

Persuasion in tourism promotion texts of Laketoba North Sumatra: Analysis of multimodality

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Date of defence: 14th of November 2025

Citation: Rajagukguk, H. (2026). Persuasion in tourism promotion texts of Laketoba North Sumatra: Analysis of multimodality. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 44, 4415. <https://doi.org/10.54055/ejtr.v44i.4868>

Publication history:

Received: 26/01/2026; Revised: 19/03/2026; 13/05/2026; 19/05/2026; Accepted: 21/05/2026;

Published online: 01/10/2026; Volume date: 01/11/2026

Coordinating editors: Marcello Atzeni and Katarzyna Barbara Minor



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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

To examine how persuasion is constructed and realized through multimodal strategies in tourism promotion texts of Lake Toba, North Sumatra, by integrating rhetorical persuasion theory (ethos, pathos, and logos) and social semiotic multimodality to explain their structure, meaning-making processes, and advertising effectiveness.

Objectives

The dissertation aims to achieve the following objectives:

- ✓ To identify the types of persuasive appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos).
- ✓ To analyse how persuasive meanings are constructed multimodally.
- ✓ To explain the reasons for the use of particular persuasive structures.
- ✓ To examine the effectiveness of tourism advertising.

Methodology

This dissertation employs a descriptive (Takona, 2024), qualitative research design with a multi-case study approach to examine how persuasion is constructed through multimodal resources in tourism promotion texts for Lake Toba, North Sumatra. The data consist of multimodal tourism promotional materials, including posters, brochures, official websites, and social media advertisements, collected through documentation from authorized tourism institutions and digital platforms (Mattei, 2024). The analysis is conducted qualitatively by integrating Ramage et al. (2018) rhetorical persuasion theory (ethos, pathos, and logos) with Kress's (2010) social semiotic multimodal analysis to investigate how linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, and audio modes interact to produce persuasive meanings. An interactive model of analysis involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing is applied to interpret persuasive structures, contextual relevance, and advertising effectiveness (Hamelin et al., 2022; Kadhim et al., 2025; Liu, 2026; Umaquinga-Criollo et al., 2020). To ensure trustworthiness, the study applies credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability through systematic analysis and theoretical triangulation.

Results

The results of this study reveal that tourism promotion texts for Lake Toba, North Sumatra, employ persuasion through a strategic integration of ethos, pathos, and logos, which is realized multimodally across linguistic and visual resources. Ethos is predominantly constructed through authoritative language, official logos, and culturally symbolic images that establish credibility and authenticity (Subedi, 2025). Pathos is the most dominant persuasive appeal, manifested through emotive lexical choices, scenic visuals, color symbolism, and visual compositions that evoke feelings of beauty, nostalgia, and cultural pride (Prantl et al., 2026). Logos is realized through factual information, such as accessibility, facilities, and tourism activities, presented through concise textual descriptions and supportive visual layouts (Adamus-Matuszyńska et al., 2021; Trehan & Kalro, 2024). The multimodal analysis further shows that persuasive meaning is not produced by language alone but emerges from the interaction of text, image, layout, and visual salience. These multimodal strategies enhance the effectiveness of tourism advertising by attracting attention, strengthening emotional engagement, and influencing audience perceptions toward Lake Toba as an appealing tourist destination.

Theoretical conclusions

Theoretically, this dissertation concludes that persuasion in tourism promotion texts is best understood as a multimodal social semiotic process, rather than a purely linguistic phenomenon. The integration

of rhetorical persuasion theory (ethos, pathos, and logos) with social semiotic multimodality demonstrates that persuasive meaning emerges from the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, including language, image, layout, color, and visual salience. Pathos is found to be the most dominant persuasive appeal, reinforcing Ramage's argument that emotional engagement plays a central role in persuasive discourse. At the same time, Kress's (2010) theory further explains how visual and spatial resources amplify emotional and cultural meanings. This study extends existing theories by showing that rhetorical appeals are not only realized verbally but are systematically distributed across multimodal resources, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive theoretical model of persuasion in tourism communication.

Practical Applications of the Dissertation

The findings of this dissertation can be applied to the design and evaluation of tourism promotion strategies, particularly for destinations such as Lake Toba in North Sumatra. Tourism marketers, government agencies, and creative industries can use the identified multimodal persuasive strategies to develop more effective promotional materials by integrating emotional appeal, credible representation, and factual information across linguistic and visual modes. The emphasis on pathos through scenic imagery, cultural symbolism, and emotive language highlights the importance of audience engagement in tourism advertising. At the same time, the strategic use of ethos and logos supports trust and clarity of information. In addition, this study provides practical guidance for content creators and policymakers in selecting and orchestrating multimodal resources to enhance persuasive impact, destination branding, and tourist attraction in both digital and print media.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of Chapter 1

The expansion of digital media has transformed the way tourism destinations disseminate information and influence potential visitors. In contemporary tourism marketing, promotional texts increasingly employ a combination of linguistic and visual resources to construct persuasive messages and shape audience perceptions. Drawing on classical rhetorical theory proposed by Aristotle (2007) and contemporary multimodality studies advanced by Jewitt (2014) and Leeuwen (2005), this chapter conceptualises persuasion as a meaning-making process that extends beyond verbal language. Lake Toba, in North Sumatra, is one of Indonesia's priority tourism destinations and provides the study's contextual focus. This chapter identifies gaps in previous research that have largely prioritised linguistic analysis while offering limited attention to the integrated role of multiple semiotic resources in tourism promotion. It further presents the research problems, objectives, scope, and significance of the study, thereby establishing a strong theoretical and contextual foundation for the dissertation.

Abstract of Chapter 2

This chapter reviews the literature through three main streams that underpin the analysis of persuasion in tourism promotion texts. The first stream examines rhetorical theories of persuasion, focusing on the persuasive appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos as conceptualised by Ramage et al. (2018), which provide a foundational understanding of persuasive argumentation. The second stream explores social semiotic multimodality, drawing primarily on Kress (2010) to explain how meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic, visual, spatial, and other semiotic resources. The third stream reviews empirical studies on tourism promotion and advertising, particularly those that employ multimodal and discourse-analytic approaches. From a social semiotic perspective, persuasion is understood as a multimodal meaning-making process shaped by cultural and contextual factors. This chapter contributes to the study by synthesising these theoretical perspectives, identifying gaps in previous

research that have prioritised linguistic persuasion, and establishing an integrated analytical framework for examining multimodal persuasion in Lake Toba tourism promotion texts.

Abstract of Chapter 3

The study employs a descriptive qualitative research design with a multi-case approach, drawing on qualitative inquiry principles (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which emphasize in-depth interpretation of real-world phenomena rather than numerical measurement. By focusing on authentic tourism promotional materials, this research addresses persuasion as a multimodal phenomenon, involving linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural, and audio resources, as highlighted in contemporary multimodality studies (Jewitt, 2016). Each case represents a different form of tourism promotional text, including brochures, advertisements, websites, social media posts, and videos, enabling systematic comparison across promotional contexts. This chapter strengthens the methodological foundation of the study by demonstrating coherence between the theoretical framework, research design, and analytical procedures.

Abstract of Chapter 4

This chapter presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study on multimodal persuasion in tourism promotion texts of Lake Toba, North Sumatra. The analysis demonstrates that persuasion is a dynamic, context-dependent meaning-making process realized through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, supporting classical rhetorical principles of persuasion (ethos, pathos, and logos) rooted in Aristotle's rhetoric and further operationalized in contemporary discourse studies. Drawing on insights from Kress (2010) and Jewitt (2016), the findings reveal that visual and spatial resources play a central role in shaping persuasive meanings, particularly through emotional engagement. The results show that pathos emerges as the most dominant persuasive appeal, realised through scenic imagery, cultural representations, and visual salience, while linguistic resources contribute to credibility and informational clarity. Importantly, this chapter challenges the assumption that increased use of multimodal elements automatically enhances persuasive effectiveness, arguing instead that persuasion depends on the strategic orchestration and contextual relevance of these resources. These findings provide empirical support for understanding persuasion in tourism promotion as a flexible, multimodal practice rather than a fixed, uniform persuasive configuration.

Abstract of Chapter 5

The chapter concludes that persuasion in tourism promotion texts for Lake Toba, North Sumatra, is a multimodal, context-sensitive process in which persuasive meanings emerge from the strategic interaction of linguistic, visual, spatial, and other semiotic resources. Building on classical rhetorical principles of persuasion (ethos, pathos, and logos) rooted in Aristotle's rhetoric and supported by contemporary multimodality scholarship (Jewitt, 2016; Kress, 2010), this chapter highlights the dominance of emotional appeal (pathos) in enhancing audience engagement and persuasive effectiveness. The chapter further outlines the theoretical contribution of the study to persuasion and multimodality research, as well as its practical implications for tourism marketers and policy makers. Finally, it addresses the study's limitations and proposes directions for future research on multimodal persuasion in tourism communication.

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