

A REVIEW OF EVOLUTION OF TRANSLATION AND TOURISM MARKETING (2016-2025)

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Abstract

Tourism marketing has become increasingly multilingual as destinations compete for international audiences in a globalized and digital world. This review article examines the evolution of translation and linguistic strategies in tourism marketing, highlighting how translation functions not merely as a transfer of information but as an act of cultural mediation and persuasive communication. Drawing on empirical studies, the review shows that effective tourism translation requires cultural adaptation, transcreation of slogans, creative handling of figurative language, storytelling, and the adoption of inclusive and sustainability-oriented discourse. The study also explores the impact of digital transformation, particularly the role of machine translation, social media, and multimodal communication, while emphasizing the continued need for human creativity and cultural expertise. Case studies from Saudi Arabia, Europe, Uzbekistan, Italy, and Australia illustrate both successes where translation enhanced authenticity and branding and failures where overreliance on technology or undervaluation of translators weakened campaigns. The findings highlight persistent challenges, including cultural misrepresentation, loss of authenticity, and training gaps, but also point to promising future directions such as AI-human collaboration, professionalization of tourism translation, and interdisciplinary training. The review concludes with four major recommendations: investing in professional and creative translation, strengthening translator training, adopting inclusive and sustainable narratives, and balancing technological tools with human expertise.

Keywords: Translation; Tourism Marketing; Cultural Mediation; Transcreation; Machine Translation.

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Introduction

Background and Rationale

Tourism is widely recognized as one of the most powerful engines of global economic development, accounting for a significant share of international trade in services and contributing substantially to employment and cultural exchange. Its rapid growth and diversification have created intense language contact and unprecedented demands for effective cross-cultural communication (Wilson, 2018). In this context, language is more than a medium of communication. It is a marketing tool that shapes perceptions, builds emotional connections, and influences travel decisions. Tourism discourse relies heavily on linguistic creativity, persuasive strategies, and cultural resonance to promote destinations, products, and services (Mănescu, 2019).

Translation lies at the heart of this process. It enables destinations to transcend linguistic boundaries and project themselves to international audiences, making it a fundamental instrument of global tourism marketing (Qassem & Sahari, 2023). However, translation in this field is not simply about transferring information; it involves crafting messages that are culturally appropriate, emotionally appealing, and commercially persuasive. As Ammendola (2022) notes, the ever-changing nature of tourism driven by shifting traveler needs, habits, and awareness demands constant adaptation in the linguistic strategies used to market destinations.

The evolution of tourism translation reflects this complexity. Early promotional texts often relied on literal, word-for-word translations that emphasized factual accuracy but neglected cultural nuance and persuasive appeal. Over time, the emphasis shifted toward more audience-centered approaches, incorporating strategies such as localization, transcreation, and cultural mediation (Agorni & Rossato, 2023; Alangari, 2022). Today, the digital era has introduced new dynamics, with social media platforms, multimodal communication, and artificial intelligence reshaping how tourism discourse is produced and disseminated (Del Fante & Federici, 2025; Elmuradova, 2024). These developments underscore the need to examine how translation strategies have evolved in response to global tourism trends and technological innovation.

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Statement of the Problem

Despite the centrality of translation to international tourism marketing, persistent challenges undermine its effectiveness. Studies reveal that many promotional texts suffer from poor translation quality, often due to reliance on unedited machine outputs or literal renderings that fail

to capture cultural subtleties (Del Fante & Federici, 2025; Liu, 2020). Such shortcomings not only lead to errors and misunderstandings but also diminish the authenticity and persuasive power of destination branding. Furthermore, gaps in translator training mean that many practitioners lack the interdisciplinary knowledge and specialized competence required to address the unique demands of tourism texts (Qassem & Sahari, 2023).

Equally pressing are the broader cultural and communicative issues. Research has shown that the transfer of metaphors across languages can pose serious challenges in promotional texts, with inconsistent strategies sometimes weakening the intended effect (Stepins, 2022). Other studies highlight the underexplored dimensions of gender, relational identity, and inclusivity in tourism discourse (Agorni, 2019; Kefala, 2021). Moreover, the rise of digital technologies has generated new linguistic challenges, including the emergence of neologisms, multimodal persuasion techniques, and shifting translator roles in AI-mediated contexts (Elmuradova, 2024). Together, these issues point to a gap in scholarship and practice: there is a pressing need to systematically analyze how translation strategies in tourism marketing have evolved and to identify the most effective linguistic approaches for engaging international audiences.

Methodology

This study adopted a systematic literature review approach in order to examine the evolution of translation strategies in tourism marketing and their effectiveness in reaching international audiences. The review drew primarily on a collection of empirical studies, complemented by relevant conceptual and theoretical works, to provide both historical and contemporary perspectives on the subject.

The literature search focused on scholarly contributions published between 2016 and 2025, a period marked by the rapid digital transformation of tourism marketing and the rise of artificial intelligence in translation practices. The reviewed studies were selected based on their relevance to tourism translation, their empirical or conceptual contribution to the field, and their focus on linguistic strategies, cross-cultural communication, or the discourse of tourism promotion. Studies that discussed translation in broader contexts without specific reference to tourism were excluded to ensure focus.

The sources comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and case-based investigations from diverse geographical contexts, including Europe (Ammendola, 2022; Stepins, 2022), the Middle East (Alangari, 2022; Qassem & Sahari, 2023), Asia (Liu, 2020; Umarovna, 2024), and Australia (Sulaiman, 2016). This diversity provided a comparative lens through which to identify both global trends and regional variations in translation practices.

The analytical approach was primarily thematic, guided by three dimensions: (1) tracing the chronological evolution of translation in tourism marketing, (2) identifying linguistic strategies adopted in different cultural and technological contexts, and (3) synthesizing challenges and future directions. By combining thematic synthesis with comparative insights, this methodology allowed

the review to capture both the broad trajectory and nuanced dynamics of tourism translation practices.

3. Conceptual Framework

Tourism marketing is an interdisciplinary field that draws on economics, cultural studies, linguistics, and communication theory. Unlike other sectors, the “product” being marketed is largely intangible: it is the promise of an experience, an adventure, or a cultural encounter. The effectiveness of this marketing depends on language’s ability to not only inform but also persuade, attract, and inspire potential travelers (Mănescu, 2019). Translation therefore plays a dual role: on the one hand, it facilitates access for global audiences by overcoming linguistic barriers, and on the other hand, it strategically reshapes messages so they resonate with the cultural and emotional expectations of target readers.

Tourism Marketing in a Global Context

Tourism is by nature international. Destinations seek to appeal to travelers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making communication central to the industry’s success. As global mobility has expanded, so too have travelers’ expectations: tourists increasingly demand authentic, personalized, and value-driven experiences rather than generic, standardized packages. This shift has had profound implications for tourism marketing discourse, requiring more nuanced linguistic strategies.

Empirical studies highlight how tourism discourse is constantly evolving in line with broader global trends. For example, Ammendola (2022) demonstrates how sustainability-related terminology entered tourism promotion through the European Green Capitals Award brochures. The introduction of new linguistic structures tied to “urban sustainability” reshaped promotional language, showing how thematic priorities such as climate awareness influence how destinations present themselves. Similarly, studies on adventure tourism emphasize the lexical fields of “nature,” “risk,” and “excitement,” illustrating how specialized forms of tourism develop their own sub-discourses with unique translational challenges.

Thus, tourism marketing in a global context requires linguistic strategies that are not only multilingual but also sensitive to these shifting thematic domains. The language used to promote a coastal city, for instance, will differ significantly from that used to brand a pilgrimage destination or a luxury resort. Translation is essential to ensuring that these tailored messages retain their persuasive power across cultures.

Language and Destination Branding

Destination branding relies heavily on language to construct and reinforce a place’s identity in the minds of potential visitors. Through slogans, brochures, websites, and social media campaigns, language creates associations between a destination and values such as hospitality, authenticity,

adventure, or sustainability. Effective branding therefore depends on linguistic creativity, especially the use of stylistic devices such as metaphors, symbolism, and relational identity markers.

However, translating these devices poses significant challenges. Stepins (2022) shows that metaphorical expressions on promotional websites in English, Spanish, and German often do not translate directly, requiring careful adaptation. Literal translation risks producing awkward or meaningless expressions, while over-domestication may dilute the distinctiveness of the original imagery. Similarly, Kefala (2021) illustrates how pragmatic choices in tourism advertising such as shifts in politeness strategies or self-representation markers affect how host/guest relations are constructed across languages. These findings underline that translation in tourism branding is not neutral but deeply implicated in how identities and power relations are framed.

At the same time, successful translation can strengthen branding. Alangari (2022), examining Saudi tourism campaigns, shows how translators actively mediated cultural items such as food, traditions, and festivals through strategies of explanation and exoticization. Rather than neutralizing cultural differences, these translations highlighted them as selling points, enhancing the destination's appeal to international audiences. This suggests that translation is not simply about preserving meaning but about strategically amplifying certain cultural features to align with branding goals.

Translation as Cross-Cultural Communication

Translation in tourism marketing must be understood as a form of cross-cultural communication rather than a purely linguistic operation. It is concerned with bridging cultural gaps, negotiating meaning, and creating messages that persuade across diverse sociolinguistic environments. From this perspective, translators act not just as language experts but also as cultural mediators.

Several studies emphasize the complexities of this role. Sulaiman (2016) found that tourism promotional materials (TPMs) are often criticized for poor quality, partly because commissioners underestimate the translator's role. Misconceptions about translation as a purely mechanical activity often lead to underfunding, reliance on non-specialists, or the use of unedited machine translation. Yet, empirical evidence shows that such practices compromise communicative effectiveness. Similarly, Qassem and Sahari (2023) reveal that postgraduate trainees in Saudi Arabia lacked the interdisciplinary competence required for tourism translation, highlighting a training gap that undermines professional practice.

Cross-cultural communication also raises questions about translation strategies such as domestication and foreignization. Alangari's (2022) study of Arabic-English translations in Saudi tourism demonstrated the deliberate use of foreignization strategies to foreground cultural items, thereby positioning Saudi traditions as distinctive attractions. Conversely, Del Fante and Federici (2025) show how reliance on automated translation in Italy's "Open to Meraviglia" campaign led to unedited, literal translations that ignored cultural context, undermining the campaign's

promotional intent. These contrasting cases illustrate the stakes involved: when translation functions effectively as cross-cultural communication, it enhances international tourism appeal; when it fails, it risks reputational damage.

4. Evolution Of Translation In Tourism Marketing

Translation in tourism marketing has undergone significant changes over the past century, shaped by shifting traveler expectations, advances in translation studies, and technological transformations. The trajectory of this evolution can be divided into four overlapping phases: literal and informative translation, persuasive and culturally adapted translation, localization and transcreation, and digital/AI-driven strategies.

Early Approaches: Literal and Informative Translation

In the early stages of institutional tourism promotion, translation was primarily seen as a tool for transferring information across languages, often in a literal and mechanical fashion. Campaigns tended to reproduce source texts word-for-word without considering cultural adaptation or persuasive impact. Agorni and Rossato (2023), in their study of Italy's national tourism body (ENIT) from the 1920s to the 1930s, reveal how multilingual magazines such as *Italia* provided straightforward translations of promotional material in English, French, and German. While these efforts expanded the reach of Italian tourism campaigns, they frequently failed to capture the cultural and emotional resonance that would later become central to destination branding.

This early phase reflected a functional but limited understanding of translation: it made tourism information accessible but did not necessarily enhance the destination's image or appeal. Literal translations often led to stiff, overly formal language that lacked persuasive power.

Shift to Persuasive and Culturally Adapted Translation

As tourism became more competitive in the post-war and globalization eras, the limitations of literal translation became evident. Destinations realized that effective marketing required texts that not only conveyed information but also appealed emotionally and aligned with target culture expectations. This period saw the gradual integration of cultural adaptation strategies into translation practices.

Research highlights the importance of this shift. Mănescu (2019) notes that tourism discourse developed its own persuasive conventions, supported by multimodal elements such as images and music, to attract and influence travelers. Translators were increasingly tasked with adapting messages to fit these conventions, raising the question of whether language shaped tourist behavior or whether tourists themselves influenced the evolution of tourism language. Similarly, studies of metaphor translation (Stepins, 2022) show how promotional texts began using figurative language to convey emotion, imagery, and identity, demanding a more nuanced approach to translation.

In this phase, translators started to be viewed not only as linguistic experts but as cultural mediators, responsible for ensuring that the promotional intent of tourism texts was preserved across languages.

The Rise of Localization and Transcreation

By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, tourism marketing embraced localization and transcreation as dominant strategies. Localization goes beyond translation to adapt content for specific cultural and linguistic audiences, while transcreation emphasizes creativity, allowing the target text to diverge significantly from the source to achieve the same persuasive effect.

Studies provide strong evidence of this shift. Alangari (2022) shows how Saudi tourism campaigns employed strategies such as exoticization and explanation to mediate cultural-specific items (CSIs), particularly in areas like traditions and cuisine. These strategies positioned Saudi culture not as a barrier but as an attraction, reflecting a deliberate foreignization that enhanced cultural authenticity. Similarly, Liu (2020) emphasizes that translation in tourism publicity materials should not only transfer information but also project cultural values and improve the international image of a city.

Localization also played a key role in addressing tourism's diversification into niches such as sustainability and adventure travel. Ammendola (2022) demonstrates how sustainability terminology in European tourism campaigns required careful adaptation to resonate with audiences unfamiliar with technical environmental terms. In adventure tourism, specialized lexical fields such as "risk" and "excitement" demanded culturally sensitive phrasing to maintain their impact across languages.

Digital and Ai-Driven Translation Strategies

The contemporary phase of tourism translation is defined by the influence of digital platforms and the growing reliance on artificial intelligence (AI). With the rise of online booking systems, multilingual websites, and social media campaigns, the demand for fast, large-scale, and cost-effective translation has never been greater. Within this phase, three main dimensions can be identified:

- a) **Machine Translation in Tourism Promotion:** Neural machine translation (NMT) tools and generative AI systems are increasingly used to translate tourism promotional materials due to their speed and affordability. However, studies reveal mixed results. For instance, Del Fante and Federici (2025) show that Italy's Open to Meraviglia campaign relied on automated translations that mirrored the source Italian text too closely, resulting in awkward phrasing and errors. This failure to adapt messages to cultural and promotional contexts weakened the campaign's international appeal, underlining the risks of unedited MT outputs.

- b) **Post-Editing and Quality Control:** Given the limitations of machine translation, post-editing and quality control have become critical in tourism contexts. Without human intervention, automated outputs often miss persuasive intent or cultural resonance, leading to communication breakdowns. As Sulaiman (2016) stresses, misconceptions about translation as a purely mechanical process often prevent commissioners from allocating adequate resources for professional post-editing, perpetuating the problem of poor-quality tourism texts.
- c) **Social Media and Multimodal Strategies:** Tourism marketing today is heavily shaped by social media platforms, where translation involves more than just words. Messages must integrate text, visuals, hashtags, and sometimes audio or video elements in a way that appeals to international audiences. Elmuradova (2024) highlights how neologisms and multimodal persuasion techniques emerge in this digital space, demanding innovative linguistic strategies that go beyond conventional translation. Translators now act as content localizers, adapting messages not only linguistically but also visually and contextually for digital audiences.

While AI tools offer efficiency, they often struggle with creativity, cultural mediation, and figurative language. Stepins (2022) notes that metaphorical expressions are already difficult for human translators, and automated systems are even less equipped to handle them effectively. As a result, AI-generated texts risk producing flat or culturally insensitive translations unless complemented by human expertise.

5. Linguistic Strategies For International Tourism Audiences

Tourism marketing texts are uniquely complex because they must perform several functions simultaneously: they inform tourists about attractions and services, they persuade readers by appealing to emotions and values, and they inspire curiosity and desire by constructing vivid images of the destination. The success of these texts lies not only in the information they carry but also in how they are linguistically crafted. Unlike technical or legal translation, tourism translation requires a careful balance between fidelity and creativity. As Mănescu (2019) observes, tourism discourse has developed its own conventions, often blending text with images, sound, and cultural references, which shape travelers' decisions in profound ways.

The challenge for translators is to recreate these effects across languages and cultures. A literal rendering may convey factual content, but it risks stripping the text of its persuasive force. On the other hand, an overly liberal translation may alienate audiences by misrepresenting the cultural reality of the destination. To address this dilemma, researchers and practitioners have identified a set of linguistic strategies that ensure translated tourism texts remain effective for international audiences. These include adaptation to cultural nuances, translation of slogans and taglines, creative handling of stylistic devices, emotional appeal through storytelling, and the adoption of inclusive, value-driven discourse.

Adaptation to Cultural Nuances

Cultural adaptation is the cornerstone of effective tourism translation. Destinations are marketed not only through attractions but also through the cultural meanings embedded in their representation. This makes the handling of culture-specific items (CSIs) such as references to local cuisine, festivals, architecture, or customs especially important.

Empirical research shows the consequences of failing to adapt culturally. In their study of Italy's Open to Meraviglia campaign, Del Fante and Federici (2025) found that machine-translated content often mirrored the original Italian too closely, producing unidiomatic English that failed to resonate with the target audience. Errors and unnatural phrasing suggested the absence of cultural adaptation, weakening the campaign's promotional intent. By contrast, Alangari (2022) demonstrates how Saudi translators took an interventionist role by adopting foreignization strategies such as exoticization and explanatory notes when rendering Arabic cultural references into English. Rather than simplifying or erasing cultural difference, they amplified it, presenting Saudi traditions and food as distinctive attractions for international audiences.

These examples illustrate a crucial point: adaptation is not about erasing cultural difference but about strategically reframing it so that it becomes a source of appeal. Qassem and Sahari (2023) similarly stress that translators require interdisciplinary competence in both translation and tourism studies to master this delicate balance. Without such skills, translations risk sounding either too alien to be understood or too generic to be persuasive.

Use of Multilingual Slogans and Taglines

Slogans and taglines are central to destination branding because they condense complex cultural identities into memorable phrases. They must be catchy, emotionally resonant, and easy to recall. For this reason, they pose one of the greatest challenges in tourism translation. Stepins (2022) shows that slogans often rely on metaphorical expressions, such as portraying destinations as "gateways" or "paradises." These metaphors rarely translate directly across languages, as their symbolic associations differ culturally. A literal rendering may produce confusion or awkwardness, while a domesticated translation may dilute the slogan's uniqueness. This is where transcreation becomes indispensable: instead of simply translating the words, the translator recreates the message to achieve the same persuasive and emotional impact in the target culture.

Examples from practice show both success and failure. Some multilingual campaigns have produced highly effective localized slogans that preserve the brand's emotional power. Others, however, have relied on literal translations that fall flat. This reflects Sulaiman's (2016) argument that misconceptions about translation as a purely mechanical task often prevent commissioners from investing in professional transcreation, resulting in weaker international campaigns. Thus, the translation of slogans is not merely a linguistic task but a strategic branding decision.

Stylistic Devices and Figurative Language

Tourism discourse is characterized by stylistic richness. Metaphors, similes, alliteration, and hyperbole are frequently used to evoke imagery, excitement, and emotional connection. Figurative language, however, is notoriously difficult to translate. Stepins (2022) and Iritspukhova (2023) highlight the underexplored but crucial role of metaphors in tourism texts. These devices do more than decorate language, they position destinations within specific experiential frames. A city may be described as the “heartbeat” of a nation, or a beach as an “untouched paradise.” In some cases, the same metaphor can be adapted across languages, but in many others, it requires creative reformulation. For example, the metaphor of a “hidden gem” works well in English but may not carry the same connotations in other languages, where “gems” are not culturally linked with discovery or exclusivity.

Translators must therefore exercise creativity and cultural sensitivity. Over-literal translations risk sounding clumsy or nonsensical, while overly free adaptations may lose the original’s branding intent. As Sulaiman (2016) notes, this delicate balance highlights the importance of professional expertise in tourism translation. Figurative language thus exemplifies the broader tension between fidelity and creativity that runs through the field.

Emotional Appeal and Storytelling

Modern tourism marketing increasingly relies on storytelling to construct immersive narratives that connect with travelers emotionally. Rather than simply listing attractions, promotional texts narrate experiences inviting the reader to imagine themselves exploring ancient streets, tasting exotic dishes, or embarking on adventures. Storytelling creates an affective bond between the destination and the potential tourist, making translation of these narratives critical to successful promotion.

Mănescu (2019) shows that tourism discourse often integrates multimodal elements such as images and music, which enhance the persuasive effect of narratives. However, translating these narratives requires preserving not only the factual content but also the emotional tone. Kefala (2021) demonstrates how relational markers such as the use of inclusive pronouns (“we,” “our”) in Greek-English tourism advertisements shaped host/visitor relationships. A failure to preserve such markers in translation could shift the relational dynamics, making a destination appear less welcoming or less authentic.

This indicates that storytelling translation involves both linguistic and pragmatic adaptation. Translators must carefully reconstruct narratives to maintain their emotional appeal, relational positioning, and persuasive effect. In this sense, they act as co-creators of the destination’s brand story rather than passive conveyors of information.

Inclusive and Value-Driven Language

Contemporary tourism discourse reflects broader global trends toward inclusivity, sustainability, and ethical values. Promotional texts increasingly highlight diversity, environmental awareness, and social responsibility. Translation must therefore ensure that these values are preserved and communicated effectively across languages. Ammendola (2022) demonstrates how sustainability discourse reshaped European promotional materials, requiring translators to adapt technical environmental terms for broader audiences. Similarly, Agorni (2019) critiques the absence of gender perspectives in tourism discourse, calling for more inclusive narratives that reflect the diverse realities of global travelers. Translators must be attentive not only to linguistic fidelity but also to the ideological implications of their choices. For instance, choosing gender-neutral language or emphasizing sustainable practices can align a destination's brand with contemporary traveler expectations.

This move toward inclusive and value-driven discourse positions translators as ethical agents as well as linguistic mediators. Their work shapes how destinations are perceived not only culturally but also morally, reinforcing tourism's role as a vehicle of both economic development and cultural diplomacy.

6. Technology And Digital Transformation

The digital revolution has profoundly reshaped the landscape of tourism marketing and, by extension, the strategies employed in translation. Unlike earlier periods where brochures, guidebooks, and travel magazines dominated, today's tourism discourse circulates largely through websites, mobile apps, and social media platforms, where immediacy and multimodality are paramount. This shift has created both opportunities and challenges for translation, demanding new approaches that combine linguistic expertise with digital literacy and cultural sensitivity.

Several key dimensions define the role of technology and digital transformation in tourism translation: the rise of machine translation, the need for post-editing and quality control, the role of social media and multimodality, the emergence of digital discourse features, and the challenge of aligning technology with creativity and cultural mediation.

Machine Translation and Efficiency Demands: The demand for large-scale multilingual content in tourism marketing has led to increased reliance on machine translation (MT), particularly neural machine translation (NMT) and, more recently, generative AI systems. These tools are attractive to tourism authorities and private companies because they offer speed, scalability, and cost-effectiveness. However, empirical studies reveal their shortcomings in terms of cultural nuance and persuasive intent. Del Fante and Federici (2025), for example, found that Italy's Open to Meraviglia campaign relied heavily on automated translations that closely mirrored the source Italian but failed to adapt to the promotional context. The result was a series of unedited, awkward texts that undermined the campaign's credibility. This case underscores that while MT may serve

as a starting point for efficiency, it cannot replace the need for professional translation in tourism, where brand image and cultural resonance are at stake.

Post-Editing and Quality Control: Given the limitations of machine-generated outputs, post-editing has become a critical step in digital tourism translation. Post-editors ensure that translated texts not only correct linguistic errors but also adjust style, tone, and cultural references to align with the destination's branding strategy. As Sulaiman (2016) emphasizes, misconceptions about translation as a purely mechanical task often lead to underinvestment in this stage, resulting in promotional materials of poor quality.

Without post-editing, the risk of cultural misrepresentation or communication breakdown increases significantly. A mistranslated slogan, metaphor, or cultural item can damage a destination's international reputation, making quality control indispensable in the digital era.

Social Media, Multimodality, and Tourism Discourse: One of the defining features of the digital age is the multimodal nature of communication. Tourism marketing today is not limited to text but combines words, images, videos, hashtags, emojis, and interactive features to engage audiences. This multimodality requires translators to function as content localizers, ensuring that each element resonates with the target culture. Elmuradova (2024) notes that tourism discourse in the digital age is marked by neologisms, innovative persuasion techniques, and context-dependent communication. For example, Instagram posts promoting destinations may rely on playful hashtags or emerging slang terms that resist literal translation. Similarly, YouTube travel campaigns combine scripts, subtitles, and visual storytelling, requiring translators to synchronize linguistic adaptation with audiovisual elements. This complexity means that tourism translators must increasingly work at the intersection of linguistics, media studies, and digital marketing.

Emerging Features of Digital Tourism Discourse: Digital platforms have also given rise to new linguistic features in tourism marketing. Studies such as Ammendola (2022) and Iritspukhova (2023) highlight how sustainability discourse and metaphorical language evolve in digital promotional texts, shaping tourist perceptions. Online communication often involves shortened formats (tweets, captions) and interactive engagement (comments, reviews), which require translation strategies that are concise, persuasive, and adaptable. Wilson (2018) further shows how multilingual interactions in tourist offices reveal processes of accommodation where English often functions as a lingua franca. These findings indicate that digital tourism discourse is not only produced by institutions but also co-constructed through traveler interactions, reviews, and user-generated content, all of which may require translation or mediation.

Technology, Creativity, and Cultural Mediation: While technology offers efficiency, it also highlights the irreplaceable role of human translators as creative and cultural mediators. Automated systems still struggle with figurative language, cultural symbolism, and relational nuances that are central to tourism discourse (Stepins, 2022). For instance, a metaphor like "a city

that never sleeps” requires cultural contextualization to maintain its effect, which AI tools are rarely equipped to provide.

Elmuradova (2024) stresses that translators in the digital era must combine linguistic expertise with specialized training in tourism discourse, as their work now involves negotiating between technological outputs, cultural expectations, and branding strategies. This hybrid role underscores that technology cannot replace translators but instead redefines their function within the digital tourism industry.

The digital transformation of tourism marketing has reconfigured translation practices in significant ways. Machine translation has introduced speed and scalability, but its limitations necessitate rigorous post-editing and quality control. Social media and multimodal platforms demand that translators act as content localizers, adapting not only text but also images, hashtags, and audiovisual elements. The rise of digital discourse features such as sustainability narratives, metaphorical persuasion, and user-generated content further complicates translation tasks. Ultimately, while technology provides tools, it is the human translator’s creativity and cultural mediation that ensure tourism texts remain authentic, persuasive, and globally competitive.

7. Challenges in Translating for Tourism Marketing

While translation plays a crucial role in international tourism marketing, it is also fraught with challenges. These challenges arise from the need to balance fidelity and creativity, manage cultural differences, and adapt texts to evolving technological and social contexts. When not addressed effectively, they can result in communication breakdowns, cultural misrepresentation, or a weakened destination brand. The literature highlights several key challenges: cultural misinterpretations and stereotyping, loss of authenticity, tension between standardization and localization, limitations of technology, and gaps in translator training and professionalization.

- i. **Cultural Misinterpretations and Stereotyping:** One of the most persistent challenges in tourism translation is the risk of misrepresenting cultural elements. Literal translation of culture-specific items often produces results that are either confusing or misleading for international audiences. For example, Del Fante and Federici (2025) observed that Italy’s reliance on machine translation in the Open to Meraviglia campaign produced texts that ignored cultural context, leading to unidiomatic and ineffective translations. Additionally, oversimplification of cultural references can lead to stereotypes. Mănescu (2019) notes that some tourism texts frame non-Western destinations through exoticized imagery, reinforcing postcolonial notions of “the Other.” Such portrayals may attract certain audiences but risk alienating others and undermining the authenticity of the tourism experience.
- ii. **Loss of Authenticity:** Closely linked to cultural misrepresentation is the problem of authenticity. Tourism marketing increasingly emphasizes authentic experiences as a key selling point, yet poor translation can compromise this goal. Liu (2020) shows that in

Chinese coastal cities, promotional texts often failed to capture cultural values in translation, weakening the international image of the destination. Similarly, Sulaiman (2016) highlights that the gap between commissioners' expectations and actual translation practices often results in tourism promotional materials (TPMs) that lack authenticity and persuasive appeal. Authenticity is particularly at risk when machine translation is used without adequate post-editing, as automated systems rarely capture the subtle cultural or emotional undertones that shape tourist perceptions.

- iii. **Balancing Standardization and Localization:** Global tourism campaigns often face the dilemma of whether to standardize messages across languages or localize them for specific markets. Standardization ensures brand consistency but risks producing generic or culturally inappropriate texts. Localization enhances cultural resonance but may fragment the brand identity across markets. Alangari (2022) shows how Saudi translators resolved this dilemma by adopting foreignization strategies that preserved cultural distinctiveness while still appealing to international audiences. In contrast, studies like Qassem and Sahari (2023) reveal that inadequate localization training leaves translators ill-equipped to adapt texts effectively, resulting in translations that neither maintain brand consistency nor resonate with target audiences. This tension illustrates the need for strategic decision-making in tourism translation: some elements (e.g., logos, visual branding) may be standardized, while others (e.g., slogans, metaphors, cultural references) require localization or transcreation.
- iv. **Technological Limitations:** Although machine translation and AI tools have improved efficiency, they also introduce new challenges. Automated outputs often lack cultural sensitivity, mishandle figurative language, and fail to preserve persuasive intent. Stepins (2022) notes that even human translators struggle with metaphorical language in tourism texts, suggesting that AI systems are even less capable of handling these complexities. Moreover, as Elmuradova (2024) argues, the rapid pace of digital innovation produces neologisms and multimodal persuasion techniques that automated systems cannot yet fully manage. Without human oversight, destinations risk reputational damage from clumsy or inaccurate translations, as seen in the Italian campaign analyzed by Del Fante and Federici (2025).
- v. **Gaps in Translator Training and Professionalization:** A significant challenge lies in the training and professionalization of tourism translators. Qassem and Sahari (2023) found that postgraduate trainees lacked the know-how to effectively handle tourism texts, reflecting a gap in curriculum design and interdisciplinary training. Similarly, Sulaiman (2016) highlighted that tourism commissioners often underestimate the translator's role, seeing translation as a mechanical process rather than a professional and creative task. This undervaluation not only leads to poor-quality outputs but also undermines the status of translation as a profession. Sulaiman et al. (2024) further emphasize that the professionalization of translation practice remains uneven across the globe. Without clear

standards and recognition, tourism translators may continue to face challenges in asserting their expertise and securing adequate resources for their work.

The challenges in translating tourism marketing texts are multifaceted, encompassing cultural, linguistic, technological, and professional dimensions. Cultural misinterpretations and stereotypes risk distorting the image of destinations, while poor translation quality can compromise authenticity. The tension between standardization and localization highlights the difficulty of maintaining global brand consistency while adapting to local markets. Technological tools offer efficiency but lack the creativity and cultural mediation required for effective tourism texts. Finally, gaps in training and professionalization hinder translators' ability to meet these demands. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that combines technological tools with human expertise, invests in translator training, and recognizes the strategic importance of translation in global tourism branding.

8. Case Studies And Empirical Insights

Tourism translation, while theoretically understood through concepts of cultural adaptation, localization, and transcreation, is best illustrated through real-world examples of how campaigns succeed or fail in practice. Case studies offer insights into the practical application of linguistic strategies and highlight the consequences of translation choices for destination branding. They also show how institutional attitudes, technological reliance, and translator training affect the overall quality of multilingual tourism communication. This section reviews selected success stories and failures drawn from empirical research, followed by comparative insights that identify recurring themes across contexts.

a) Success Stories in Multilingual Tourism Campaigns

- i. **Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and Cultural Mediation:** A widely cited success is Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 tourism initiative, which aimed to diversify the economy by attracting international visitors. Translation played a central role in this campaign, as the country sought to present itself as both modern and deeply rooted in tradition. Alangari (2022) demonstrates how translators actively mediated cultural-specific items (CSIs) such as food traditions, religious practices, and hospitality norms. Instead of domesticating these elements, translators employed foreignization strategies—including exoticization and explanatory footnotes—to present Saudi culture as an authentic and unique attraction. This approach enhanced the country's global image, showing that translation can function as a tool of cultural diplomacy as well as marketing.
- ii. **Sustainability and the European Green Capitals Award (EGCA):** Another success story is Europe's use of sustainability discourse in tourism promotion. Ammendola (2022) shows that cities competing for the Green Capitals Award relied on promotional brochures that emphasized themes of urban sustainability, green lifestyles, and eco-

tourism. Translating this discourse involved adapting technical environmental terminology into more accessible and persuasive forms for general audiences. By carefully shaping language, translators ensured that sustainability was not communicated as abstract jargon but as a tangible value for potential travelers. This case illustrates how translation contributes to aligning tourism branding with global social priorities such as climate change awareness and responsible travel.

- iii. **Tourism Terminology in Uzbekistan:** Emerging markets also demonstrate how translation can serve as a tool for global visibility. Umarovna (2024) examined the translation of tourism terminology in Uzbekistan, highlighting the adaptation of hospitality vocabulary, destination-specific content, and marketing texts. Through careful lexical choices and cultural framing, translators helped position Uzbekistan as a competitive travel destination, bridging gaps between local heritage and international expectations. This case reinforces the idea that smaller tourism economies can leverage translation strategically to gain a foothold in global tourism markets.
- iv. **Adventure Tourism and Specialized Discourse:** The growing niche of adventure tourism also illustrates successful translation practices. Corpus-based studies show that key terms such as adventure, risk, and nature along with their Spanish equivalents (aventura, riesgo, naturaleza) were consistently adapted in ways that preserved their promotional impact across languages. This demonstrates the importance of terminological consistency and phraseological adaptation in specialized tourism sub-sectors. By maintaining emotional resonance while respecting linguistic conventions, translators ensured the discourse appealed equally to English- and Spanish-speaking adventure travelers.

b) Failures and Lessons from Poor Translation Practices

- i. **Italy's Open to Meraviglia Campaign:** One of the most striking failures is Italy's 2023–2025 Open to Meraviglia campaign. Del Fante and Federici (2025) reveal that much of the campaign relied on automated translations with little to no post-editing. The outputs mirrored Italian syntax and expressions too closely, producing unidiomatic English that failed to capture the promotional tone. Errors appeared across the campaign's website and Instagram posts, leading to widespread criticism. Instead of enhancing Italy's international image, the campaign demonstrated the reputational risks of overreliance on machine translation. The lesson here is that efficiency cannot replace cultural adaptation, and human intervention remains essential.
- ii. **Australian Tourism Promotional Materials (TPMs):** Sulaiman (2016) investigated how Australian tourism commissioners approached translation and found a troubling gap between their expectations and practices. While

commissioners envisioned culturally effective promotional materials, in practice they treated translation as a minor technical step. This misconception led to underinvestment in professional translators and inadequate collaboration, resulting in TPMs that lacked persuasive force. The study underscores that undervaluing translation not only compromises quality but also undermines the broader tourism brand.

- iii. **Training Gaps in Saudi Translation Students:** Another lesson comes from Qassem and Sahari (2023), who examined the translation performance of Saudi postgraduate students. Their findings showed that students often adhered rigidly to the source text, neglecting adaptation and creativity. As a result, their translations were inadequate for tourism promotion, highlighting a lack of specialized training in the interdisciplinary skills required for this field. The implication is clear: without targeted education in tourism translation, even trained linguists may fail to meet the demands of the industry.
- iv. **Metaphor Translation Challenges:** Stepins (2022) shows that metaphor translation remains a recurrent stumbling block in tourism promotion. Literal renderings of metaphors often fail, producing either confusing or culturally inappropriate texts. Automated tools are particularly poor at handling figurative language, compounding the problem. This suggests that both human and machine translation continue to struggle with the creative demands of tourism discourse.

Comparative Insights

Across the reviewed case studies, a consistent pattern emerges regarding the factors that distinguish successful from failed translation practices in tourism marketing. Success is most evident when translation is treated as a strategic and creative act of cultural mediation rather than a purely linguistic exercise. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 campaigns stand out in this regard, where translators deliberately employed foreignization to foreground cultural uniqueness and frame local traditions as global attractions. Similarly, European cities competing for the Green Capitals Award demonstrated how technical sustainability discourse could be carefully adapted into persuasive narratives that resonated with international audiences. These cases underscore the point that when translators act as co-creators of meaning—balancing authenticity with accessibility—translation becomes a powerful driver of destination branding and competitiveness.

By contrast, failed cases reveal that misconceptions about translation remain widespread, particularly when it is viewed as a mechanical process rather than a professional and creative task. Italy's Open to Meraviglia campaign faltered because machine-generated texts were left unedited, producing unidiomatic and ineffective messages, while Australian Tourism Promotional Materials suffered from commissioners' undervaluation of translators, resulting in weak promotional appeal. Training gaps also contribute to such failures, as seen in the Saudi postgraduate students' struggles

to adapt texts beyond literal rendering. Moreover, technology, while offering efficiency, tends to amplify risks when not paired with human oversight; unedited machine translation consistently compromises authenticity and persuasiveness. Ultimately, these comparative insights reinforce that translation in tourism is not a neutral transfer of meaning but a strategic intervention capable of either elevating or undermining a nation's global image. Poor translation can tarnish reputations and reduce competitiveness, while successful translation transforms cultural difference into an asset that attracts, persuades, and connects international audiences.

9. Future Directions

As tourism continues to evolve in response to globalization, digital transformation, and shifting consumer values, so too must translation strategies. The future of translation in tourism marketing lies not only in addressing existing challenges but also in anticipating new trends that will shape how destinations communicate with international audiences. Key directions include AI-human collaboration, multimodal and digital-first strategies, inclusivity and sustainability in language, professionalization of tourism translation, and the integration of interdisciplinary expertise.

- a) **AI-Human Collaboration:** The rapid growth of artificial intelligence and neural machine translation will undoubtedly remain a defining feature of tourism translation. However, case studies such as Italy's Open to Meraviglia campaign (Del Fante & Federici, 2025) show that AI cannot replace human creativity or cultural mediation. The future lies in hybrid models, where machine translation provides speed and scalability while human translators ensure quality, creativity, and cultural adaptation. Post-editing will become a core skill, and translators will need to work seamlessly with digital tools while maintaining their role as cultural mediators.
- b) **Multimodal and Digital-First Strategies:** Tourism marketing will increasingly operate in a digital-first environment where content is multimodal, combining text, images, video, hashtags, and interactive features. Translators will need to function as content localizers, not only rendering words but also adapting visual and audiovisual elements to ensure cross-cultural resonance. Elmuradova (2024) notes the rise of neologisms and linguocognitive persuasion techniques in digital tourism discourse, requiring translators to stay agile and creative in adapting emerging forms of communication. This signals a shift from traditional text-based translation toward integrated multimodal translation.
- c) **Inclusive and Value-Driven Tourism Language:** Future tourism translation will need to align with growing demands for inclusivity, diversity, and sustainability. Ammendola (2022) demonstrates how sustainability discourse is reshaping tourism texts, while Agorni (2019) highlights the need to integrate gender perspectives into tourism communication. Destinations that fail to reflect these values risk alienating socially conscious travelers. Translators, therefore, will increasingly act as ethical agents, ensuring that promotional

texts avoid stereotypes, embrace inclusivity, and project values consistent with global expectations of responsible tourism.

- d) **Professionalization of Tourism Translation:** The undervaluation of translators has been a recurring issue in tourism marketing (Sulaiman, 2016). Moving forward, greater recognition of translation as a strategic function is essential. Sulaiman et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of professionalizing translation practice through clearer standards, training, and recognition. Future tourism campaigns will likely require closer collaboration between marketers, translators, and cultural experts, ensuring that translation is integrated from the planning stage rather than treated as an afterthought.
- e) **Interdisciplinary Training and Expertise:** Future translators will need more than linguistic competence; they will require interdisciplinary knowledge spanning tourism studies, marketing, intercultural communication, and digital technologies. Qassem and Sahari (2023) show that many translation trainees lack specialized training for tourism texts, leading to inadequate promotional outcomes. Universities and professional programs will need to design curricula that integrate tourism-specific training, digital literacy, and cultural mediation skills to prepare translators for the complex realities of the industry.
- f) **Research and Innovation in Tourism Translation:** There is also room for future research to deepen understanding of underexplored areas. Stepins (2022) and Iritspukhova (2023) note that metaphor use in tourism remains relatively under-researched, while Agorni (2019) points to the lack of gender perspectives. Further research into figurative language, relational identity, and digital discourse features will inform better practices and training. Innovation will also come from exploring how tourism translation interacts with user-generated content (reviews, blogs, social media posts), which increasingly shapes traveler decisions.

Conclusion

This review has examined the evolution of translation and linguistic strategies in tourism marketing, highlighting how they shape the global visibility and competitiveness of destinations. Tourism translation is not merely the transfer of words across languages; it is a complex act of cultural mediation, creative adaptation, and strategic communication. The analysis showed that effective translation depends on a range of strategies: cultural adaptation, transcreation of slogans, handling of figurative language, storytelling, and inclusive discourse. The digital transformation of tourism has introduced new opportunities and challenges, particularly through the rise of machine translation, multimodal discourse, and social media platforms. Case studies revealed that successes occur when translation is integrated as a creative and professional function, while failures often result from undervaluation of translators, overreliance on technology, and inadequate training. The future of tourism translation lies in balancing technological efficiency with human creativity, embracing inclusivity and sustainability, and professionalizing the role of translators in

destination branding. Without these measures, destinations risk miscommunication, cultural misrepresentation, and weakened global appeal.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders in the tourism industry:

- i. Tourism stakeholders should recognize translation as a strategic component of destination marketing, not a mechanical task. Adequate resources must be allocated for professional translators, with emphasis on transcreation, cultural mediation, and storytelling.
- ii. Universities and training institutions should design curricula that combine translation studies with tourism, marketing, intercultural communication, and digital literacy. This will prepare translators to meet the complex demands of multilingual tourism promotion.
- iii. Translators and tourism boards should ensure that promotional texts reflect global values of inclusivity, gender sensitivity, and sustainability. This approach enhances authenticity and aligns destinations with the expectations of socially conscious travelers.
- iv. While AI and machine translation can improve efficiency, their outputs must undergo rigorous post-editing to preserve cultural nuance and persuasive intent. The future lies in AI–human collaboration, where technology supports but does not replace human creativity and judgment.

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