist, flashy, and attractive [22] is not easy to do. Applying cutting edge on the home page website can be a big lure for potential visitors. However, the owner or manager of the website should be careful since excessive use of color, sound, video and other multimedia can be a media overkill [23] [24]. Generally, minimalist web design creates appealing visuals, avoids hyperbolic phrases and clauses, and dares to be different to attract the audiences. In addition, another study mentioned that the factors which influence the success of marketing on the website were: 1) the quality of information, 2) the convenience in browsing, 3) responsiveness, 4) security and privacy, 5) the visual appearance, 6) trustworthiness, 7) interactivity, and 8) the fulfillment of the demands of personal visitors [25]. The data show that more than 90% of the websites followed those rules. They colored the websites in white, grey, or soft green; there was no sound and video due to the effective use of pictures; the sentences were concise and able to persuade the audiences; and contacts were provided.

3.2 Brand Communication

Brand communication is intended to identify how the values or ideas communicated to the public or potential tourists through the websites. Since there was no audio mode found, the verbal and visual ones then were analyzed into pull and push factors. As depicted by Fig 3., there were 50% websites which depicted both pull and push factors using verbal elements, 25% exhibited pull factor only, and 25% did not apply words in presenting pull and/or push factors. It can be seen that pull factor still became the basis of selling point for DIY. It is described that DIY was "centre of arts", rich on Javanese architecture, history and culture and offered beautiful landscape by stating the famous attractions namely: Prambanan and Borobudur temple, Yogyakarta Palace, Mt Merapi, and Parangtritis beach. Even though mostly relied on its pull factor, DIY has expanded several alternative tourism objects, products, and activities, for example: Mangunan orchard, tubing, jeep riding in Mt Merapi, Gondola riding in a beach, jeans industry, puppet show, "special coffee made from civet droppings".
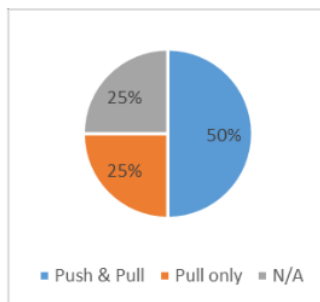

Figure 3 The percentage of pull and push factors using verbal elements

The visual elements in those websites confirmed the emphasis of the pull factor in building the value of DIY. There were 7 websites (58.3%) which applied visuals both pull and push factors, while the rest 41.7% showed solely pull factor (see Fig 4.). There were no websites that sell push factor only using verbal and visual modes. The pictures used and the verbal description certainly supported each other in providing a holistic information for the audiences. Overall, the efforts to find an alternative or the push factor had been done like visiting a creative industry or a natural attraction that have not been widely publicized. However, there were some points influence the development of push factor such as the dynamic of market's interest, the stability of human

resource management, and the help of the local governments, especially with regard to the access to locations which requires large investments.
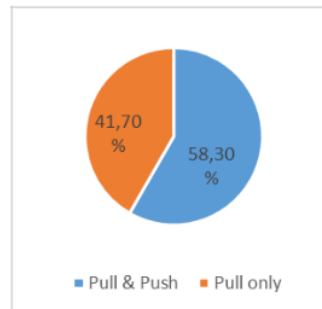

Figure 4 The percentage of pull and push factors using visual elements.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has purposes to investigate how visual and verbal elements build brand design and brand communication in DIY travel agent websites. In conclusion, based on brand design, most of those websites used keywords tour/ tours and Yogyakarta/ Jogjakarta/ Yogya/ Jogja as their names. There were 91.7% websites which resided in domain .com, and the other was in .id. All of them used Indonesian as their first language option, English as the second option, and if it is needed they will put customized ones. Eleven out of twelve websites were considerate in selecting the items which must be present or absent in order to make a minimalist but attractive website. They tended to be careful in following the rules to build a website and in mix and match both visual and verbal elements since there was no audio found.

In brand communication, there was a bigger percentage of the websites which relied on DIY pull factor. Visual and verbal elements in the websites have portrayed DIY/ Yogyakarta/ Jogjakarta/ Yogya/ Jogja as an area where the tourists could enjoy the embrace of Javanese culture, heritage, and natural beauty. It was associated with the presence of temples like Borobudur and Prambanan, Mt Merapi, and several beaches as Parangtritis and Timang. Even though some efforts have been done in establishing the alternatives, there were several points which are crucial in determining the development of DIY push factor. However, it is important to note that the DIY travel agents and the local government should cooperate to continue in finding the new tourism objects, activities, and products so that it would help the agents in selling the potential of DIY to foreigners.

The current study made use only 12 websites, and involved only a small number of informants. The results, accordingly, could not be generalized to websites used to brand other cities especially the cities where cultural backgrounds are different. With regard to the three elements of the brand identity i.e. brand behavior, brand design, and brand communication, future studies may focus on each of the element in terms of how each contributes to potential tourist persuasion. In addition, brand name [26], logo [27] [28], and color [29] especially in relation to psychology of color, are among research interests worth doing.

REFERENCES

[1] G. Hankinson, *Branding in action: cases and strategies for profitable brand management*", 1993.

[2] T. Domański and Wydawnictwo, "Marketing miasta akademickiego: rola uczelni wyższych w promocji Łodzi : monografia", *Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego*, Łódź, 2014.

[3] M. Florek, A. Insch, and J. Gnoth, "City Council websites as a means of place brand identity communication," *Place Brand.*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 276–296, Oct. 2006. doi: 10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000036.

[4] K. Gorica, E. Kordha, and K. SEVRANI, "Towards the Importance for Sustainable Development: Case Study: Albania", *Danubius University of Galati.*, 2015, doi: 10.13140/RG.2.1.3286.5445.

[5] R. Feng, A. M. Morrison, and J. A. Ismail, "East versus West: A comparison of online destination marketing in China and the USA," *J. Vacat. Mark.*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 43–56, Jan. 2004, doi: 10.1177/135676670301000105.

[6] R. Parker, "Provincial and Territorial On-Line Tourism: How Canadian Provinces and Territories Are Using the Internet for Travel Marketing and Promotion," *Acad. Mark. Stud. J.*, vol. 11, pp. 39–55, Jan. 2007.

[7] R. Parker, D. Sears, and R. Smith, "International Design Concepts in Internet Tourism Marketing: Comparing Web-Design Practices in Atlantic Canada and New England," *Acad. Mark. Stud. J.*, vol. 16, pp. 65–78, Jan. 2012.

[8] S. Hudson and N. Lang, "A destination case study of marketing tourism online: Banff, Canada," *J. Vacat. Mark.*, vol. 8, pp. 155–165, Apr. 2002, doi: 10.1177/135676670200800205.

[9] R. Scollon and S. Scollon, *Discourse and Intercultural Communication,* 2008, pp. 537–547.

[10] P. Van den Hoven and Y. Yang, "The Argumentative Reconstruction of Multimodal Discourse, Taking the ABC Coverage of President Hu Jintao's Visit to the USA as an Example," Argumentation, vol. 27, Nov. 2013, doi: 10.1007/s10503-013-9293-z.

[11] K. L. O'Halloran, "Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Systemic Functional Perspectives", *Continuum*, London, 2004.

[12] S. Keegan, "Qualitative Research: Good Decision Making Through Understanding People, Cultures and Markets", *Kogan Page*, 2009.

[13] R. K. Yin, "Qualitative Research from Start to Finish, First Edition", *Guilford Press*, 2011.

[14] R. Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online.* 2010.

[15] J. Creswell and D. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," *Theory Pract.*, vol. 39, pp. 124–130, Aug. 2000. doi: 10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2.

[16] Y. S. Lincoln and E. G. Guba, "Naturalistic Inquiry", *SAGE*, 1985.

[17] J. W. Creswell, "Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks": *SAGE Publications,* 2014.

[18] "Collins Online Dictionary | Definitions, Thesaurus and Translations." https://www.collinsdictionary.com/ (accessed Aug. 05, 2020).

[19] P. Cobley, "The Routledge Companion to Semiotics", *Routledge*, 2010.

[20] "Domain Name Definition." https://techterms.com/definition/domain_name (accessed Aug. 05, 2020).

[21] "Badan Pusat Statistik." https://www.bps.go.id/publication/2019/07/04/daa c1ba18cae1e90706ee58a/statistik-indonesia-2019.html (accessed Aug. 05, 2020).

[22] W. Moe and P. Fader, "Dynamic Conversion Behavior at E-Commerce Sites," *Manag. Sci.*, vol. 50, pp. 326–335, Mar. 2004, doi: 10.1287/mnsc.1040.0153.

[23] L. D Michael, "A Shaker Approach to Web Site Design: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics." https://www.bls.gov/osmr/research-papers/1997/html/st970120.htm (accessed Aug. 05, 2020).

[24] N. Dalal, Z. Quible, and K. Wyatt, "Cognitive Design of Home Pages: An Experimental Study of Comprehension on the World Wide Web," *Inf. Process. Manag.*, vol. 36, pp. 607–621, Jul. 2000, doi: 10.1016/S0306-4573(99)00071-0.

[25] Y. Park and U. Gretzel, "Success Factors for Destination Marketing Web Sites: A Qualitative Meta-Analysis," J. *Travel Res.*, vol. 46, pp. 46–63, Aug. 2007. doi: 10.1177/0047287507302381.

[26] A. Aksholakova, "Proper Name as a Clue Symbol of Identity," *Procedia - Soc. Behav. Sci.*, vol. 112, pp. 465–471, Feb. 2014. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1190.

[27] V. Krishnan, J. J. Kellaris, and T. W. Aurand, "Sonic logos: can sound influence willingness to pay?" *J. Prod. Brand Manag.*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 275–284, Jan. 2012, doi: 10.1108/10610421211246685.

[28] M. Peterson, S. AlShebil, and M. Bishop, "Cognitive and emotional processing of brand logo changes," *J. Prod. Brand Manag.*, vol. 24, no. 7, pp. 745–757, Jan. 2015. doi: 10.1108/JPBM-03-2015-0823.

[29] L. I. Labrecque and G. R. Milne, "To be or not to be different: Exploration of norms and benefits of color differentiation in the marketplace," *Mark. Lett.*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 165–176, 2013.

Intercultural Place e-Branding (IPB) of Travel Agent Websites in Special Region of Yogyakarta: A Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) Approach