

TOURIST ADVERTISING AS A MEANS OF PROMOTING A COUNTRY'S CULTURAL HERITAGE. FROM TRAVEL GUIDES TO POP-CULTURE TOURISM

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Abstract

This paper deals with the discourse of travel guides considered as a marketing tool used to commodify a touristic destination and to promote cultural heritage. Since the promotion of a touristic destination is traditionally an absolute display of appraisal, the study investigates the evaluative resources exploited in travel guides in order to express aesthetic appreciation and to enhance the interest for the destination. However, the advent of internet and the success of creative industries, also favoured by consumerism, led to the development of pop-culture tourism whose promotion draws heavily on re-constructing the reality of the touristic site based on myth and fiction. The study focuses on a famous Romanian tourist destination, Bran Castle, which is promoted as Dracula Castle, and aims at showing how myth and legend can be put to use in order to persuade. The analysis was conducted on tourist websites advertising Bran Castle and identifies strategies used to marketize the royal fortress as Dracula's abode and to foster mystery around it.

Keywords: travel guides, promotional discourse, pop-culture tourism, Dracula, Bran Castle

Travel guides represent a mediator between the tourist and the host country (Bhattacharya in Hallet& Kaplan-Veinger, 2010: 2) and can be considered an essential tool in promoting a country's cultural heritage. They are an instance of complex hybrid discourse as they

feature characteristics pertaining to several discourse genres. However, their promotional scope is the most pervasive one since travel guides firstly target persuasion. Starting from the prerequisite that discourse is a form of action, this study will attempt to delineate, in its first part, the most important features of the discourse genre of travel guides and will focus on the peculiarities of the promotional language which contributes to building a seductive image of uniqueness for the travel destination. However, with the advent of Internet and the extensive development of creative industries, this discourse genre has come to appeal to different promotional strategies addressing the emerging community of tourists who are avid consumers of pop-culture, and who appear therefore to be more interested in the mythology of the place rather than in the place itself. Consequently, the second part of this paper will focus on the strategies used in order to build up the reputation of a Romanian location of interest, *e.g.*, Bran Castle¹, also known as Dracula's castle, which, given its association with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, gives rise to advertisements instantiating a case of pop-culture tourism.

Whatever the strategy chosen, the persuasive approach follows the same pattern, namely luring the perspective tourist and granting him/her a positive self-image given the fact that he/she is a consumer of a praised commodity which makes him/her become a quality tourist. The concept of *culture* is central in this promotional undertake and therefore travel guides can be seen as supporting culture bridging and exchange, a means to advertise cultural heritage.

1. Discursive characteristics of travel guides

As already stated, travel guides hybrid discourse genre. According to Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004: 134-135), travel guides relate to:

- the descriptive genre as they depict a virtual travel story,
- the informative genre given their didactic scope,
- the procedural (directive) genre since they offer travel instructions

¹ <http://www.bran-castle.com>

meant to assist the traveler’s visit and to help him/her accomplish his/her objective,

- the (positive) critical discourse as travel guides are loaded with appraisal language,
- the promotional discourse since they target persuasion.

According to the afore mentioned linguist (*Ibidem*), the promotional component is pervasive and encloses the descriptive, directive and critical components.

Moreover, functionally speaking, travel guides represent a form of eulogy of a geographical and cultural space. Given the fact that nowadays reading travel guides is the first step towards planning and accomplishing the trip, this discourse genre uses positive language in order to present the destination, to spur readers to explore and discover the foreign territory. A wide array of geographical, institutional, climatic, social, cultural, artistic, historic, industrial, administrative, gastronomical, religious aspects are provided in order to give rise to promising expectations for the reader who is bound to shape a positive image of the host country. Travel guides speak about the pleasure of visiting the new country and promises happiness.

Further, travel guides may be conceived as displaying a code of conduct for the tourist in the foreign country. In this respect, we may say that it corresponds to a directive macro-act corresponding to the advice illocutionary speech act. This illocutionary act can take various forms (recommendations, suggestions, warnings) and can be linguistically expressed using different prescriptive formulas such as *It would be convenient to...., Avoid...., Pay attention to, Tourists should...* These illocutions are meant to attract the tourists’ attention to the way one should proceed in order to take profit of the visit, to avoid any possible causes of conflicts or misunderstandings, to undertake the right actions if such events occur. The following examples excerpted from online travel sites provide examples of such speech acts:

(1) Trails to the summit are busy throughout the official trekking season. To avoid the worst of the crush head up on a weekday, or start earlier during the day **to avoid the afternoon rush and spend a night in a mountain hut [...]**

Authorities strongly caution against climbing outside the regular season, [...] Despite this, many people do climb out of season, as it's **the best time to avoid the crowds**. [...] **It's highly advised** that off-season climbers register with the local police department for safety reasons; [...]

If you plan to hike, go slowly and take regular breaks to avoid altitude sickness. Hiking poles are a good idea to help avoid knee pain (especially during the descent).²

(2) The market is quite narrow and can get elbow-to-elbow busy, so **try visiting early or later** in the afternoon if you prefer a bit of space, but **keep in mind** many of the stalls close by 5pm. Free samples are on offer in many places but **refrain from** eating while walking as it is considered impolite.³

(3) Tips for exploring Djemaa El Fna

While wandering around Djemaa at any time of day, **stay alert** to cars, motorbikes and horse-drawn-carriage traffic, [...].

Be on guard against pickpockets and rogue groppers who are known to work the crowds, particularly after sunset. [...]

Keep a stock of Dh1 coins on hand for tipping the performers. [...]

Be warned that you will see chained monkeys dressed in sports jerseys paraded for tourists, and the practices of the snake charmers are ethically questionable. **We advise avoiding both**.⁴

As it can be noticed, the imperative is widely used, expressing advice (*try visiting, keep a stock of ...*), warnings (*be on guard, keep in mind, be warned that*), mild prohibitions (*refrain from*). The present indicative is a frequent alternative (*authorities strongly caution, we advise avoiding both*); the adjunction of a modifier in the verb phrase may sometimes lead to a stronger formulation of the directives.

Advice and warnings interweave with recommendations concerning the habits and customs specific to the country, insisting, especially when it comes to more traditional societies, on cultural taboo

² <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/japan/around-tokyo/attractions/mt-fuji/a/poi-sig/1309509/356827>

³ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/japan/kansai/kyoto/attractions/nishiki-market/a/poi-sig/402526/1323305>

⁴ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/morocco/marrakesh/djemaa-el-fna-around/attractions/djemaa-el-fna/a/poi-sig/422043/1341479>

words or subjects, and on clichés. This is the case with (4) which draws the attention on the rules to be respected when visiting Morocco:

(4) Be respectful during Ramadan

During Ramadan, it's a good idea to avoid eating and drinking outside the confines of public restaurants or your hotel, just as a courtesy to locals who are fasting. This is especially true if you're in a non-touristy area of the country.

In general, dress conservatively

The traditions of Morocco tend to be quite conservative by western standards. In order to fit in with the locals and avoid drawing unwanted attention, it's a good idea to dress conservatively. For men, this usually means trousers instead of shorts and shirts with short sleeves at least.

Never eat with your left hand

There's another rule to remember when it comes to eating, besides sticking to your section of the communal bowl. Always, always take food using your right hand. This even applies if you are left-handed.⁵

Finally, travel guides represent an introduction and orientation handbook to the culture, history, traditions of a country and of a people. It makes an inventory of sights and monuments that should be included in the tourist's itinerary, and which are worth a visit. The guide also provides geographical and historical accounts, it depicts the local atmosphere stressing the cultural cachet of the place. This account familiarizes the potential tourist with the cultural differences in order to prepare his/her arrival in the host country especially since he/she will be on a supposedly unfamiliar territory. An entire paradigm comprising new cultural elements is provided to the reader plunging him/her into a virtual initial experience destined to push him/her to make the decision of visiting the country. Therefore, under the informative and functional disguise, travel guides put forward a persuasive project that can be reduced to the urge: *buy this touristic product!*, i.e. *visit this place!*

Rhetorically speaking, travel guides belong to an expert voice addressing readers who would virtually turn into visitors of the

⁵ <https://www.thetravel.com/10-etiquette-tips-for-traveling-to-morocco/>

respective travel places if the persuasive undertaking is successful. Travel guides also exploit emotions when picturing the destination in positive terms inculcating the desire to visit the foreign place. The linguistic means used to project this alluring image of the travel destination will be looked into in the following chapter.

2. Characteristics of the touristic language

Language and image are the essential persuasive tools of travel guides as Dann underlines it below:

Via static and moving pictures, written texts and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in so doing, convert them from potential into actual clients. [...] Thus, since much of the rhetoric is both logically and temporally prior to any travel or sightseeing, one can legitimately say that tourism is grounded in discourse. (1996: 2)

The language is packed with superlatives and words that connote genuineness and authenticity of the discovery experience:

(5) Life choices are presented in no uncertain terms in the **dazzling mosaics of the Assumption Basilica**. Look ahead to a golden afterlife amid saints and a **beatific** Madonna and Child or turn your back on them and face the wrath of the devil gloating over lost souls in an **extraordinary** Last Judgment scene. In existence since the 7th century, this former cathedral is the lagoon's oldest Byzantine-Romanesque structure.⁶

(6) As the former HQ of the Hapsburg Empire, the Austrian capital has a **flabbergasting** stash of cultural and art **treasures** – more than you could ever hope to see in a lifetime. But with 48 hours on your hands, you can easily take in some of the city's **trophy sights**: baroque palaces **bejeweled** with Klimt's golden **wonders**, grand concert halls,

⁶ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/venice/attractions/basilica-di-santa-maria-assunta/a/poi-sig/1138035/1321296>

and contemporary art in the born-again imperial stables.⁷

(7) Fuji-san is among Japan’s **most revered and timeless aflractions**, the inspiration for generations of poets and the focus of countless artworks. **Hundreds of thousands of people** climb it every year, continuing a centuries-old tradition of pilgrimages up the sacred volcano (which, despite its last eruption occurring in 1707, is still considered active). Whether or not you don the hiking boots to climb its busy slopes, taking some time to gaze upon the **perfectly symmetrical cone of the country’s highest peak** is an **essential Japan experience**.⁸

The syntagms in bold provide examples of positive evaluative language (*dazzling, beatific, perfectly, treasure*, etc.), superlatives (*most revered, highest*), words connoting uniqueness or intensity (*essential, flabbergasting, extraordinary, hundreds of thousands of people*).

The appraisal language infusing touristic guides is used to refer either to the characteristics of the place (*intriguing, theatrical interpretation of a dish* in 8), (*delectable* in 9), to the service offered (*enthusiastic staff* in 8), to the variety of choice (*incredible gin selection* in 9), to the unique experience offered (*delicatessen* in 9):

(8) The Hotel Metropole’s Michelin-starred restaurant offers an **intriguing** proposition: at each stage of its multicourse menu, you can order a traditional Venetian dish or a **theatrical** modern interpretation using the same ingredients. The **enthusiastic** staff will ably assist you in your decision but, either way, you can’t go wrong. Jellyfish-like Murano chandeliers add **whimsy** to an otherwise formal room.⁹

(9) Radici

Sit down for a quick and **delectable** meal of Puglia’s **temptations** at this **delicatessen**. And – surprise! – it has an **incredible** gin selection. Not even locals know about this place yet.¹⁰

⁷ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/48-hours-in-vienna>

⁸ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/japan/attractions>

⁹ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/venice/sestiere-di-castello/restaurants/met/a/poi-eat/1568300/1320999>

¹⁰ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/rome-food-critics-favourite-restaurants>

The perspective can range from the grandiose to the familiar, from luxurious treats to intimate cozy invitations:

(10) Need to impress? At Budapest's **most romantic** rooftop bar, you might just end the day with a kiss. The upscale High Note Roof Bar, snuggled next to St Stephen's Basilica, has **comfy** sofas to **cuddle up** on and watch the slowly sinking sun paint all kinds of colors across the evening sky. The **roomy** terraces provide floor-to-ceiling views of the whole city and beyond, with the cathedral's dome almost within arm's reach. When the weather gets chilly, you can retreat to the **elegant, burgundy-colored** indoor area that's open year-round. **Cocktails inspired by bucket-list destinations**, plenty of Hungarian and international wines, and an **impressive** list of spirits further elevate the mood.¹¹

(11) With a hint of black magic in its name and a **cosy** location in the basement of a residential block, this family-run restaurant has earned loyal local fans with its excellent takes on Hungarian classics.¹²

Directives are inherent to travel guides, as it has been already shown. In this respect, Moirand (2004 : 160) defines travel guides as textbooks that facilitate the advisory relationship between an expert and a novice.

Not in the least, travel guides are seasoned with a plethora of foreign cultural elements and foreign words that add to the persuasive undertake. They role is to lure the reader with the original echoes of foreign words which create the effect of authenticity and plunge the reader into the local atmosphere, stirring his/her imagination.

(12) Food is a hugely important aspect of Italian culture, and eating in the **bel paese** has its own set of customs.¹³

¹¹ <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/best-rooftop-bars-budapest>

¹² <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/hungary/budapest/castle-district/restaurants/mandragora/a/poi-eat/1548424/1329730>

¹³ <https://www.fodors.com/world/europe/italy/experiences/news/photos/italy-dining-guide-never-do-these-things-at-a-restaurant>

(13) In Italy, pasta is served as a **primo piaflo**, or first course, which is followed by the main dish of meat, fish, or a vegetarian option, known as the **secondo piaflo**. Don’t expect to have a side of pasta with your *secondo* -the two are served separately! (*Ibidem*)

(14) Cocktails aren’t generally drunk with dinner in Italy. Ask for a gin and tonic with your **cacio e pepe** and, just like requesting **parmigiano** for your **spaghefli alle vongole**, you might raise an eyebrow (or get deported). (*Ibidem*)

As it can be observed in the examples above, the foreign words are sometimes motivated as they designate *realia* specific to the foreign culture (*cacio e pepe*, *parmigiano*, etc.) and mentioning them as such provides the reader a glimpse of life of the travel destination. However, in other contexts (see 12,13), these foreign terms could have been translated as they designate common concepts, yet the authors opt for preserving the foreign term, being aware of their stylistic effects.

If everything mentioned above relates to the traditional approach in tourism promotion, notwithstanding, the advent of popular culture (television, music, cinema) and people’s easy access to it due to its overwhelming rise in popularity and the extensive use of internet made way to a new tendency in tourism advertising, namely pop-culture tourism. The following chapter will look into this new approach in touristic promotion and will illustrate it by providing the example of the online advertising of a famous Romanian site, Bran Castle, also known as Dracula Castle.

3. Visit Bran Castle! - a case of pop-culture tourism

Pop-culture tourism emerged in the second half of the XXth century as a result of mass tourism and as a variant of postmodern tourism initially designated as literary tourism (Baleiro& Pereira, 2021: 1-2) and defined as travelling to places connected to a literary text or writer (Baleiro&Quinterio, 2018: 31). Later on, this type of cultural tourism diversified, covering fields “such as film-induced, literary, and music tourism, as well as special events, and technology tourism, among others” (Radomskaya, 2018). This trend casts new perspectives on

the motivations underlying this type of tourism which relate to the attraction or even fascination with a certain pop-culture product. The fierce competition in the touristic field has inherently led to an increased market offer and even to the “segmentation and the creation of several tourism niches tailored to specific market demands (e.g. dance tourism, photographic tourism, wine tourism, music tourism, food tourism)” (Baleiro& Pereira, 2021: 3). This phenomenon has generated the “commodification process of culture” (*Ibidem*) within which celebrities, stars, popular characters play an important role in nourishing people’s interest to visit these “constructed realities” (Larson, Lundberg &Lexhagen, 2013: 74). This appears to be the case with the touristic sight we chose to analyze in this paper, namely the Romanian Bran Castle which has been associated with Bram Stoker’s character Dracula. The castle is situated in on the border of Transylvania and Walachia and is said to have inspired Stoker in depicting his character’s abode. Although it is commonly acknowledged as one of the most beautiful and well-kept fortresses in Romania, the site is promoted as a film-induced touristic destination, putting forward the mythological vampirism aura revolving around the castle history rather than its actual one. The purpose of our analysis is to show how this theme of vampirism is cultivated and nurtured in the castle promotion in order to trigger the interest to visit the destination.

3.1. *Dracula Castle –the abode where Dracula never set foot in*

The castle was built in the XIIIth century and was called Dietrichstein¹⁴; it hosted along centuries kings, knights, soldiers. When Transylvania became part of the Kingdom of Romania in 1920, the castle was gifted to Queen Marie of Romania who turned it into a home for the royal family¹⁵. Nowadays the castle has been turned into a museum and displays a collection of furniture, armour and costumes. The legend surrounding the fortress is spiced with vampire elements enhanced by the gloomy Transylvanian forests said to be the home of vampires and ghosts, the geographical situation of the castle on top of a hill, exactly like Dracula’s abode, and the vampire’s thirst for blood that also characterizes Vlad the Impaler, the Wallachian prince who is said to have influenced Bram Stoker’s story. Another

¹⁴ <http://www.romanianmonasteries.org/romania/bran-castle>

¹⁵ <http://www.bran-castle.com/historical-timeline.html>

misleading association maintaining the vampire mystery around the castle is the resemblance between the name of Vlad the Impaler’s father called Dracul, a derivative from the name of the *order of the Dragon*, and Stoker’s vampire’s name Dracula (devil). Romania’s communist regime exploited these confusions and, aware of the possibility of maximizing profits following the success of the film about Dracula in the 60s, decided to promote Bran Castle as Dracula Castle¹⁶. It was a form of encouraging film-induced tourism which “rests on the imaginary created in books and films”, and which “consists of experiences of fun, fantasy and desire” (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982 cited by Larson, Lundberg & Lexhagen, 2013: 74). In the case of Bran Castle, we may speak of a case of “constructed reality, *i.e.* based on both authentic as well as purely fictitious foundations (Frost, 2010), which creates a strong emotional tie between a tourist and the destination (Kim & Richardson, 2003)” (cited by Larson, Lundberg & Lexhagen, 2013: 7).

3.2 Bran Castle – a royal castle under the disguise of a vampire abode

The analysis of several sites promoting Bran castle enabled us to reveal two recurrent techniques used to integrate vampire elements into the cultural site presentation, which thereby becomes its authenticity cachet.

Firstly, with few exceptions, the fortress is advertised solely under the name of Dracula Castle or this name is added as an apposition accompanying the real name, Bran Castle. Here are some examples:

(15) Bran Castle, **also known as Dracula’s Castle**, is one of the most infamous castles in the world.¹⁷

(16) The real **Dracula’s Castle** in Transylvania to host the very best Halloween party¹⁸

The castle is advertised as being Dracula’s *real* abode, promising an authentic vampire experience to the tourist. Using this alternative name is instrumental in enhancing allure to the tourists.

¹⁶ <https://www.golivegotravel.nl/en/europe/bran-castle-practical-tips/>

¹⁷ <https://www.kkday.com/en/blog/26098/5-most-hauntingly-beautiful-castles-in-europe-you-can-visit>

¹⁸ <https://www.en-vols.com/en/inspirations-en/dracula-bran-castle/>

(17) In Romania, you can find the **famous Bran castle, also known as Dracula castle**. If you like vampire stories, then this is the castle for you!¹⁹

Secondly, struggling to make end-site users connect with the location, advertisers resort to the strategy consisting in introducing fictional elements of the story into the description of the real site. Intermingling fiction and reality results in forging an identity induced by consumers' demand, which however raises the problem of maintaining the balance between fiction and truth. In order to illustrate the linguistic reflection of this strategy, we could mention the following:

- the extensive use of *haunting* or *haunted* as preferred modifiers accompanying the name of the castle

(18) Take a **haunting** tour of legendary Bran Castle...If you dare.²⁰

- frequent references to Vlad III Dracula, known as Vlad the Impaler because of his torturing techniques when punishing villains, who is identified with Stoker's character

(19) Bran Castle, also known as Dracula's Castle, is one of the most infamous castles in the world. It used to be thought of as the setting of **Vlad the Impaler's bloody atrocities** with some even saying he was imprisoned here during his capture in 1462. The castle found renown with the publication of the novel *Dracula*, which was greatly inspired by Vlad III Dracula and **his brutal habit of impaling victims**²¹

- the use of words belonging to the vampire story paradigm (*garlic, crucifix, fang, bloody*, etc.) to reconstruct the layers of gloominess, menace and horror around the bloodthirsty vampire

(20) A Chef, Some Garlic and a Dracula!

No doubt Bran Castle is gorgeous and splendid. And it does have a spooky vibe to it. The haunting aura of the castle seeps right to your bones! [...]

Her recommendation- Even sans Dracula, Bran Castle should be on

¹⁹ <https://www.en-vols.com/en/inspirations-en/dracula-bran-castle/>

²⁰ <https://www.globaltravelerusa.com/take-a-haunting-tour-of-legendary-bran-castle-if-you-dare/>

²¹ <https://www.kkday.com/en/blog/26098/5-most-hauntingly-beautiful-castles-in-europe-you-can-visit>

your bucket list. [...] Don’t forget to carry some **garlic** and a **crucifix**!²²

(21) Now visitors from all over the world descend on rural Transylvania for a chance to experience some of the **eerie thrill** of Stoker’s novel. Tour companies often book Bran Castle for Halloween parties, complete with “**bloody**” **vodka shots** and a DJ.²³

- use of words pertaining to the discourse of monstrosity in order to maintain and nurture fiction

(22) Two lucky (or **doomed**, depending on how you look at it) people will have the opportunity to spend their October 31 at the ultimate Halloween locale. [...] One winner and a guest will arrive via horse-drawn carriage where they’ll be hosted [...] and invited to explore every part of the castle from its highest towers to its **darkest crypts**.²⁴

(23) Are you fond of **mysticism**, gothic, or **vampires’** castles? Is your childhood associated with listening to **horror** stories? In this case, you will be impressed by Transylvania, the homeland of **vampires** and **werewolves**, as this region is literally filled with ominous secrets and riddles. (...) ²⁵

Conclusions

Travel guides facilitate the visit of a foreign destination before the real meting takes place. Taking a discourse approach to travel guides, this study attempted to investigate the main discourse features specific to this type of writing which heavily relies on appraisal language meant to lure the prospective tourist and to create a positive destination image. In the second part, the paper focused on film-induced tourism and chose a case study, namely the Romanian Bran castle, in order to illustrate how popular culture can contribute to promoting a touristic

²² <https://www.triphobo.com/blog/hobos-we-admire-annette>

²³ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/dracula-castle-things-to-do-brasov-transylvania>

²⁴ <https://www.fodors.com/world/europe/romania/experiences/news/airbnb-wants-to-send-you-to-draculas-castle-for-halloween-12045>

²⁵ <https://planetofhotels.com/guide/en/blog/things-to-do-in-transilvania>

destination. An analysis of several foreign touristic online websites revealed ways in which the theme of vampirism is cultivated in order to maintain the haunting aura and the spooky vibe much adored by the lovers of vampire lore.

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