

# “VISIT TRULY ASIA MALAYSIA”: ANALYSING VMY 2020 TOURISM PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

Norhanim Abdul Razak<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Tourism, Hospitality & Event Management, University Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah, MALAYSIA

\*Corresponding author: norhanim@uum.edu.my

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**Abstract:** *Tourism Malaysia has adopted the tagline “Malaysia Truly Asia” in projecting this country to tourists since 1999. Branding Malaysia as an Asian destination has been a well-established theme in marketing Malaysian tourism. As a result of this, Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture has retained Asia as a unique tourism brand and identity in the launching of Visit Malaysia 2020 campaign. However, the slogan has been slightly rephrased to “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia”. Because of the importance of Asia as a Malaysian tourism brand for two decades, this paper aims to explore how the national tourism authority of Malaysia portrayed the recent tourism campaign “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia” in the official promotional video. Utilising a discourse analysis method, visuals and the textual content through lyrics of the song were assessed to uncover how this country has been framed as part of the theme “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia”. The assessment of the promotional video uncovered that the projection of “Truly Asia” primarily reflects multi-ethnicity of Malaysian societies and unity in diversity as core attractions in the official video. This is manifested through the portrayal of their colourful cultural heritage attributes, particularly traditional costumes, traditional music and performing arts, musical instruments, and gastronomy. Diverse spectacular natural resources, such as tropical rainforests, wildlife, beaches and highlands, are also parts of “Truly Asia” projection. The overall assessment of the promotional video identified that the portrayal of Malaysia as a tourist destination adopted some attributes of Orientalism, particularly fascinating traditional cultural heritage attributes and natural resources in order to highlight Otherness uniqueness and exoticness. Aspects of modernity and familiarity are depicted through cosmopolitan cities and Western lifestyles.*

**Keywords:** tourism promotion, Orientalism, Otherness, discourse analysis

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the primary industries and service sectors in Malaysia. The importance of this industry is reflected via the announcement of the recent budget for 2020 in which the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) was one of the main recipients of funding allocated for 2020. RM1.1 billion has been allocated for MOTAC and RM90 million from this amount will be used for tourism promotion (Jun, 2019). With the launch of Visit Malaysia 2020 (VMY 2020), this country aims to attract 30 million tourist arrivals with RM100 billion tourist receipts (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, 2019). However, the target for 2019 is slightly lower with the

projection to lure 28.1 million tourists with receipts of RM92.2 billion. The performance of Malaysia's tourism from the perspective of tourist arrivals was not entirely positive as the number of tourist arrivals for 2018 dropped 0.4% from 2017 (Syed Jaafar, 2019). He further elaborates that in 2018, Malaysia only received 25.83 million tourists in contrast to 25.95 million tourists in 2017. Chan (2019) claims that Malaysia received 116,105 less tourists in 2018 compared to 2017. Statistical analysis identified that Malaysia received fewer tourists primarily compared with neighbouring nations Singapore and Brunei (Chan, 2019). As published in the WTO website, in the Asian region, the rank of Malaysia went down from number three in 2017 to number five in 2018. Prior to 2018, Malaysia has been among the top three countries that attracted relatively higher number of tourists in the Asian region, together with China and Thailand for several years. However, in 2018, Japan and Hong Kong surpassed Malaysia based on tourist arrivals. As the year 2019 is coming to an end shortly, and VMY 2020 is starting soon, it is interesting to uncover the number of tourist arrivals for this year and the following year.

Based on the development, it is observed that the tourism industry has experienced a tremendous growth in Malaysia and it is one of the sectors that is rising quickly (Set, 2014). Economically, tourism play a significant role in generating income to the country. Besides its contribution to the country's economic prosperity, tourism also generate considerable foreign exchange earnings and employment opportunities (Mosbah & Al Khunja, 2014). Although Malaysia offered numerous tourism products to tourists, a number of niche markets, including culture and heritage tourism, medical tourism and education tourism, are among the categories of products gaining popularity during the last decade. The launched of VMY 2020 shows that VMY has been utilised for the fifth time since this campaign had been introduced in 1990 (Nik Anis, 2019). Because of the importance of VMY 2020 campaign to the success of Malaysian tourism industry, it is therefore important to examine how "Visit Truly Asia Malaysia" has been portrayed in the official promotional video. This tagline is unmistakably significant as it has been utilised to market Malaysia for 20 years.

## **2. Literature Review**

It is reflected within fairly early studies that delved into the area of tourism marketing (e.g. Britton, 1979; Silver, 1993; Selwyn, 1993) that the promotion of many non-Western countries is embedded within the former colonial portrayal of Orientalism. The New World Encyclopaedia (2019) states that the term 'Orientalism' originated from the Latin word 'oriens', which signifies the "east", and the term can be literally translated as the "rising sun". Studies relating to Orientalism is not complete without mentioning the well-known figure in this academic field, Edward Said. It is claimed that Said pioneered 'Orientalism' concept and coined the term as well. However, it is important to note that the idea surrounding differences between East and West civilisations has existed long time ago prior to Said's work. In his book titled 'Orientalism' published in 1978, Said offers insights into the Orient, especially from the Western perspective. Said (1978) claims that Orientalism is a powerful way for the West to dominate the Oriental world. Haldrup and Keofoed (2009) maintain that Orientalism as presented by Said is the opposite of the Occident. Traditionally, Europe was considered to be "The West" or Occident, and "The East" referred to as "the Orient". The East or the Orient is often presented consisting of characteristics of Otherness in contrast to the West or the Occident. Khan (2015) states that the term 'other' can be described as "something different from the familiar, the known and the norm" (p.64-65).

It is shown in the work by Echtner and Prasad (2003) how different areas of Third World countries are marketed by travel agencies from North American based on the typical stereotypes associated with Orientalism. These projections are communicated through images of the unchanged, unrestrained, and uncivilised as core components in the promotion of the Orient, Latin America and the Caribbean (Echtner & Prasad 2003). Similarly, Echtner (2002) uncover almost same results in examining the contents of destination marketing of the Third World. Among major themes in selling the Third World tourism destinations mainly revolves around the portrayals of the past, images of paradise and traditional culture in order to cater to Western traditional perceptions of the developing countries.

Jamerson (2017) investigates the representation of Orientalism through tourism digital media, the TripAdvisor. Although TripAdvisor is regarded as a credible and trusted source of information by consumers, it is can still project Orientalism discourse through digital form of communication. Jamerson (2017) argues that TripAdvisor sometimes published prejudiced and narrow-minded views of Otherness destinations and people as genuine and sincere consumer reviews via their online website. (Stiffler, 2014) analyses the portrayal of Orientalism in the context of food outlets in the United States by Arab American Christian communities. It is identified that Arab Americans participated in self-Orientalist effort in selling their cuisines by emphasising their Middle-Eastern heritage which are acceptable to the American market. Stiffler (2014) cited that Arab American made attempts to position their restaurants with aspects of the Arab culture which are familiar to the Western world including naming their restaurants such as Aladdin and Ali Baba which are mentioned in the Arabian Nights Tales.

Tourism marketers believed that Orientalism attributes can boost the appeal of Oriental destinations. Consequently, it is found that Oriental countries themselves incorporated Orientalism characteristics in tourism marketing, which is referred to as self-Orientalism. For instance, Ooi (2005) argues that Orientalism has been re-introduced to market national museums in Singapore. In order to enhance the uniqueness of Singapore as an Oriental destination, attempts have been made by three national museums in Singapore to utilise and created Orientalism themes to highlight their charms as Otherness and Asian identity. Yan and Santos (2009) explores how Orientalism has been depicted in the promotional video “China, Forever” produced by China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) in 2003. Themes of Orientalism are apparent through projections of unchanging, romantic, mythical, and feminised China which are embedded within traditional Western framework of the Orient. In addition to these Orientalism portrayals, “China Forever” promotional video featured modern China which juxtaposed Western notion of the East (Yan & Santos, 2009).

Khan (2015) states that Malaysia and Singapore are two Asian countries that employed ‘Asia’ as a brand in their tourism promotions. These two countries acknowledged multi-ethnic groups living in Asia as unique selling points in destination marketing. Khan (2015) further explains that Singapore constantly utilises this theme in marketing its tourism, using themes such as ‘Instant Asia’, ‘New Asia-Singapore’, and ‘Uniquely Singapore’, while the promotion of Malaysian tourism has been using ‘Truly Asia’ in the highlighting unity in diversity. The tagline ‘Truly Asia’

is synonym with Malaysia and this slogan has been launched in 1999 (Kaur, 2019). The continuous use of this slogan has been accredited to its effectiveness in attracting tourists and showcasing the core attributes of this country to the world (Kaur, 2019). During the launch of the Visit Malaysia Year 2020, it is announced that the tagline “Truly Asia” will remain in usage. As marketing effort play significant role in attracting and enhancing positive image of the country, it is therefore useful to evaluate the current tourism campaign launched by Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) for VMY 2020 including the official promotional video.

### **3. Method**

The analysis of this paper adopted a discourse analysis method in exploring how “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia” has been projected in the official promotional video of Visit Malaysia 2020. The analysis involved assessing components of the official of promotional video, including song lyrics and visual images that were featured in the recent campaign. Historically, discourse analysis, also known as discourse studies, started in the 1970s as a scholarly study (Nordquist, 2019). Discourse is described by Foucault (1972) as “a body of knowledge composed of particular ways of talking and seeing, forms of subjectivity, and power relations” (cited in Yan & Santos, 2009, p.299). It is used to refer to approach to examine written and verbal language more than their literal meanings (Salkind, 2010). In general, it is a qualitative research approach that involves the study of language in a wider context (Nordquist, 2019). The essence of discourse analysis is how language is used in the context of social world (Salkind, 2010).

In this paper, discourse analysis is utilised to investigate how “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia” has been projected via the official promotional video for VMY 2020. The official song for VMY 2020 was launched in 6 September 2019. This song was composed by the Ramlan Mohd Iman, the Dean of Music Faculty at Akademi Seni Budaya and Warisan Kebangsaan and the song lyric in the English version was written by James P.S. Boyle (Vijandren, 2019). Discourse analysis is employed to analyse the song lyric and visual images of the official tourism video. The assessment carried out in this paper primarily involves exploring how Malaysia has been framed as a “Truly Asia” destination by the national tourism authority. Besides, types of resources and attractions that are selected to form the representation of this country as “Truly Asia” destination are assessed in this paper.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

The assessment of the visuals identified that there are a number of key tourism attractions represented in the promotional video for VMY 2020. One striking theme that is visible at the beginning of the promotional video is presence of local people and their multi-ethnic cultural heritage attributes. This clearly is evident as the promotional video begins with a strong colourful stage performance of what appeared to be like a Malay dancer performing, followed by an image of Kadazandusun girls wearing their traditional costumes standing on a field with a mountain as a backdrop. An image of indigenous group as a host welcoming tourist to what appeared like a cultural village was shown on the video too. The diversity of Asian culture was showcased at the start of the promotional video with the display of Indian women adorned in saris complete with traditional jewellerys, and one of them performed a Hindu ritual. Chinese cultural heritage

performance continued with children playing traditional Chinese drums and the celebration of lantern festival.

However, analysis of the song lyric discovered that cultural attributes are not directly depicted. These aspects are ingrained in the song lyric through description of feelings and experiences. For example, the third and fourth lines of the song say that “Stretch your hands, reach out, and touch. Feel our love, rhythm, and dance in joy and delight.” As depicted in the theme song, cultural heritage attractions mainly involved tourists’ experiences and feelings rather than just gazing at these attributes. Furthermore, the diversity of cultures can be identified through the musical instruments that are used in the promotional video. It is stated by Vijaindren (2019) that among multi-ethnic musical instruments that was employed as part of the promotional video are *gong*, *bungkau*, *bamboo flute*, *tabla*, *kompang*, *sitar*, *erhu*, and *tangyu*. The incorporation of musical instruments from several ethnic groups living in Malaysia is evident as *bungkau* represents the Kadazandusun people, *bamboo flute* and *gong* are part of the Malay traditions. Meanwhile, *erhu* and *tangyu* signify Chinese culture, and *tabla* and *sitar* are Indian musical tools. The integration of traditional musical instruments symbolises respect for heritage and traditions. Despite the inclusion of various musical instruments from various ethnic groups, including the indigenous groups, only those familiar with these traditional instruments can detect their presence through sound in the promotional video. From the positive perspective, it is important to note that the promotional video appears very lively as some of the traditional musical instruments involved fairly strong beatings of the apparatus. Additionally, the incorporation of the *dikir barat* performance as part of theme song of “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia” makes it even more energetic. *Dikir barat* is a type of musical form originated from the East Coast of Malaysia and commonly performed in the state of Kelantan. This traditional show is a group performance staged in a competitive way, which makes the promotional video more interesting. Although the official theme song in the video was sung in English by Malaysian singer Idayu, the inclusion of the *dikir barat* performance using the East Coast dialect as part of the song injects element of Orientalism, which enhances its authenticity and exoticness. This is a reflection of the popularity of inserting Orientalism traits, including Arabic verses in the pop music like the song titled ‘Desert Rose’. This finding supports the point made by Stiffler (2014) that the inclusion of Middle Eastern attributes can enhance the attractiveness of tourism and hospitality industry, especially in the globalised world today.

Various Malaysian popular gastronomy has been integrated into the promotional video to show the presence of multi-ethnic cultural heritage. Several signature cuisines associated with multi-ethnic societies, particularly associated with the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia the Malays, Chinese and Indian are showcased in the “Truly Asia” promotion for 2020. Among the famous food and beverages demonstrated include *nasi lemak*, *char kuey teow*, fried rice, *satay*, *nasi kandar*, *roti* and curry, *ketupat* and sweet delicacies. Tropical fruits such as durian, mango, banana, and pomelo also shown in the video can accentuate the uniqueness of Malaysia as an Asian destination.

As part of the “Truly Asia” destination, the recently launched promotional video also featured natural resources as another primary attraction offered to tourists visiting Malaysia. The country’s spectacular natural resources are directly represented in the lyrics of the song and visuals images.

It is manifested in the chorus part of the song that “Beautiful Malaysia ... Feel the rainforest, the mountains and beaches”. This verse showcases that three types of natural resources, the rainforest, mountains, and the beaches are among core attractions in luring tourists to visit Malaysia. Malaysia’s impressive natural assets are featured quite strongly in the form of visuals, including unique flowers and wildlife, such as orang utan and rare birds. Visuals showed that there are various recreational activities and adventures that can be enjoyed by tourists within the natural settings, particularly water-based activities. In fact, nature has been shown as the background of some of the cultural heritage attractions featured in the video.

Through self-representation of Malaysia as a “Truly Asia” destination for 2020 campaign, it is evident Tourism Malaysia focuses their promotion on cultural heritage attributes as the fundamental attractions. Various cultural heritage resources, including the people from numerous ethnic groups, their lifestyles, music, cuisines, arts and crafts, are incorporated to highlight the uniqueness of Malaysia as an Asian and Oriental destination to foreign and local tourists. Interactions between hosts (locals) and guests (tourists) are among important part of experiencing Malaysia and creating memorable moment. It is stated in the song lyrics and is apparent via visuals that Malaysians as hosts are very friendly and they welcome tourists with open arms. These aspects are evident via the settings of homestays, cultural village, and retail contexts involving locals serving and entertaining tourists. It is also shown in the promotional video that tourists do not only consist of Western and foreign tourists, but local visitors as well. This indirectly shows that Malaysians appreciate and enjoy travelling within their home country. Not only that, it reflects that the rapid growth of this country over the past years has improved the standard of living in Malaysia and enable them to travel. Modernisation and familiarity elements are included in the “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia” 2020 tourism campaign. These characteristics are apparent through the images of high-rise buildings, theme parks, developed resorts, and lifestyles associated with Westerners. These findings support outcomes from previous studies (e.g. Yan & Santos, 2009; Ooi, 2005; Stiffler, 2017), which mentioned that both elements of traditions and modernisation are reflected in tourism promotion. Although the national tourism authority of Malaysia has power to represent Malaysia as a modern and dynamic way, traits linked to traditional and aboriginal culture are still evident. Tourism officials, including destination marketers, obviously incorporated these attributes to entice tourists as it is claimed by earlier scholars (e.g. Britton, 1979; Silver, 1993; Selwyn, 1993) that employing Orientalism characteristics is widely recognised as one of the approaches to draw tourists, especially from Western countries. Although Said previously blamed the developed world for misrepresenting the least developing countries, it is uncovered that Oriental destinations, including Malaysia, is utilising this strategy to attract tourists.

## 5. Conclusion

In short, this paper explored how Malaysia has been framed as a “Truly Asia” destination via the promotional video produced for VMY 2020 campaign. Findings of this paper reveal that variety of cultural heritage attributes associated with multi-ethnic groups and unity in diversity as main attractions presented to tourists. Components of “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia” in the official video consist of spectacular natural resources, gastronomy, sports and recreational attributes, and modern attractions. It is also reflected within the lyrics and visuals that Malaysians are friendly and attentive to tourists’ needs and wants. Indirectly, these can boost tourists’ experience and enable them to create a memorable time in Malaysia. Overall, the integration of traditional and modern attributes of Malaysia combined to project this country as “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia”.

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