

National Representation of Malaysian Myths in Tourism Promotional Brochures: A Longitudinal Perspective

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Abstract

It is claimed that myths and legends have been incorporated in tourism promotions as they have the power to enhance the appeal of tourist destinations. The inclusion of mythological aspects can contribute to the imagination of places as Oriental or Otherness destinations, a reputable approach to attracting tourists. Despite the importance of the role played by myths and legends in destination marketing, thus far there have been very few studies which have delved into this area, especially from longitudinal and self-representation perspectives. Therefore, the aim of this thesis was to explore the national representation of manifest myths in tourism marketing, focusing on a longitudinal lens. In the analysis of this representation, myths included in tourism brochures published by the Malaysian national promotional bodies from 1962 to 2007 were assessed.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to analyse the brochures in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the representation of myths. Past brochures from the Tourism Malaysia Resource Centre in Kuala Lumpur were examined. Contemporary brochures were collected from three locations and two international airports in Malaysia: the Tourism Malaysia offices in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Langkawi Island, and Kuala Lumpur and Penang International Airports.

The quantitative analysis shows that myths have been well represented in the Malaysian tourism promotional brochures, with almost one third including myths. However, the extent of the representation of the majority of myths is quite brief, most brochures allocating only a small number and percentage of words to the myths and their description. The assessment of the trend of the portrayal of myths reveals that the incorporation of myths declined steadily over the period of five decades.

Qualitative analysis identified that stories depicting religious and spiritual beliefs are fundamental in Malaysian myths. The myths include a variety of themes projecting Orientalism, Otherness, modernisation, Westernisation and globalisation. Over time, changes in portraying modernisation and Westernisation have been identifiable in selected myths. The longitudinal assessment revealed that nine myths exhibit some alteration in their components. Among traditional core values ingrained in Malay myths are the significance of conveying crucial messages in a delicate way, indirect communication is a symbol of politeness; and, along with human relationships, maintaining harmony with the natural environment and supernatural worlds and beings.

In the context of tourism, this research demonstrates that a significant number of myths have been utilised in the promotion of natural resources and to complement the descriptions of tangible attractions, particularly places of worship and cultural heritage sites. It is also shown that some unusual and peculiar myths have been exploited to lure tourists and used in destination marketing to highlight the uniqueness of a particular ethnicity and a place's identity.

The findings of this research shed light on the knowledge of tourism representation from longitudinal and national perspectives, by revealing over a period of five decades the trends and alterations in the projection of mythological stories and how they have been employed in the promotional brochures published by an Oriental country. They also contribute to the understanding on how myths have been utilised in promotional material and exploited to attract tourists.