

**DISCOURSES OF TOURISM IN THE OFFICIAL TOURISM WEBSITES  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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DISCOURSES OF TOURISM IN THE OFFICIAL TOURISM WEBSITES IN  
SOUTHEAST ASIA

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## ABSTRACT

Today, as one of the biggest population movements and one of the world's largest economic activities, tourism has become one of the more desirable areas to be investigated. Tourism promotional documents contain detailed description of potential destinations. However, very few research, if any, have focused on investigating the text and visual images in portraying the destination image on official tourism websites. This research employed a qualitative research design underpinned by the Social Constructionism theory. In addition, discourse analysis and multimodality were utilized to describe the discourses of tourism by investigating the integration of language use and visual images in portraying the tourist destinations on the official tourism websites of Southeast Asian countries. This study aims to provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the tourism discourse, in particular, the official tourism websites of four top tourism destinations in Southeast Asia that is Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia. Data were collected via online documentation and semi structured interview and analysed using both textual and visual analysis. The former included lexical and syntactical strategies, while the visual analysis focused on the analysis of salience and modality elements. The findings of the study revealed that various discourses of tourism like the discourse of diversity, and discourse of spirituality realized through textual and visual means are used to portray the destination image. Finally, the study has significant contribution to discourse driven research and has application for tourism website development.

## ABSTRAK

Sektor pelancongan adalah antara aktiviti ekonomi terbesar yang melibatkan salah satu pergerakan penduduk terbesar di dunia dan kini telah menjadi salah satu bidang kajian menarik untuk dikaji. Untuk mempromosikan sektor pelancongan, dokumen pelancongan yang mengandungi maklumat terperinci berkaitan dengan destinasi yang berpotensi digunakan. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian yang menumpukan pada teks dan imej visual untuk menggambarkan imej destinasi pelancongan dalam laman web rasmi pelancongan masih belum banyak dikaji. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif yang disandarkan pada Teori Sosial Konstruktivisme. Dalam kajian ini analisis wacana dan pendekatan *multimodality* telah diguna pakai untuk menjelaskan wacana pelancongan melalui sudut penggunaan bahasa dan elemen visual bagi menggambarkan destinasi pelancongan dalam laman web rasmi pelancongan beberapa negara di Asia Tenggara. Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk mendapatkan pemahaman terperinci dan komprehensif tentang wacana pelancongan, khususnya dalam laman web rasmi pelancongan bagi empat destinasi terkemuka di Asia Tenggara iaitu Malaysia, Thailand, Singapura dan Indonesia. Data telah dikumpul melalui dokumen dalam talian dan temuramah separa berstruktur dan telah dianalisis menggunakan analisis tekstual dan visual. Kajian tekstual meliputi strategi leksikal dan sintaksis, manakala analisis visual ditumpukan pada analisis elemen *salience* dan *modality*. Dapatan kajian mendapati bahawa wujud pelbagai wacana pelancongan seperti wacana kepelbagaian dan kerohanian melalui teks dan visual yang digunakan untuk menggambarkan sesuatu imej destinasi pelancongan tersebut. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini memberi sumbangan penting terhadap penyelidikan wacana serta mempunyai kegunaan bagi pembangunan laman web pelancongan.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ASEAN	- Association of Southeast Asian Nations
GDP	- Growth Domestic Product
ITB	- Internationale Tourismus-Börse
KL	- Kuala Lumpur
MTB	- Malaysia Tourism Board
OTWs	- Official Tourism Websites
OTWI	- Official Tourism Website of Indonesia
OTWM	- Official Tourism Website of Malaysia
OTWS	- Official Tourism Website of Singapore
OTWT	- Official Tourism Website of Thailand
RM	- Ringgit Malaysia
RQ	- Research Question
SEA	- Southeast Asia
TAT	- Tourism Authority of Thailand
TV	- Television
STB	- Singapore Tourism Boards
UNWTO	- United Nations-World Tourism Organization
UNESCO	- United Nations-Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
US\$	- Dollar United State
WWW	- World Wide Web
WHC	- World Heritage City
WHS	- Wold Heritage Site



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Special attention has been given to the tourism development through such approaches including promotional activities. Most countries employ this approach to encourage the necessary development of the tourism segment with marketing seen as an important information source for potential tourists. It aims at alluring and seducing people in making decision on the tourist destination. Thus, the deployment of promotion in tourism industry is being becoming an important priority in the development of the tourism Industry.

The enthusiasm of seeking and exploring the beauty, exoticism and uniqueness of the globe has led to increase in world-wide mobility (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010). Hence the use of tourism promotional modes in a variety of ways is primarily to portray and enhance the tourist destinations image. Consequently, tourism promotion has become a more significant approach to market destinations, because it contains deeper meanings which contextually describe the tourist destinations. Therefore, it has been urbanized into a form of globalization on its own; providing an image of the objects or places all over the world in which people may have never seen or reached (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998).

In marketing tourist destinations, the language of tourism plays an essential function in constructing the detailed description of the potential tourist destinations (Dann, 1996). In fact, the language of tourism has an important role in stylizing the

strangeness, exoticism and authenticity of the touristic destination through different promotional tools such as website, leaflet, brochure, and guidebook, (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010; Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005). Therefore, tourism becomes a discourse object (Dann, 1996) which is developed through different discourse elements such as speech or text and visual elements. Hence, promoting tourism, different promotional modes are developed through different discourses to enhance the destination image.

With regard to the interactive communication, tourism conjures up the image of travelling and presents salient travelling experience. The advancement of information and technology has created a plethora of sources to promote the tourism industry to further increase it at a substantial rate. The utilization of the different tourism promotional tools such as brochures, leaflet, travel magazines, websites and any other type of media may help to attractively promote tourism destinations and tourist attractions. It is important to note that tourism promotion through the use of imagery and representation play a vital role and can potentially change the market segment in a highly competitive industry (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). Selected media provides a description of what tourism providers really want in order to introduce and describe the destination in the different tourism promotion modes such as websites or other printed media. According to Thurlow & Jaworski (2010), language in any kind of tourism promotional materials plays a significant role to portray the tourist destination image. Furthermore, the visual aspect in tourism promotion also enhances the value of the destination (Mocini, 2005). Therefore, both language and visual elements as part of the tourism promotions play an important role in constructing the discourse of tourism.

It is clearly that discourse of tourism plays an important role to portray tourist destination image, since it encompasses both language and visual elements that are put into a frame to describe tourism as a powerful domain of existing social life (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010). Tourism as one of the greatest population movements has become an object of investigation by discourse analysts and sociolinguists. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing body of research on tourism discourse by presenting the analysis of the interplay between language and visual element in constructing the different discourses of tourism. The findings of this study

will be discussed in the subsequent finding chapters and will show how tourism interpreted. In this way, tourism is interpreted, explained and described in the four different tourism websites.

## **1.2 Background of the Problem**

In this millennium, tourism industry has become one of the key industrial players which contribute to an increase internationalization and globalization. The technology, communication and transportation advancement increase people's motivation to travel and explore different societies. Tourism is one of the greatest worldwide economic activities and social interaction which pushes the flow of people to provide and consume the service and goods (Freidman, 1995; Reisinger, 2009). Therefore, tourism involves many aspects of human life.

In conjunction with the on-going growth of national income in most countries, the significant turn down in the liberalization of cross-border movements, the real costs of transportation, and the increasing tendency to travel abroad, the number of total international tourist arrivals in the world as a whole continues to grow. Consequently, most countries in the Southeast Asia area such as Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia have committed themselves to increase and develop international tourism. The investment in tourism has resulted in a significant increase in the number of worldwide arrivals to Southeast Asia and the region's share of the total world tourist arrivals (ITB World Travel Trade Report 2012/2013; WTTC, 2014). These countries try to portray their tourist destinations in a favourable way, for instance by providing valuable information and establishing the destination image. In this sense, tourism promotional activities are seen as giving a positive impact in introducing and portraying the tourist destination. In fact, the language and visual elements are the factors that create particular discourses about the image and identity of particular destinations (Jørgensen, 2004; Adams, 2004; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). A number of studies have been conducted which are related to tourism discourse in particular investigating the role of language usage or visual element. However, there are only few if any which investigates the combination of

text and visual element on official tourism websites (OTWs) (Salim, Ibrahim & Hassan, 2012). Previous studies have shown that the combination language and visual element as discourses play a significant role to portray the destination in tourism promotion modes. Therefore, the focus of this study is to investigate how language or texts and visual images enhance the destination portrayal on OTWs.

### **1.2.1 Tourism Promotion**

Tourism promotional efforts include various tools such as websites, brochures, magazines and guidebooks. However, most tourists prefer utilizing online medium to get information about a particular tourist destination (Fakharyan et.al, 2012; Loda, 2011). The finding of this study has shown that the dominant tool used by tourists to search for information about particular destination is via website search. For instance, the use of website as the source of information to search for tourist destination in Indonesia reached 24% and this is followed by brochure/advertisement, which is approximately 8% to 15% (Suradnya, 2006). Therefore, in line with advances in information technology, the use of website tends to continue to rise and brochure/advertisement remains as a supporting mediation for tourists in decision-making. Thus, website has become the most popular mediation used by tourist for decision-making as they can ‘virtually’ visit destinations through these websites.

Through these tourism websites, language and visual images are the important aspects to portray the destination. These aspects enhance the destination image by manipulating the tourist’s emotion in order to engage the tourist’s experience (Ling, 2008; Hunter, 2008). Furthermore, tourism promotional materials contain unseen messages which are transmitted by certain images and language that sell the positive and attractive aspects of the destination to potential travellers. Several studies examined the role of language and visual image to enhance the tourist destinations (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Edelheim, 2007; Nasution, et al, 2005; Jorgensen, 2004). The work of El-Daly (2011), for example, indicates that the promotional advertisement has to be seen as a social discourse which emphasizes not

only the language structure but also the substance of communicative exchange achieved through visual elements. Mocini (2005) identifies the language and visual elements as the elements that contribute to the enhancement of the tourist's perception.

In trying to enhance the tourist's perceptions of a destination, the image of the destination plays a very important role (Molina, Gomes, & Martin-Consuegra, 2010). In Fact, tourism promotional media is one of the important tools used to construct the destination image and thus, influencing tourist arrival. It covers all information through both language and visual element. Therefore, the language and visual elements play a significant role to portray and enhance the destination image. For instance, lexical and syntactical choices as discourse strategy can help to not only portray the destination image but also to enhance it (Hassan, et.al, 2008).

There is little doubt that tourism promotional modes such as, websites, advertisement and brochures as discourses are important mediations to establish and develop communication between the tourism practitioners and the potential tourists or actual tourists. Therefore, the primary concern of this study was to examine how language and visual element construe the meaning to portray the tourist destinations in tourism websites. As Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia are major tourist destinations in Southeast Asia, this study focused on discourses found in the official tourism websites of these countries in portraying the tourist destinations. The following sections will provide a brief background of the tourism promotional activities in the four selected countries.

#### **1.2.1.1 Tourism Promotion in Malaysia**

There is no denying that the number of tourist arrivals is also influenced by factors such as the stability of the country, and service provided. However, as previously discussed, promotional activity becomes an important aspect in constructing the tourism destination image. As a developing country, Malaysia tries to gain as many arrivals as possible through different means including the promotion

or the imagery of the country. As the most popular tourism promotional tool, the official tourism website uses different discourses to portray and enhance the value of the tourist destination. For example, Malaysia uses tagline '*Malaysia truly Asia*' to construct the Malaysia's identity as diverse destinations and attractions. The tagline impacts to increase the destination image that Malaysia has diverse tourist attractions.

### **1.2.1.2 Tourism Promotion in Thailand**

The Thailand tourism tagline "Amazing Thailand Always Amazes You" is used as a way to help build up the country's strong brand and position as a unique destination with a wide variety of experiences for tourists. In addition, the tagline also helps to strengthen the many aspects of "Thainess" that are so engaging to visitors from around the world (TAT, 2012). This in the same way may contribute to the number of tourist arrivals. The Thailand Tourism website creates specific discourse in amazing the potential tourist through language use and visual elements.

### **1.2.1.3 Tourism Promotion in Singapore**

As one of the developed nations in Southeast Asia, geographically and economically, Singapore is one of the most welfare conscious countries over the globe and the only one with the first world status in Southeast Asia. This status makes Singapore attractive to many visitors. The image of Singapore was not created incidentally but it took a long time with different conditions. With the lack of natural resources and the limitation of geographic space, Singapore implements the strategy by creating a concept of hub for everything to link the trade and services including tourism development. Services and trades are strongly connected to the hospitality, hence Singapore creates the comfort and security and conducive-environment. Then, tourism is one of the primary concerns in the concept to obtain the economic benefit for the country. As a key economic pillar, tourism Singapore tries to create

innovative and tourist experience. Thus, designing an image of Singapore in the visitors' minds through specific discourse destination becomes the primary concern. For example, the Government of Singapore distinguishes and promotes Singapore as a must-visit destination, offering empowering experiences through the "*Your Singapore*" destination brand, and personalizes every visit and experience. Hence, language and visual elements take an important part in building the image and branding of Singapore as a destination that offers many exiting tourist experiences which is reflected the discourse used on the website. Therefore, the current study investigated in depth how the tourism website of Singapore uses different discourses to describe and promote the tourist attractions. The study focused on the language and visual elements found in the Singaporean website.

#### **1.2.1.4 Tourism Promotion in Indonesia**

The small number of tourist arrivals in Indonesia may be caused by some factors including promotional factors. This may result in an inadequate or weak 'pull factor' (Walker & Walker, 2011). In particular, tourism products of some areas in Indonesia such as Jawa Tengah, South Sulawesi, Yogyakarta, and North Sulawesi have not been specifically ogled by international tourists. This may due to these products inability to meet the needs and criteria of what they expect to have when they want to travel to the destination. Moreover, the tourism products are not published well even through media and other tourism promotion (Kamase, 2008). The main factors to cause this are the use of language and visual image in tourism promotion modes (Mocini, 2005).

Therefore, the concern of this study was to investigate how the different discourses of tourism are realised through the language or textual and visual elements found in the official tourism websites of the four selected countries. Although, this study did not examine how language and visual images on the tourism websites impact on the tourist arrivals, it is important to understand how important tourist arrival is for the tourism industry and the countries focused of this study.



## 1.2.2 Tourists Arrivals in the Southeast Asian Regions

With regard to the movement of tourists, there is a significant increase year by year and the remaining growth of arrivals in some countries makes this industry a popular sector in economic development (UNWTO, 2012). For instance, the statistics of tourist arrivals in the Southeast Asian regions has shown a steady increase from time to time. This is closely related to the efforts of each country to increase the number of arrivals. For example, promotional activity is the way to portray the tourist destination to the potential tourists by representing arts and culture as key products for tourism. Comparing the tourist arrivals in Southeast Asian countries, the following four countries have achieved the top ranking positions in this area: i) Malaysia, ii) Thailand, iii) Singapore and iv) Indonesia accordingly. In fact, these countries are listed in the top ten destinations in Asia Pacific as shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1:** Top ten destinations in Asia and Pacific in 2010-2013  
(UNWTO, 2012; 2013)

Rank	Country	Tourist Arrivals (2010) in Million	Country	Tourist Arrivals (2011) in Million	Country	Tourist Arrivals (2012) in Million	Country	Tourist Arrivals (2013) in Million
1	China	55.67	China	57.58	China	57.7	China	55.7
2	Malaysia	24.58	Malaysia	24.71	Malaysia	25	Thailand	26.5
3	Hong Kong	20.09	Hong Kong	22.32	Hong Kong	23.7	Malaysia	25.7
4	Thailand	15.84	Thailand	19.10	Thailand	22.4	Hong Kong	25.6
5	Macau	11.93	Macau	12.93	Macau	13.5	Singapore	15.7
6	Singapore	9.16	Singapore	10.39	South Korea	11.1	Macau	14.2
7	South Korea	8.80	South Korea	9.80	Singapore	11.0	South Korea	12.1
8	Japan	8.61	Indonesia	7.65	Japan	8.3	Japan	10.3
9	Indonesia	7.00	India	6.29	Indonesia	8.0	Indonesia	8.8
10	Australia	5.89	Japan	6.22	Taiwan	7.3	Taiwan	8.0

As can be seen in table 1.1, although the tourist arrivals in Asia Pacific and other countries such as Japan and Australia remain unstable, there is an increase of tourist arrivals in the Southeast Asia and other countries from 2010 to 2013. For example, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia are included as the top tenth destinations in Asia Pacific countries. These countries are the most popular

destinations leading the tourist arrivals in Southeast Asia. Therefore, this study was concerned with the official tourism websites of the four leading tourist destinations countries in Southeast Asia because these official tourism websites play an important role to enhance and portray the tourist destinations or attractions.

#### **1.2.2.1 Tourist Arrivals in Malaysia**

Malaysia is one of the most popular destination countries in Southeast Asia visited by tourists. Tourism has enormously increased the country's foreign exchange and job prospects which are the target of the 10<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan. In 2010, Malaysia recorded 24.5 million arrivals with RM56.5 billion (US\$ 18.3 billion) in tourism revenues. This number is the maximum ever in the history of the industry that placed Malaysia in 9<sup>th</sup> top-ten of the UNWTO list. Then, in 2013 the country gained 25.71 million tourist arrivals which set it in the third position among Asia Pacific countries (Malaysia country report on ASEAN Tourism Forum 2012, UNWTO, 2013).

#### **1.2.2.2 Tourist Arrivals in Thailand**

The tourism industry plays a significant role in the Thai economic development. Tourism is set at the second position as the biggest source of revenue for the country. It contributes significantly to Thailand's gross domestic product (GDP), affecting employment, investment, and foreign exchange earnings (TAT, 2006). Conversely, there are a number of factors that influence the competitiveness of the Thai tourism industry such as political issues, economic situation and language (Thitthongkam & Walsh, 2010). Tourism Authority of Thailand documented 15.84 million tourist arrivals in 2010 by recording US\$ 20.1 billion tourism receipts and 19 million tourist arrivals in 2011 with the receipts of about US\$ 26.3 billion, an increase of 19.84 per cent year-on-year and positioned it in the fourth rank in Asia Pacific (UNWTO, 2012). Thailand saw a significant increase in 2013 by gaining the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank in Asia Pacific by recording 26.7 million tourist arrivals. The increase of

tourism in different part of the world contributes to the recovery of the global economy and the popularity of tourist attractions in Thailand creating an impact on tourist arrivals in the country.

### **1.2.2.3 Tourism Arrivals in Singapore**

In 2010, tourism was the largest service industry in Singapore, with tourist arrivals gaining 9.16 million by recording US\$14.1 billion receipt. In the following year, the tourism industry continue add to the country's revenue by contributing 5 per cent Singapore's GDP, and generating US\$ 18.00 billion in tourism receipts. (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2012). This trend clearly indicates that tourism industry plays an important role in the Singapore's economic development. In fact, tourism still continues to be seen the strategic economic pillar of Singapore in 2015. The main aims of the initiative are to increase in threefold the tourism revenues to about US\$ 30 billion, increase in tourist arrivals to 17 million, and to generate about 100,000 employment opportunities in the tourism industry by 2015.

### **1.2.2.4 Tourism Arrivals in Indonesia**

Indonesia as an island country has numerous touristic destinations to be visited. Statistically, referring to the tourist arrival in Asia and Pacific countries in 2013, Indonesia was still in the 9<sup>th</sup> rank in 2010 and the 8<sup>th</sup> rank in 2011, and again in 9<sup>th</sup> rank in 2012 and 2013 and lagging behind the neighbour countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. The number of tourist arrivals is about 7 million in 2010 with revenue of US\$ 7.6 billion. In 2013, the arrivals reached 8 million and documenting US\$ 8.5 billion revenue (Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2014). Consequently, some factors for example promotional activities, quality of promotional materials may influence Indonesia tourist arrivals.

Overall, it is clear that the tourism industry in these four countries is important for the countries' GDP and thus it can be assumed that these countries are concerned about increasing the number of the tourist arrivals. This may be reflected in their efforts to promote tourism. Hence, this study is concerned with examining how tourist destinations are portrayed through the official tourism website of Malaysia (OTWM), Thailand (OTWT), Singapore (OTWS) and Indonesia (OTWI).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Promotional activity is an important initial tool to enhance the interaction and communication between the tourism stakeholders and the prospective tourists. Tourism promotional mode is divided into two categories: printed-based promotion (e.g. brochure, booklet and leaflet) and internet-based promotion (e.g. website, and social media). Web-based promotion is the easiest to be accessed by everyone from every corner of the world. Web-based promotion has been shown to be more accessible, with language and visual elements utilised as the dominant strategies (Wan, 2002; Boyne, Hall, & Williams, 2003; du Rand et al., 2003; Horng, Tsai, 2010).

The integration between language and visual elements construct specific discourses to portray the destinations in promotional tourism websites. In fact, language (Dann, 1996) and visual element (Hallett & Weinger, 2010) are significant factors in constructing tourism discourses on the official tourism websites (OTWs). Through the discourses of tourism, the branding image of the tourist destination can be developed to enhance the destination portrayal. However, there are only a few studies, if any that have investigated the integration of language and visual elements on the official tourism websites (Salim, et.al, 2012). Previous discourse driven studies on tourism websites have primarily focused the textual elements (e.g. Zhang, 2011; Jaworski, 2010; Molina & Esteban, 2006; Mocini, 2005; Kim, Hwang & Fasenmaier, 2005; Mohamed, 2004) and have shown that language plays an important role in portraying the destination. However, these studies have largely ignored the analysis of visual elements.

Similarly, previous studies on visual elements have uncovered the significant role they play in constructing the discourse of tourism. However, Triandjojo (2008) suggests that conducting research on advertisements in both printed and electronic medium needs to examine different data sources and modality. Unfortunately, there is a clear gap in empirical studies that have examined the utilisation of different modalities in constructing the discourse of tourism. Therefore, this current research is significant as it has contributed to scarcity of research in this area. In short, this study is important as it investigated both textual and visual elements in portraying the tourist destination image.

The portrayal of the destination image through online media is more effective and accessible as it creates the image of the destination which reaches a bigger audience and influence the potential tourist's decision-making (Govers & Go, 2005). However, previous study has focused on web design and web marketing. For instance, the power of mediators in marketing chain (Alderman, 2008; Levinson & Milne, 2004), designs as a persuasive strategy (Lee & Gretzel, 2012) and destination image on website (de Farais, et.al., 2013). The role of language use and visual elements in portraying the destination image have been largely ignored in this studies (Mocini, 2005; Salim, et.al, 2012). Liu & O'Harollan, (2009) have pointed out that the portrayal of destination image promotional tourism websites is achieved through the discourses of tourism. Therefore in examining the destination image in the discourse of tourism, studies like the current research, must analyse the role of language and visual elements in this construction.

Tourism promotion is gradually growing as a vital part of the tourism industry. In fact, tourism promotion authority has carried out initiatives to promote and introduce tourist destinations using different kinds of promotional material such as websites, brochure and advertisement. However, the number of tourist arrivals in some countries such as Indonesia remains behind other Southeast Asian counterparts, in particular Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. In addition, it is logical to assume that the tourism promotion initiatives may not clearly convey the right kinds of information regarding locations and activities associated with tourism (Rukendi, 2008; Nasution, et.al, 2005; Adams, 1997). This is further supported by a study by Diah & Mugijanto (2005) which found that tourism promotion of Indonesia does not

significantly portray the destination. Thus, it is important for research to examine how tourism is constructed on websites of top ranking tourism countries. As such, this study examined how the OTWs of four top tourism countries in South East Asia employ both language and visual elements to portray the destinations.

Numerous studies have been conducted in terms of tourism promotional media in particular printed media, however only a few, if any, focused on the online promotional tools in particular investigating official tourism websites by integrating visual images and texts (Feighery, 2006; Dann, 2000; Kennedy, 2005). More importantly, tourism website is an interesting promotional mode which contains rich information which potentially enhances the destination image. This genre is an interesting phenomenon to be investigated because it is carefully constructed through different discourses. For example tourism websites have been shown to maintain the national identity through different discourses which portray the destination (Fürsich & Robins, 2004). In light of this, it important for studies to examine tourism websites because it is an interesting and rich multimodal phenomenon which has a vast option meaning-making.

Although, there has been a great deal of interest on tourism research, it is clear from the discussion above that most research has been concerned with content and qualitative investigation of printed promotional tools for example guidebook and brochures (Salim, et.al, 2012). This shows a clear gap in discourse driven research focusing on both language and visual elements particularly in tourism websites. Therefore, this study investigated the language and visual elements in constructing the discourses of tourism that play a key role in the destination portrayal on the selected tourism websites. The significance of conducting the study was to investigate the different discourses available on tourism websites of Malaysia; Thailand; Singapore; and Indonesia with a particular focus on the language and visual elements. These discourses can be constructed through the use of appropriate lexical and syntactical choice. Furthermore, the utilization of the visual elements (e.g. modality and salience) as discourses is able to enhance the portrayal of the destinations.

#### **1.4 Objective of the Study**

The main objectives of this study are to examine how language use and visual elements convey the meaning and construct the discourses of tourism to portray the tourist destination image on the official tourism websites. The more specific objectives of this study are stated as follows:

- i) To identify the discourses of tourism available on the tourism websites.
- ii) To examine how the discourses of tourism are constructed through the texts.
- iii) To examine how the discourses of tourism are constructed through the visual elements.
- iv) To study how the different discourses of tourism construct the tourism destination on the four official tourism websites.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

Bearing in mind the rationale and objectives, the following research questions have been formulated for this study:

- i) What are discourses of tourism available on the tourism website?
- ii) How are the discourses of tourism constructed through the language used?
- iii) How are the discourses of tourism constructed through the visual elements?
- iv) How do the discourses of tourism construct the destination image on the four official tourism websites?

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

Taking on a discourse driven approach, this study examined the official tourism websites of the four top destination countries in Southeast Asia, which are i) Malaysia, ii) Thailand, iii) Singapore and iv) Indonesia. The study outlines the discourses of tourism by identifying the textual and visual elements that are used to portray the destinations. In addition, the findings determined the relations between the elements of the discourse in order to understand what makes the text and visual elements a coherent whole. The significance brought out by the analysis in the study was outlined in the following paragraphs.

The study is significant, first, based on the theoretical framework employed in the analysis of the study. In analysing text and visual elements of official tourism websites, this study adopted the language of tourism (Dann, 1996) and Multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006) framework which primarily focused on text and visual elements as the principal semiotic resources that realize the discourses of tourism. This study would be one of the few, if not the only research to have used discourse approach by using multimodal analysis in describing the discourses of tourism of official tourism websites. As such, findings of the study have extended on existing literature on the few researches carried out using official tourism website as data sources.

Second the significance of the study lies in data used as discourse driven research on official tourism website of Malaysian, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia is currently unavailable. These websites are important tourism promotional tools not only in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia but also in the world, in the current age of globalization and technological advancement. The broad description of OTWs under the analysis would establish, in a highly systemic way, the construction of tourism discourse on the tourism websites. This study would be significant in providing the needed information and knowledge on the construction of discourses of tourism on OTWs. Thus far, literature about discourses of tourism construction provides only guidelines on website arrangement. The findings of the study would have practical relevance to tourism studies, tourism promotion and tourism information media.

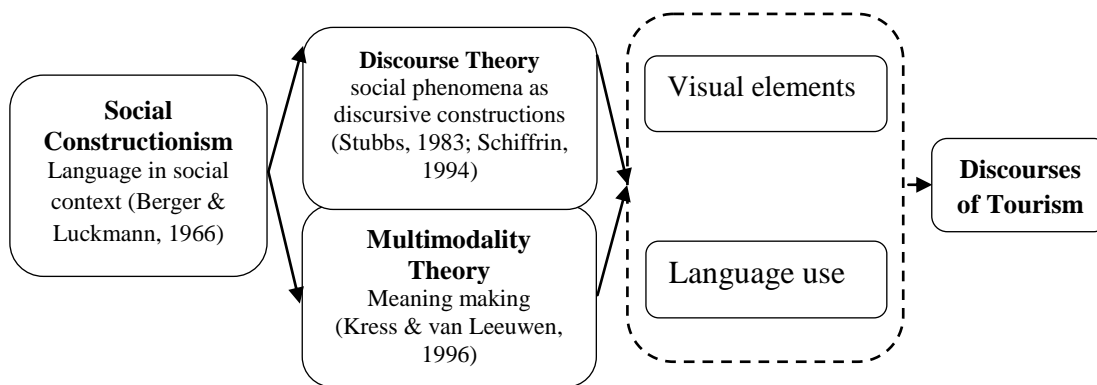


The widespread use of information and technology recently has also conveyed the substantial use of text and visual elements on OTWs such as lexical, syntactical choices and visual images. The increasing usage of such elements has emphasized the importance of analysing them to determine the functions of the different approaches of meaning making in both texts and visual elements. Thus, this study would be of significance as it described the different multimodal resources found in the data and analysed text and visual elements used in constructing the different kinds of discourses of tourism in portraying the tourist destinations.

This study provided a framework of the tourism destination portrayal which also helps tourism stakeholders, tourism practitioners and academician to gain some critical understanding of the language and visual elements used for tourism promotion. The findings from this study can be put to the effective use in constructing promotional materials and/or revising the existing promotional tools especially the tourism websites.

## **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of a study is the configuration of concept which supports the research work. A theoretical framework embraced an assortment of linked concepts, like a theory but not automatically so well worked-out. It helps guide the researcher in conducting and shaping what things to be analysed, and what analysis relationships to be looked for. The theoretical framework that underpins this study is shown in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1** Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that guides this study in order to answer the research questions posed earlier encompasses three key theories that are the social constructionism theory, discourse theory and multimodality. This theoretical framework supports the current study which is concerned with examining the discourse of tourism, particularly those found in tourism promotion websites of the four major tourist destinations in Southeast Asia.

### 1.7.1 Social Constructionism Theory

The first key concept that underpins this study is the social constructionism theory which is the sociological movement that focuses on the social construction of everyday assumption and knowledge towards understanding the social interaction. Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated that our everyday sense of reality is the artefact of current social interaction above the meaning of objects, events and actions.

Fundamentally, social constructionism is the paradigm of this study. Kim (2010) argues that constructionists' principles about reality are based on meaning construction in human interaction and activity, for instance, the society constructs the meanings and the reality. Normally, constructionists recognize reality as only an object of reality, as the human understanding, reality cannot be completely exposed and reality is incomprehensible and has no meaning (Milton, 1996). Furthermore,

understandings and meanings of reality are constructed as a result of phenomenon, prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences from the human interaction (Sridevi, 2008). Reality is not unarbitrated construction; reality is implanted in social contexts and accustomed by a variety of compartments of knowing (Christ, 2008). Social constructionism, therefore, demonstrated epistemic relativism. Subsequently, construction of reality is apparent to be dynamic and disposed to the variation of spatiotemporal.

A key concern of social constructionism is on language use in the social context of society. Language is defined as a significant part of the presence of human beings. Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann (1966, 1991) revealed the significant place of language in our social world:

The common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification. Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 51-52)

According to social constructionism, language is not reflecting the reality nevertheless it is simply the replication of the principles of a certain group. The constructed reality strictly influences the individual behaviour within the society towards a particular world of society (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Hence, discourses are believed as the truth that is imposed as reflection in power. Language, in this sense plays a significant role as the meaning and trust carrier. Furthermore, Burr (1995) states that social constructionism emphasizes on the role of language in social context of society. Consequently, all social activities such as science, law, literature, religion, politics and even economy are socially constructed through discourse. Hence, as a social life or social activity, tourism is constructed through language use. Therefore, it is important for this study to examine how tourism is constructed through the language use in the tourism websites. Furthermore, the purpose of discourse is to recognise the social as a discursive construction where principally, all

social phenomena can be analysed using discourse analytical tools (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Epistemologically, discourse is a form of social event that takes a part in constructing the social world, such as identities, knowledge, and social relations and thus in sustaining particular social patterns (Burr, 1995). Furthermore, discursive patterns in language are viewed as consistencies in the text through which phenomena, such as tourism, are constructed, reconstructed and ignored (Willot & Griffin, 1997). Nevertheless, the language of tourism as a form of particular discourse giving different levels of specialization alongside a disparate assortment of texts that address particular societies (Gotti, 2006; Cappelli, 2006; Francesconi 2007). For example guidebooks, booklets, websites are believed to be the most representative genres relating to tourism discourse (Dann 1996).

### **1.7.2 Discourse Theory**

The theory in general originated from the *linguistic turn* in social sciences based on the work of important persons such as Michel Foucault, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Rorty, 1992). Many approaches to the theory of discourse rely on the primary principles that language use not only constructs the society's mental realities, but the approaches essentially support constructing the realities. Discourse is embedded into constructionism prototype. Thus, discourse relies on the construction of knowledge and the reality.

A number of comprehensive definitions of discourse, for example Foucault defined discourse as "a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation that provide a language for talking about a way of constructing the knowledge in a particular matter at a particular historical moment" (Foucault, in Jørgensen & Phillips 2002:12). Another definition from Hajer (1995:44) discourse is a particular collection of categorization, concepts and ideas which construct meaning and realities in a particular set of practices. Stokowski (2003:287) formulates a discourse as:

“(…) cultural and organizational structures of the social worlds, that produce them and offer a perspective for evaluating what appears to be rational individual and institutional behavior”.

In spite of the number of discourse explanations, discourse seems to come to an agreement by which reality is constructed. Thus, the process of construction by which knowledge is created via action of communication. Language is recognized as power, create symbols that effect societies and decision-making. In this sense, language can offer conflicting constructions, phenomenon can be constructed as meaningless but may likewise be constructed a significance (Hajer, 2005). Discourse may thus be a constitutive element in constructing the knowledge in different disciplines such as knowledge cultures, knowledge situations and knowledge networks. It also contributes to the shaping and articulating knowledge, in the case of this the knowledge on the discourse of tourism.

### **1.7.3 Multimodality approach**

The second key theory which underpins this research is multimodality that comes from the social semiotic theory. Multimodality takes into account the functions and meaning of visual images that comes from the integrated use of two semiotic resources; language and visual images (O’Halloran, 2004). Currently, multimodal frames are presented for analysing numerous discourse types in both printed and electronic media. The interpretation and analysis of language and visual images are conceptualized in relation to multimodal semiotic resources which are concurrently used for the construction of meaning (O’halloran, 2004; Paltridge, 2006; Scollon, 2008).

In all domains of communication and social interaction, meanings are constructed in one frame that consists of different approaches: in text, with image, gaze, and with gestures and speech (Kress, 2010). Language and visual images realise and reflect in the internal organisation of social function which constructs the basis of the emerging field of multimodality (O’Halloran, 2011; O’Toole, 1994; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Batemen, 2008; Jewitt, 2009). The important

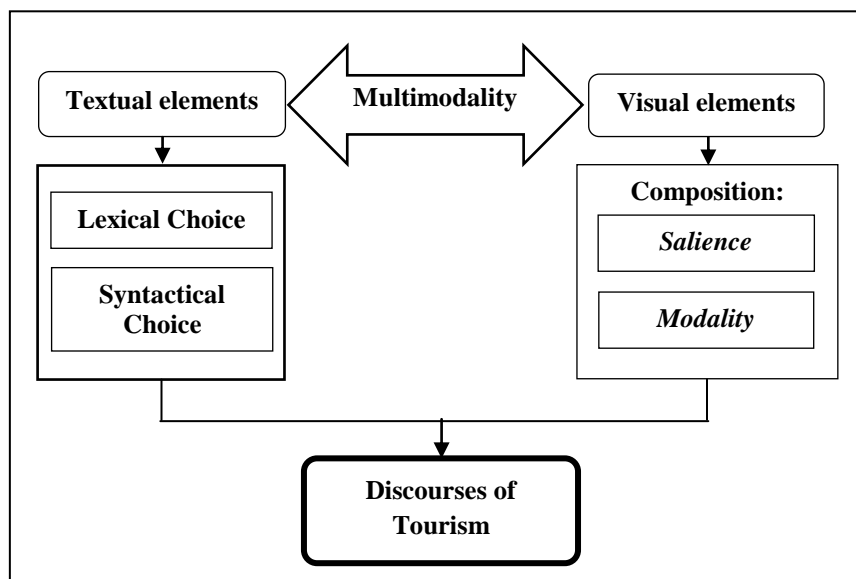
philosophy of multimodality is that meaning-making appealed on a multiplicity of modes to make meaning. Consequently, multimodality as part of social semiotic is applied in analysing multimodal resources, including language and visual elements. Multimodality is closely related to social semiotics in which the process of meaning making in the social context is also influenced by the aspect of mode.

Socially and culturally, multimodal approach is concerned with the construction of meaning, and can be employed to investigate and examine the way language and visual images intermittently construct discourses in human interactions and artefacts, for example, the role of official tourism websites to interact with the potential tourists. Because of the scope of this study which investigates language and visual elements used in tourism websites, multimodality as a theory is the most appropriate to examine how language and visual image work together to construct tourism discourses to portray the destination.

## 1.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study outlines and illustrates the key concepts and issues that underpin the research approach as realized in this study. The conceptual framework assisted the research to focus on specific issues that were associated with tourism discourse, in particular the tourism websites. It also empowered the researcher to investigate the construction of tourism discourses which emerged from the tourism websites and to examine how the tourism discourses found in the websites enhance the tourist destinations image.

Figure 1.2 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study. It highlights the key concepts that strengthen the study and key issues addressed in the research questions. The main objective of the study was to identify the discourses of tourism found on the tourism websites. There are two key concepts linked to the tourism discourses on the websites analysed in this study which is textual and visual elements



**Figure 1.2** Conceptual framework of the study

The first key concept is the language employed by website providers to enhance the tourist destination on the tourism website. Dann (1996) states that the language of tourism as a part of discourse plays a very important role to enhance the tourist destination. Therefore, this study views language as a key concept as language is utilized to convey meaning, to enlighten the tourist about what to be seen and to direct his/her gaze through an anticipation of intense pleasures (Dann, 1996). Therefore, this study is concerned with the language in particular the lexical (e.g. pronoun, descriptive and noun) and syntactical choice (e.g. imperative, declaratives, and tense) in conveying the meaning which is important in the construction of the tourist destination on the selected tourism websites.

The details included in the language of tourism enabled the researcher to explore the specific lexis or words and syntactical choice used on the websites. Some authors (e.g. Calvi, 2000); Dann, 1996; Kelly, 1997) argue that language in the tourism context shows some particular lexical, syntactic and textual features that justify its insertion as a specialized discourse. Language of tourism is different from other forms of communication (Dann, 1996). Thus, lexical choice in this study was defined as specific terms used in tourism website (e.g. diversity, experience authenticity or natural nature and play). Hoffman (1998) states that language of tourism is as a special discourse that covers three criteria: firstly, the use of highly

specialised vocabulary, secondly, the use of positive adjectives to give beauty and distinction to the text, and thirdly, the use of superlatives to give exaggeration in the text.

As for the syntactical choice there are some very common aspects that are mostly used in tourism promotional texts, namely nominalization, the use of passive form, imperative structure, present tense, present simple tense and transformation verbs (Dann, 1996; Hoffman, 1998; Durán, 2011). With regard to the language functions found in tourism promotional texts, the referential or the informative function always becomes the key function, as in other specialized languages, because the objective of texts on tourism website is to portray and describe the tourist destination and community. Therefore, language on the tourism websites as in any form of media or tools were published to specifically portray the destination image. Language use does not simply provide information about a certain place of interest, it is used to construct tourism discourse through a new model of classification based on a three-stage model of the tourist process, which are pre, on and post trip on media (Dann, 1996).

Apart from language as the first key concept, the second key concept linked to the tourism discourses in this study is visual elements or images. One main issue is addressed under this concept. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) propose multimodal approach to examine textual and visual elements. This study focused on the salience and modality elements in composition to highlight the discourses of tourism in visual element.

Composition element highlighted in this study comprised the salience of the image on the tourism website. Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) pointed out that salience is realized by factors including perspectives, size sharpness, tonal and colour contrast. Furthermore, the modality element is also highlighted in this study as a part of composition to examine the reliability of the images used in the tourism website (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Modality is equally important in visual communication and in the construction of the reality.



The concepts illustrated in this study are firstly, to govern the issues about construction of tourism discourses to portray tourism destination on official tourism websites. Secondly, how tourism discourses are constructed through language and visual elements. Finally, how tourism discourses portray the tourism destination on the four tourism websites.

## **1.9 Scope of the Study**

One of the scopes of this study is that it analyses only the textual and visual elements used on OTWs in Southeast Asian. An in-depth analysis of text and visual elements has been included to provide information about how discourses of tourism on OTWs are constructed in portraying the tourist destination. However, this study did not explore the element of sound and moving picture that might be part of the tourism websites.

In addition, the textual analysis of the study was limited to the lexical and syntactical choices used to illustrate the various discourses of tourism on the OTWs. While, the visual analysis concentrated on the composition elements, in particular salience and modality, used in the selected pictures from the OTWs. Hence, multimodal analysis is employed to describe the construction of the discourses of tourism on the OTWs.

Another key focus of the study is that the selected tourism websites analysed were the official tourism websites of the four leading destination countries in Southeast Asia; which are i) Malaysia, ii) Thailand, iii) Singapore and iv) Indonesia. Therefore, the official tourism websites were those governed officially by government. Tourism websites managed by non-government were not included. The analysis focused on the homepage of the official websites and selected internal links to popular destination or events. The homepage contains a great deal of information for website users and it is the first page that tourists can see. Since, it provides an overview of the tourism in the destination country, it was important to include it in the analysis. Therefore, this study focused on the homepage and selected links of the

four tourism websites in the four top destination countries in Southeast Asia. The analysis extracted the websites at the specific time in which the data was downloaded and documented for analysis purposes. The analysis did not take into consideration changes made after the period of data collection.

Finally, the participants for interviewed in this study were limited to both Asian and Non-Asian tourists who were visiting the tourist destinations.

### 1.10 Definition of Terms

This operational definition describes the key terms in this study

- i. **Tourism discourse.** Tourism as social interaction which has become a part of discourse in which the representation of physical system includes the language use, and visual element or image (Urry, 2002; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005). Therefore, Tourism discourse is defined as understanding the role of language use and visual element in tourism as a social activity.
- ii. **Discourse of tourism.** Any kinds of discourses which are used to enhance the tourism destinations portrayal on the official tourism websites
- iii. **Discourse of diversity.** A discourse theme that is used to portray the diversity of the tourism elements such as diversity of cultural heritage, diversity of nature and diversity of play.
- iv. **Discourse of experience.** A discourse employed to highlight the tourist experience at the destinations.
- v. **Discourse of authenticity.** A discourse theme used to enhance the originality of the tourist attraction and destination, e.g. authentic cultural heritage and authentic nature.
- vi. **Discourse of spirituality.** A discourse theme which portrays the spiritual element from the tourism attraction, such as temple, devotion and religion practices and tradition in a certain tourist destination.

- vii. **Discourse of relaxation.** A discourse theme which highlights the wellness elements at the tourist destination, e.g. spa and traditional massage.
- viii. **Language of tourism.** A language use which has special structure and vocabularies. Language of tourism differs from other form of communication (Dann, 1996). In this study language of tourism is the special language or language use which is used in tourism website to portray the destination.
- ix. **Visual element or image.** A mental image that similar to visual perception (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The image is divided into two processes; conceptual process refers to what things are like and improving function and presentational process is concerned with action and events Visual element is the pictorial element used as the construction of reality.
- x. **Destination image.** The construction of portrayal which aims at enhancing the tourist's perception (Reynolds, 1965; Pan & Li, 2011). In the case of destination image is constructed through language use and visual image. Destination image in this study construct the value of the destination.
- xi. **Tourism destination.** City, town, or other area that is dependent to a significant extent on the revenues accruing from tourism. It may contain one or more tourist attractions and possibly some "tourist traps."
- xii. **Tourism element.** Element that constructs the tourist attractions; it includes the cultural heritage, nature and play.
- xiii. **Play** refers to the tourism enjoyment which is constructed from the tourist preferences, e.g. shopping, entertainment, culinary, health tourism and spa and traditional massage.
- xiv. **Nature tourism.** Travel through and enjoyment of the natural world, its seasonal cycles and events, carried out in a manner that promotes the protection of natural and human communities and consideration for those who will inherit our world. Nature tourism involves any type of tourism that relies on experiences directly related to natural attractions and includes ecotourism, adventure tourism, extractive tourism, wildlife tourism and nature retreats.

- xv. **Cultural heritage.** An expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural Heritage is often expressed as either Intangible or Tangible Cultural Heritage.

## 1.11 Organisation of Chapters

There are altogether eight chapters in this thesis. Chapter One describes the development of tourism and tourist promotion in Southeast Asia as a backdrop to this study. This chapter also aims at describing the objectives of the study in order to address the issue of ‘rigorousness’, a notion which is central to any study conducted for producing the highest degree in tertiary education.

Chapter Two provides a review of related previous studies on tourism discourse. This chapter specifically addressed the concept of tourism as a social construction, tourism promotional media as a social communicative action or event as expressed by social semiotic theory and discourse analysis. The main objective of Chapter Two is to establish the theoretical and practical concepts of tourism discourse and to use these concepts to examine the discourses of tourism used on official tourism websites. Relevant discourse studies of tourism were reviewed in order to establish an understanding of the role of language and visual elements in constructing the discourses of tourism on OTWs.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used in this study which addresses two components, the pilot study and the investigation proper. The former discusses the trial and error stage conducted before the real investigation took place. The latter however, addresses the methodology employed for the present study based on input gained from the pilot project done earlier. Likewise, Chapter Three also addresses different issues that take the researcher to the intended results and conclusions. First, the homepage and the popular destination links of the official tourism website of Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia used as the data for this study was

addressed. Secondly, data collection and data analysis techniques were discussed in the body of thesis.

The findings of this study are organized based on the different primary data sources – Chapter four is Malaysian website, Chapter five is Thailand website, Chapter six is the Singaporean website, Chapter seven is the Indonesian website. This is because although the data from these four websites were analyzed through similar analytical lens and procedure, each website has its unique feature which yields equally distinct findings and therefore they should be discussed separately. However, the discussion in the concluding Chapter eight brings together the findings from all four chapters.

The first finding chapter is Chapter Four which focuses on the data analysis of the official tourism website of Malaysia. In particular, the language and visual elements are used in constructing the tourism discourse on the official tourism website of Malaysia (OTWM). The second findings chapter is Chapter Five which focuses on the data analysis taken from the official tourism website of Thailand (OTWT). The third finding chapter is Chapter Six which analyses the data analysis taken from the official tourism website of Singapore (OTWS) Chapter seven focuses on the data analysis taken from the official tourism website of Indonesia (OTWI).

Chapter eight brings together the discussion in the four finding chapters. In addition this finding is discussed in relation to the research questions and draws conclusion, limitation of the research, research implications and recommendation for further research.

## **1.12 Conclusion**

In summary, the first chapter has elaborated the rationales why the researcher carried out this current study by describing issues back-grounding the need of making the study into being. Additionally, the potential contributions of the study to the world of tourism promotion and the role of the discourses of tourism in

portraying the tourism destinations, in particular the language and visual elements have been elaborated.

The aim of this study was to investigate how language use and visual elements in tourism websites conveying the meaning in portraying the destination. This study focused on the language and visual element employed in official tourism websites. Tourism promotional media in this study covered the websites of four popular tourism destination countries in South East Asia. A number of study have been carried out in terms of the use of language and visual elements, however there appears to be real gap in studies analysing the integration between language and visual elements. Furthermore, this study employed a very current methodology to describe the multimodal data taken from the official tourism websites in the four leading destination countries in Southeast Asia. Thus far, the main objective of the study is to highlight the discourses of tourism on OTWs constructed by language use and visual elements.

This chapter outlined the introduction, research objectives, and research problems, significant of the study, theoretical framework, conceptual framework and definition of terms. In the following chapter, the literature review is presented to discuss show the theories, concepts and result of previous studies which provide the foundation to support the current study.

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