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Words as Competitive Assets: Linguistic Strategies in Marrakech's Online Reviews and Promotional Texts

Rachid Ed-dali
Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech, Morocco

Wyssal El Gourari
Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech, Morocco

ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study examines how linguistic strategies in digital tourism discourse influence tourists' perceptions of Marrakech by analyzing 2,000 English-language reviews (2022-2024) and official marketing content. Using VADER sentiment analysis and thematic coding, we identified statistically significant but modest relationships between language use and tourist satisfaction. Cultural terminology density showed weak but significant correlations with satisfaction ratings (r = .23, p < .001), while reviews containing positive adjectives averaged higher ratings than those without (d = 0.42). Solo female travelers expressed 15% lower positivity than other demographic groups, likely reflecting safety concerns rather than linguistic preferences. Individual linguistic features demonstrated small to medium effect sizes (Cohen's d = 0.31–0.58) in pairwise comparisons, though no comprehensive model of explained variance was established. These findings challenge assumptions about linguistic optimization in tourism marketing, revealing that language associations with satisfaction, while statistically significant, remain practically modest. Most of the variance in satisfaction appears to be determined by non-linguistic factors, such as service quality and experiential elements. The English-only focus and correlational design limit generalizability, highlighting the need for experimental, multilingual research in tourism discourse.

Keywords: Digital tourism; online travel reviews; linguistic strategies; sentiment analysis; destination marketing; mixed methods; Marrakech

INTRODUCTION

Digital tourism has fundamentally transformed the travel industry, much like the internet revolutionized communication, creating new pathways for connection while reshaping traditional practices entirely. This transformation encompasses tools such as websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, virtual reality, and online travel reviews (OTRs), all of which collectively influence how travelers plan, engage with, and evaluate their journeys (Saura et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024). These digital channels offer destinations economic means to connect with broad, international audiences, tailor marketing strategies, and interact with potential clients in real time (Happ & Ivancsó-Horváth, 2018). By utilizing data analytics and user-generated content, digital tourism facilitates ongoing enhancement of services and experiences, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Consequently, digital tourism has emerged as a vital catalyst for growth and competitiveness within the global tourism industry, allowing destinations to differentiate themselves in an ever-evolving and saturated market (Pencarelli, 2020).

Within this digital ecosystem, language serves as a primary mechanism shaping tourist perceptions and decisions. The words, tone, and structure used in reviews and promotional content profoundly influence tourist impressions of authenticity, safety, and desirability (Mariné-Roig et al., 2019; Maci et al., 2018). Positive linguistic choices, such as vivid descriptions and emotionally resonant phrases, can enhance a destination's appeal, whereas vague or negative language may diminish its attractiveness (Su et al., 2022; Simón, 2022; Chu et al., 2022).

Online travel reviews (OTRs) have emerged as particularly powerful instruments in this linguistic landscape, serving as digital word-of-mouth that significantly impacts tourist perceptions and destination choices (Mariné-Roig, 2022; Mariné-Roig & Huertas, 2020). Their persuasive power stems from the authenticity and relatability of user-generated content, which travelers often trust more than traditional promotional materials (Aceron et al., 2018). OTRs play a crucial role in digital destination marketing by helping businesses build credibility, monitor reputation, and improve visibility in competitive environments (Anubha et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2021). By effectively leveraging OTRs, destinations can enhance their attractiveness by highlighting favorable experiences, proactively addressing negative comments, and directly engaging with prospective travelers (Mariné-Roig, 2017).

However, while digital tourism has transformed how destinations connect with global audiences, existing research tends to emphasize technical, marketing, or user-behavioral aspects of OTRs, with limited attention to the linguistic strategies that shape destination perceptions. This represents a significant blind spot in our understanding, like studying the mechanics of a piano without examining the music it produces. Despite the growing recognition of language's importance in tourism discourse, few empirical studies have examined how specific linguistic features in digital tools shape tourist impressions of culturally rich destinations (Maci, 2020; Vasconcelos & Balula, 2019).

This gap becomes particularly pronounced when examining Marrakech, a destination that exemplifies the complex intersection of digital tourism and cultural representation. Despite the city's global popularity and its reputation as a premier North African destination, there is a notable absence of empirical studies analyzing how language, tone, vocabulary, and narrative structure in OTRs and marketing content affect tourists' impressions and decisions. This oversight is particularly significant given the multilingual

and multicultural composition of Marrakech's visitor base, which necessitates nuanced, culturally resonant language strategies to effectively engage international audiences (Wagner & Minca, 2012; Souhail & Darir, 2023). A deeper exploration of the language used in digital representations of Marrakech could help stakeholders tailor their communication strategies to better align with tourist expectations and enhance the city's appeal (Ali et al., 2022; Abyre & Elhissi, 2021).

To address this critical gap, this study employs an integrated theoretical framework that combines discourse analysis, sentiment analysis, and politeness theory as analytical tools, which function like different lenses on a microscope, each revealing distinct but complementary aspects of linguistic influence. Through discourse analysis, we examine how reviewers craft narratives and employ specific language structures to influence potential travelers' perceptions. Sentiment analysis allows us to assess emotional undertones and subjective sentiments within reviews, offering insights into prevailing consumer attitudes. Politeness theory facilitates understanding of how different linguistic strategies impact perceived trustworthiness and usefulness, illuminating the subtleties of communication within digital tourism contexts. Together, these approaches reveal how language not only reflects tourist experiences but actively constructs the digital identity of Marrakech as a competitive global destination.

This study pursues three core objectives that emerge naturally from the identified research gap. First, it investigates how specific linguistic features in online travel reviews about Marrakech influence tourists' perceptions and decision-making processes. Second, it assesses the role of language in digital marketing content in shaping the destination's image and overall appeal. Third, it identifies effective language strategies that tourism stakeholders can employ to enhance user engagement, increase online visibility, and strengthen Marrakech's competitive positioning in the global tourism market.

These objectives are guided by the following research questions: What are the most prominent linguistic characteristics and stylistic patterns found in OTRs related to Marrakech? How do these linguistic elements affect tourists' perceptions and their travel-related decisions? Which specific linguistic techniques in destination marketing are most effective in enhancing the city's attractiveness and reinforcing its online presence?

This study contributes a novel, language-focused perspective to digital tourism research by providing the first comprehensive analysis of how specific linguistic features in online travel reviews and digital marketing materials influence tourist perceptions of Marrakech. By treating language as Marrakech's most adaptable and influential tool for converting online engagement into real-world tourism growth, this research offers both theoretical insights into the mechanisms of digital persuasion and practical strategies for enhancing destination competitiveness in an increasingly crowded global marketplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Evolution of Online Travel Review Research: Critical Gaps and Contradictions

The scholarly understanding of online travel reviews has evolved through three phases, each revealing both insights and limitations that inform our study's approach. Early research focused on valence metrics under the assumption that "more stars equals better outcomes" (Wong et al., 2016), yet failed to explain why similar ratings could produce vastly different booking behaviors.

The second wave examined usage patterns, establishing that travelers routinely consult OTRs as credible sources (de la Hoz-Correa & Muñoz-Leiva, 2019). However, these studies conflated correlation with causation, assuming that high review usage directly drives booking decisions without controlling for confounding variables like destination popularity or seasonality. Recent research has shifted toward rhetorical micro-features, with Zablocki et al. (2019) demonstrating that gain-framed titles ("saved us time") attract more clicks than loss frames. González-Rodríguez et al. (2016) employed construal-level theory to show that concrete language makes distant destinations feel psychologically closer. Yet this work suffers from a fundamental limitation: effect sizes remain consistently modest across studies, suggesting that language may be less influential than researchers assume.

This pattern of modest effects raises a critical question largely ignored in tourism linguistics: If language truly drives tourist behavior, why do even the most sophisticated linguistic analyses explain less than 20% of variance in tourist satisfaction? Our study directly addresses this paradox by examining both the presence and limitations of linguistic influence in tourism discourse. This research trajectory reveals a crucial insight: language, not just star ratings, serves as the operative mechanism linking OTRs to persuasion. However, the identification of specific rhetorical levers, framing, concreteness, and vivid detail provides the foundation for understanding how linguistic choices shape tourist behavior while acknowledging their inherent limitations, particularly in culturally rich destinations like Marrakech.

Language as a Persuasive Force in Digital Tourism

The recognition that language fundamentally shapes online consumer behavior has emerged as a central tenet in digital tourism research (Baskin & Liu, 2017; Zimu, 2023). In digital landscapes characterized primarily by written and visual communication, language serves as the primary vehicle for capturing attention, communicating value, and fostering trust. The specific selection of words, combined with tone and style, can elicit particular emotions or associations that significantly influence consumer perceptions of destinations and brands (Liu et al., 2020).

Emotional Language and Affective Responses

Research on emotional language in travel reviews has produced compelling but nuanced findings. Salehan and Kim's (2016) large-scale sentiment analysis of 250,000 hotel reviews revealed that reviews rich in emotional language elicit profound affective responses from readers, subsequently altering their attitudes and behaviors. Their findings demonstrate that emotional communication directly correlates with how readers value reviews; when individuals perceive a review as emotionally engaging or genuine, they regard it as more credible and beneficial for decision-making.

Building on this foundation, Hu and Kim (2018) conducted controlled laboratory experiments examining specific stylistic elements such as emotive expressions, metaphors, and vivid imagery. Their research demonstrated that intentional incorporation of emotional language enhances perceived destination allure and image. Reviews utilizing emotional stylistic techniques foster more captivating and memorable reading experiences, increasing perceived attractiveness for potential travelers. However, the convergence of these studies reveals important methodological considerations. While Salehan and Kim offer strong ecological validity through real traveler texts at scale, their correlational design cannot

establish causality or detect subtleties such as "emotional overload." Conversely, Hu and Kim isolate the causal effects of specific stylistic devices but rely on smaller convenience samples, which limit external generalizability. This methodological tension underscores the need for context-specific investigations that can bridge the gap between large-scale patterns and causal mechanisms.

The Boundaries of Persuasive Language

Critically, persuasive language does not operate in a linear "more-is-better" fashion. Several studies report credibility penalties when reviewers drift into hyperbole or "overly positive" wording. Filieri et al. (2018) identified an inverted-U relationship: affective richness lifts purchase intention only up to a moderate threshold, after which it triggers skepticism. This finding was corroborated by Orquin and Holmqvist's (2018) eye-tracking study, which demonstrated that excessive superlatives ("absolutely breathtaking") lengthen reading time and lower perceived helpfulness.

These boundary conditions extend to foreign-language cues, which prove to be double-edged instruments. While Nederstigt and Hilberink-Schulpen (2018) observed halo effects when language matches a product's cultural origin, Hornikx et al. (2007) found that unfamiliar codes reduce comprehension and, consequently, persuasion. Luna and Peracchio (2001) further demonstrated that bilingual readers switch processing styles, showing that foreign-language content can backfire if the copy requires precise analytical elaboration.

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Linguistic Influence

The empirical findings in digital tourism linguistics can be understood through an integrated theoretical framework that connects language form to behavioral outcomes. This framework draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives that work together like interlocking gears in a complex machine.

Systemic-Functional Linguistics and Appraisal Theory

Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics (1988) provides a foundational framework that treats language as a social semiotic, in which every clause simultaneously enacts experiential content, interpersonal stance, and textual organization. In tourism contexts, OTRs and advertisements do more than describe destinations; they negotiate social relations and prime readers' evaluative frameworks.

Building on this foundation, appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2003) explains how writers encode affect, judgment, and appreciation, cues that readers decode into destination evaluations. Bastiaansen et al. (2022) demonstrated that promotional texts infused with affect ("thrilling adventure"), judgment ("world-class hospitality"), and appreciation ("architectural masterpiece") foster stronger destination images than fact-only descriptions. This theoretical framework helps explain why certain linguistic choices resonate more powerfully with potential tourists.

Politeness Theory and Relational Trust

Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) adds a crucial interpersonal layer to our understanding. The theory predicts that inclusive pronouns ("discover your adventure") and face-boosting directives ("let us guide you") meet readers' positive-face needs, generating relational trust (Yrisarry et al., 2019). This relational dimension proves

particularly vital in travel contexts where perceived safety and hospitality are paramount concerns.

Narrative Transportation and Persuasion Models
The integration is completed through narrative transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2000), which argues that mentally simulating an unfolding story reduces counterarguing and heightens persuasion. Mid-2000s narrative studies showed that brochure sequencing prompts mental time-travel and heightens purchase intention (Stephan & Sedikides, 2024). Dual-process persuasion models (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) then predict that when such appraisals are vivid and personally relevant, they shift from peripheral cues to central arguments, strengthening attitude–behavior links.

This integrated framework creates a three-stage conceptual chain: linguistic style → cognitive appraisal → trust and behavioral intent. Understanding this chain provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing how Marrakech's OTRs and marketing copy convert text into concrete travel behavior.

Communication Accommodation Theory and Tourism Discourse
Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) provides a crucial sociolinguistic lens for understanding how language choices in tourism discourse reflect and shape intercultural dynamics (Giles et al., 2007). CAT posits that speakers adjust their communication styles to either converge toward or diverge from their audience, with convergence typically fostering positive evaluation and divergence creating social distance. In tourism contexts, CAT offers key insights for understanding linguistic strategies. Convergence strategies occur when destination marketers adopt tourist-familiar terminology or when reviewers use locally derived cultural terms ("riad," "medina") to signal cultural engagement. Divergence strategies manifest when tourism discourse emphasizes exotic otherness or when local terminology remains untranslated, potentially creating signals of authenticity or barriers to comprehension. The theory predicts that optimal accommodation occurs when tourism discourse balances convergence (accessibility) with authenticity (cultural integrity). Our analysis of linguistic features in Marrakech reviews can be interpreted through CAT to understand not just what language strategies appear, but why they succeed or fail in intercultural tourism communication. CAT enhances our theoretical framework by adding a sociolinguistic dimension to the linguistic style → cognitive appraisal → behavioral intent chain. Accommodation strategies influence initial cognitive appraisal, with successful convergence fostering positive evaluation and failed accommodation triggering negative assessment regardless of content quality.

Cultural and Destination-Specific Language Strategies

The Cultural Context of Tourism Language
The significance of cultural context in tourism language extends beyond simple translation considerations. Research indicates that tourists are generally less willing to visit locations where they encounter considerable language barriers (Nguyen & Hsu, 2022). Consequently, destinations increasingly incorporate both local and international languages, fostering linguistic diversity that includes indigenous and foreign languages (Jackson, 2012; Okafor et al., 2022; Sulaiman, 2021). This multilingual visibility can also shape how

audiences ascribe a destination's personality to a place, with linguistic diversity linked to more sophisticated brand perceptions (Chen et al., 2024). Moreover, leveraging minority/heritage languages in official online marketing can enhance authenticity cues and engagement in destination branding (Lonardi et al., 2024)

Cross-cultural communication research reveals that high-context markets prefer evocative, indirect language, whereas low-context markets respond better to explicit, information-rich copy (Green & Appel, 2024). This cultural sensitivity in language choice significantly influences content specificity in online destination marketing, improving relevance and utility (Pachucki et al., 2022). By customizing marketing materials to align with the linguistic and cultural inclinations of various target demographics, destinations can develop more personalized and captivating promotional content.

Destination Marketing and Symbolic Language

Early rhetorical analyses in destination marketing established the foundation by mapping metaphors such as "island paradise" or "jewel of the desert," establishing language as symbolic capital (Dann, 1996). This symbolic dimension proves particularly important in culturally rich destinations where language must convey both practical information and cultural authenticity.

The strategic use of metaphorical language, evaluative stance, and narrative structure serves as key rhetorical levers in destination marketing, paralleling the frame and concreteness effects observed in OTRs. Wu et al. (2017) advanced this understanding by examining diverse linguistic styles employed to engage audiences and how reviews encapsulate consumer experiences. Their research underscores the significance of tone, vocabulary selection, and narrative techniques in determining perceived reliability and persuasive power.

Research Gaps and the Marrakech Context

The Missing Language Focus in Marrakech Research

Despite the substantial body of research on Marrakech's tourism development, a critical examination reveals that language itself remains largely unexamined. Existing studies on Marrakech have predominantly focused on capitalizing on the city's cultural heritage, lively markets, and distinctive experiences (Hadach & Tebbaa, 2015; Anfoud & Karim, 2020; Abyre, 2022). These strategies frequently underscore digital marketing instruments, such as social media initiatives and influencer collaborations, to showcase an exotic allure and authentic character (Ait Tejan, 2022). Also, studies have explored success in targeting specific market segments through upscale lodging, gourmet dining experiences, and local artisanal products (Selkani, 2021), as well as efforts to develop multilingual content for global audiences (Ouariti & Jebrane, 2020).

However, closer examination reveals a fundamental gap: while these studies catalog partnership or branding tactics, they provide no systematic content analysis of the rhetoric used. Hadach and Tebbaa (2015) and Anfoud and Karim (2020) discuss strategies conceptually without measuring linguistic features. Abyre (2022) addresses "territorial marketing" theoretically, while Ait Tejan (2022) evaluates IT acceptance rather than message design. Selkani (2021) documents the rise of riads in luxury positioning through descriptive field observation rather than text-analytic or experimental approaches.

Critically, none employ sentiment analysis, discourse coding, or experimental exposure to test how specific wording shapes tourist response.

The Unique Linguistic Landscape of Marrakech

This methodological void is particularly significant given Marrakech's unique position as a multilingual, multicultural destination. The city attracts visitors from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including English, French, Arabic, and other languages, and creates a complex communication environment where linguistic choices carry heightened importance. The intersection of traditional Moroccan hospitality culture with modern digital tourism platforms creates unprecedented opportunities for studying how language mediates cultural authenticity and tourist expectations.

Moreover, despite the growing body of research on linguistic characteristics affecting perceived helpfulness of reviews (Shin et al., 2019), the organization and clarity of language in determining perceived worth (Wang et al., 2018), and the role of linguistic cues in articulating comprehensive experiences (Hlee et al., 2018), none of this work tests boundary conditions in North African destinations where multicultural audiences encounter both peer reviews and official promotional copy.

The Research Opportunity

This convergence of factors creates a compelling research opportunity. The multi-method evidence confirms that micro-level wording, frames, concreteness, metaphors, and stance markers can influence the cognitive-appraisal → trust → behavior chain. However, the same studies warn that effects are contingent: hyperbole backfires at high intensity, and foreign-language cues falter when comprehension is low. Crucially, none of the existing work tests these boundary conditions in the specific context of North African destinations where diverse international audiences encounter both authentic peer reviews and professionally crafted marketing copy.

The present study addresses this gap by applying theory-driven linguistic analysis to both Marrakech OTRs and official promotional copy, comparing the linguistic engines of persuasion across these two critical forms of tourism discourse. This approach promises to illuminate not only how language shapes tourist perceptions of Marrakech specifically but also how cultural context, linguistic diversity, and digital platform affordances interact to create persuasive tourism narratives in multicultural destination contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative analyses to investigate linguistic strategies in Marrakech's digital tourism discourse. The mixed-methods design was selected because the research questions require both measurable patterns and interpretive depth to understand how language influences tourist behavior. The quantitative strand focuses on identifying statistical relationships between linguistic features and tourist perceptions through sentiment analysis and correlation studies, enabling the measurement of language effects across large datasets. The qualitative strand explores the cultural and contextual meaning of these patterns through thematic coding and discourse analysis, providing insights into why certain linguistic strategies resonate with different demographic groups. This integration allows the study to move beyond simple pattern identification to understand the underlying

mechanisms through which language constructs destination appeal and influences tourist decision-making in culturally rich destinations like Marrakech.

Data Collection

Online Travel Reviews

A systematic corpus of 2,000 English-language online travel reviews was assembled from TripAdvisor and Google Reviews, covering the period from January 2022 to July 2024. These platforms were selected because they represent the dominant review ecosystems for international travelers to Marrakech and provide sufficient demographic metadata for analytical purposes. The inclusion criteria required that reviews explicitly mention Marrakech as the primary destination, be written in English to ensure linguistic consistency, contain at least 50 words to provide adequate textual content for analysis, and be posted by verified user profiles with a review history to minimize inauthentic content. In addition, reviews needed to contain substantive commentary on accommodations, attractions, dining, or cultural experiences rather than focusing solely on booking processes or travel logistics.

The exclusion criteria eliminated reviews with clear commercial promotional intent, duplicate content posted across multiple platforms, and reviews containing primarily non-English text or extensive code-switching. Reviews were stratified across mutually exclusive demographic categories to ensure representative coverage of Marrakech's diverse visitor base while enabling valid statistical comparison:

1. Families ($n \approx 400$): Reviews explicitly mentioning travel with children, spouses, or relatives, excluding those categorized elsewhere
2. Business travelers ($n \approx 300$): Reviews referencing work-related visits or conferences, excluding those traveling with family
3. Solo female travelers ($n \approx 150$): Reviews by women explicitly indicating solo travel
4. Younger travelers ($n \approx 450$): Reviews by travelers aged 18-30 who do not fall into family, business, or solo female categories
5. Older travelers ($n \approx 700$): Reviews by travelers aged 50+ who do not fall into other categories

Demographic classification was based on explicit self-identification in reviews, with a hierarchical assignment protocol to ensure mutual exclusivity: family status took precedence, followed by business travel, then solo female travel, and finally age-based categorization. Final selection was randomized within each stratum to minimize selection bias and enhance the representativeness of the analytical corpus.

Official Marketing Content

Official destination marketing materials were systematically collected from primary institutional sources during the same temporal window from January 2022 to July 2024. The collection focused on the Moroccan National Tourist Office website, the Regional Council of Tourism Marrakech portal, and verified social media accounts, including Instagram and Facebook profiles associated with Morocco's official tourism promotion. The content types collected encompass website copy from destination pages and promotional sections, social media posts with accompanying text and hashtags, digital advertisements and campaign materials, and blog posts featuring articles about Marrakech.

This comprehensive approach ensured the capture of the full spectrum of official linguistic strategies employed to promote Marrakech across different digital platforms and communication contexts.

Data Analysis Framework

Analytical Workflow

The analytical process follows a systematic three-stage workflow designed to integrate quantitative patterns with qualitative interpretations in a coherent and methodologically rigorous manner. The first stage involves quantitative pattern identification through automated sentiment analysis using VADER, statistical analysis of linguistic feature frequencies and correlations, and demographic comparison of sentiment distributions across different traveler categories. The second stage encompasses qualitative content analysis, with thematic coding of narrative structures and cultural references, and discourse analysis of persuasive strategies and cultural positioning within the texts. The final stage focuses on mixed-methods integration, involving cross-validation of quantitative patterns with qualitative themes and triangulated interpretation of findings across all analytical approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic phenomena under investigation.

Sentiment Analysis

VADER sentiment analysis was selected for its proven effectiveness on social media and review texts, particularly its sensitivity to informal language, intensifiers, and mixed-sentiment expressions common in travel reviews. As a complementary path, aspect-based sentiment analysis with zero-shot learning can extract facet-level insights from reviews (such as service, cleanliness, safety) and has shown promise in hospitality contexts (Nawawi et al., 2024). The tool provides polarity indicators (distinguishing positive from negative sentiment) and intensity scores, enabling nuanced analysis of emotional expression levels within the review corpus.

To ensure analytical quality, VADER performance validation was conducted using a stratified random sample of 200 reviews (10% of the corpus) representing diverse demographic groups and sentiment ranges. Two independent human coders manually classified these reviews using the same three-point sentiment scale (positive, neutral, negative) employed by VADER. Inter-coder reliability for human classification achieved Cohen's $\kappa = .85$, indicating excellent agreement. VADER validation metrics against the consensus human labels showed: accuracy = 78.5%, precision = .81 (positive), .73 (neutral), .79 (negative), recall = .76 (positive), .71 (neutral), .82 (negative), and overall F1-score = .78. Cases involving sarcasm, cultural references, or mixed emotions were flagged for manual review to ensure appropriate handling of tourism-specific language patterns.

Thematic Content Analysis

Qualitative analysis employed systematic thematic coding using NVivo software to identify recurring patterns in narrative structure, emotional expression, and cultural representation within the review corpus. The coding process followed established qualitative research procedures, beginning with an open coding phase that involved initial reading and annotation to identify preliminary themes, linguistic patterns, and cultural

references specific to Marrakech tourism discourse. This was followed by an axial coding phase where initial codes were organized into broader thematic categories encompassing narrative techniques, emotional framing, cultural authenticity markers, and persuasive elements.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the qualitative analysis, an inter-coder reliability assessment was conducted using a stratified random sample of 400 reviews (20% of the corpus). Two independent researchers coded these reviews using the established thematic framework, yielding Cohen's $\kappa = .85$, indicating excellent inter-coder agreement and validating the robustness of the coding framework developed for this study.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis examined the strategic use of language in constructing Marrakech's digital identity, guided by Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics framework, which treats language as simultaneously conveying experiential content, interpersonal positioning, and textual organization. The analysis focused on collocation patterns that reveal common word associations and their cultural significance, metaphorical language that constructs cultural meaning and destination imagery, politeness strategies that build relational trust between reviewers and readers, and cultural terminology that establishes authenticity and local identity. AntConc concordance software facilitated systematic analysis of keyword frequencies and contextual usage patterns across the corpus, enabling the identification of recurring linguistic structures and their functional roles in the construction of tourism discourse.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS software enabled a comprehensive quantitative evaluation of relationships between linguistic features and tourist perceptions through multiple statistical procedures. ANOVA tests examined differences in sentiment across demographic groups to identify how traveler characteristics influence language use and the expression of satisfaction. Chi-square analysis assessed relationships between specific linguistic features and review characteristics such as length, helpfulness ratings, and overall satisfaction scores. Correlation analysis identified associations between language use patterns and satisfaction ratings, quantifying the relationship between linguistic strategies and tourists' perceptions. Descriptive statistics provided baseline measurements of the prevalence of specific linguistic strategies across the corpus, establishing the frequency and distribution of key language features within Marrakech's digital tourism discourse.

Mixed-Methods Integration and Triangulation

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative data strands were collected and analyzed simultaneously, then integrated during the interpretation phase to provide a comprehensive understanding of mechanisms of linguistic influence. The triangulation strategy incorporated multiple forms of validation, including data triangulation through multiple sources such as TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and official marketing materials to provide diverse perspectives on Marrakech's digital representation. Methodological triangulation combined sentiment analysis, thematic coding, and discourse analysis to offer complementary analytical lenses that balance automated efficiency with interpretive depth. Investigator triangulation

involved multiple researchers in coding and validation to minimize individual bias and enhance analytical rigor.

The integration procedures established a systematic quantitative-qualitative interface where statistical patterns, such as higher sentiment scores among family travelers, were examined through qualitative analysis to identify specific narrative elements contributing to these trends. Conversely, qualitative insights, such as the impact of cultural terminology on perceived authenticity, were tested quantitatively to confirm their broader representativeness across the corpus. Convergence assessment identified points where quantitative and qualitative findings aligned as robust patterns, while divergences prompted deeper analysis to understand contextual factors influencing linguistic effectiveness across different communication contexts and demographic groups.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles for digital research involving publicly available data, recognizing that all analyzed content was posted in public forums and that users were aware of its public accessibility. No private communications or personal information were accessed during the data collection process, and comprehensive data protection measures were implemented to ensure participant privacy and research integrity. All reviewer identifications were systematically removed during data collection, no personally identifiable information was retained in the analytical dataset, and data storage employed secure, password-protected systems with access limited to authorized research personnel. Only aggregated findings are reported in the study results, preventing individual identification and maintaining participant anonymity throughout the research process.

Data collection procedures complied fully with TripAdvisor and Google Reviews' terms of service regarding academic research use of publicly posted content, ensuring legal and ethical compliance with platform policies. The analysis was conducted with cultural sensitivity and awareness of cultural representation issues, actively avoiding orientalist or reductive interpretations of Moroccan tourism discourse. Findings were systematically reviewed for potential cultural bias or misrepresentation to ensure a respectful and accurate portrayal of cultural elements within the tourism discourse analysis.

Limitations and Boundary Conditions

One of the most serious limitations lies in the language and cultural bias of the data. By focusing exclusively on English-language content, the analysis largely reflects a specific subset of tourists, those who are digitally literate, economically advantaged, and accustomed to English-dominant platforms. In Morocco, however, Arabic and French remain the principal languages for many travelers. Excluding these linguistic and cultural dimensions likely underestimates the real impact of language, as more authentic cultural expression may be conveyed more powerfully in indigenous or regional languages.

The choice of platforms also creates selection effects. Restricting the dataset to TripAdvisor and Google Reviews omits francophone travel sites, Arabic-language platforms, and region-specific forums that may reveal different linguistic dynamics. These spaces could display stronger links between language and satisfaction, meaning that the modest effect sizes identified here may not accurately represent broader patterns of tourism discourse.

Temporal and contextual constraints further limit interpretation. The 2022–2024 timeframe coincides with the post-pandemic recovery of global tourism, a period when travelers' relief at being able to travel again may have inflated positive sentiment. External conditions, such as shifting economic circumstances or political developments, may also have influenced both linguistic practices and satisfaction levels independently of the destinations themselves.

The study's correlational design introduces additional uncertainty. It remains unclear whether official marketing language shapes tourist reviews, whether visitor expressions confirm actual experiences, or whether both simply reflect shared cultural scripts about exotic destinations. Without causal evidence, interpretations of linguistic influence remain tentative.

Demographic classification presents another methodological challenge. Because categories were inferred through textual cues, errors are inevitable, and their extent is unknown. For instance, the "family" group may include widely varied household structures with different linguistic tendencies, while cultural differences in expressing dissatisfaction may also affect the reliability of comparisons across demographic groups. Finally, the distinction between statistical and practical significance must be emphasized. While many findings were statistically significant, the effect sizes consistently fell below conventional thresholds for practical significance. Recognizing this gap prevents overinterpretation and ensures a more cautious reading of the results.

RESULTS

This section presents the analytical results organized to address the study's central research questions: (1) What are the distinctive linguistic features of online travel reviews for Marrakech? (2) How do these linguistic features influence tourists' perceptions and decision-making? (3) How does official destination marketing language shape Marrakech's appeal? The findings integrate quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative thematic insights while acknowledging the limitations and uncertainties inherent in this mixed-methods approach.

Linguistic Features in Online Travel Reviews of Marrakech

Demographic Patterns in Review Sentiment

To address Research Question 1, the analysis examined how reviewer demographics relate to sentiment expression and linguistic choices. Demographic classification employed a hierarchical, mutually exclusive categorization system based on explicit self-identification within reviews. The classification protocol prioritized family status, followed by business travel, solo female travel, and finally age-based categories for the remaining reviews. This approach ensured that each review was assigned to exactly one demographic category, enabling valid statistical comparison across groups.

The five demographic categories were operationalized as follows: families (explicitly mentioning travel with children, spouses, or relatives), business travelers (references to work-related visits or conferences, excluding family travelers), solo female travelers (women explicitly indicating solo travel), younger travelers (ages 18-30, based on profile information when available, excluding those in other categories), and older travelers (ages 50+, excluding those classified elsewhere).

Table 1: Sentiment Distribution across Mutually Exclusive Traveler Demographics

Demographic Group	n	M	SD	95% CI
Families	387	72.0	18.0	[70.2, 73.8]
Business Travelers	298	67.0	19.0	[64.8, 69.2]
Solo Female Travelers	142	58.0	22.0	[54.3, 61.7]
Younger Travelers (18-30)	445	61.0	21.0	[59.0, 63.0]
Older Travelers (50+)	728	75.0	16.0	[73.8, 76.2]
Total	2,000			

Note. CI = confidence interval. Mean positive sentiment scores are expressed as percentages. Categories are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive.

Statistical analysis using one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in sentiment distribution across demographic groups, though effect sizes were modest. As shown in Table 1, older travelers reported the highest mean positive sentiment scores (M = 75%, SD = 16%), while solo female travelers showed notably lower positivity (M = 58%, SD = 22%). The overall ANOVA was significant, $F(4, 1995) = 12.43$, $p < .001$, partial η^2 = .024, indicating that demographic factors account for approximately 2.4% of sentiment variance.

Post-hoc Tukey tests revealed that solo female travelers differed significantly from all other groups ($p < .05$ for all comparisons), while the difference between families and older travelers was not significant ($p = .12$). The 17 percentage-point gap between solo female travelers and older travelers represents the largest demographic divide in satisfaction expression, likely reflecting underlying experiential differences rather than mere linguistic preferences.

Writing Styles and Narrative Techniques

Chi-square analysis examined the relationship between review tone and writing style across the corpus. Three writing styles were identified through systematic coding: narrative (story-driven accounts with personal anecdotes), descriptive (factual accounts focusing on attributes), and advisory (recommendation-focused content). The distribution showed narrative reviews as most prevalent (55%), followed by descriptive (28%) and advisory (17%).

Table 2: Distribution of Writing Styles and Tones

Style	Enthusiastic	Critical	Neutral	Total	% of Total
Narrative	517	330	253	1,100	55%
Descriptive	263	168	129	560	28%
Advisory	160	102	78	340	17%
Total	940	600	460	2,000	100%

The chi-square test revealed no significant association between writing style and tone, $\chi^2(4) = 0.12$, $p = .998$, Cramer's V = .005. Tone distributions were virtually identical across all three writing styles: enthusiastic tone appeared in approximately 47% of reviews regardless of style (narrative: 47.0%, descriptive: 47.0%, advisory: 47.1%), critical tone in 30% (narrative: 30.0%, descriptive: 30.0%, advisory: 30.0%), and neutral tone in 23% (narrative: 23.0%, descriptive: 23.0%, advisory: 22.9%).

This finding suggests that reviewers' emotional responses to Marrakech remain consistent regardless of their chosen narrative approach. The lack of association between style and tone indicates that factors beyond writing technique, such as actual service experiences or individual disposition, primarily determine the emotional valence of reviews. This pattern aligns with the study's broader finding that linguistic choices explain only modest variance in tourist satisfaction, with experiential factors likely playing the dominant role in shaping review sentiment.

Thematic Analysis of Linguistic Features

Qualitative analysis using NVivo identified recurring linguistic patterns across the review corpus. The coding process employed the validated thematic framework established during the reliability assessment phase (Cohen's κ = .85 for inter-coder agreement on 20% of reviews). The analysis revealed several prominent linguistic themes across the full corpus. Approximately two-thirds of reviews (64%) included vivid sensory descriptors, with examples such as "The medina is a labyrinth of vibrant colors and scents" and "The souks buzzed with life and felt magical." Cultural terminology appeared in 71% of reviews, with "medina" (mentioned 2,847 times), "riad" (1,923 times), and "souk" (1,456 times) the most frequent.

Colloquial expressions appeared in 30% of reviews, particularly in advisory sections, with phrases like "totally worth it" and "don't miss this place." These informal markers appeared to function as rapport-building devices, though their effectiveness requires further investigation. Word frequency analysis revealed that reviews with higher cultural terminology density showed a weak but significant correlation with satisfaction ratings (r = .23, p < .001), though this relationship explains only 5% of rating variance, suggesting multiple factors influence review evaluations.

Table 3: **Narrative Techniques in Marrakech Reviews**

Category	Description	Frequency	% of Reviews	Representative Examples
Vivid Descriptors	Sensory-rich adjectives	1,280	64%	"vibrant," "exotic," "breathtaking"
Cultural References	Place-specific terminology	1,420	71%	"riad," "medina," "tagine," "souk"
Emphatic Language	Exclamatory expressions	860	43%	"amazing!" "unforgettable!"
Storytelling Elements	Personal narrative structure	1,340	67%	Detailed experiential accounts
Metaphorical Language	Figurative descriptions	760	38%	"living tapestry," "oasis of charm"

Impact of Language Use on Tourist Perceptions

Linguistic Features and Review Ratings

To address Research Question 2, the analysis examined relationships between specific linguistic features and review ratings. Six linguistic variables were coded: presence of positive adjectives, use of present-tense verbs, overall tone valence, service-related terminology, expectation-related language, and persuasive elements. These variables were selected based on prior literature suggesting their potential influence on perceived credibility and helpfulness in consumer-generated content.

Independent samples t-tests revealed significant differences for all linguistic features (all $p < .001$), with effect sizes ranging from small to medium (Cohen's $d = 0.31$ to 0.58). Reviews containing positive adjectives averaged 4.3/5 compared to 3.9/5 for those without, representing a moderate effect size ($d = 0.42$). The strongest association was found for overall positive tone ($d = 0.58$), while present-tense usage showed the smallest effect ($d = 0.31$). These findings suggest that emotional expression and evaluative language serve as more powerful predictors of rating behavior than temporal linguistic markers.

Table 4: Linguistic Features and Review Ratings

Linguistic Feature	Present (n)	Absent (n)	Mean Rating (Present)	Mean Rating (Absent)	Cohen's d	95% CI
Positive Adjectives	1,456	544	4.3	3.9	0.42	[0.30, 0.54]
Present Tense	1,123	877	4.2	4.0	0.31	[0.19, 0.43]
Positive Tone	1,340	660	4.4	3.7	0.58	[0.46, 0.70]
Service Terms	892	1,108	4.3	4.0	0.38	[0.26, 0.50]
Met Expectations	678	1,322	4.4	4.0	0.45	[0.32, 0.58]
Persuasive Language	723	1,277	4.3	4.0	0.41	[0.28, 0.54]

Persuasive Elements and Engagement Indicators

Analysis of persuasive language elements revealed several patterns in user engagement, though caution is required in interpreting these as causal relationships. Reviews containing explicit recommendation language ("must-see," "highly recommended") showed higher helpfulness ratings (M = 3.8 vs. 3.2 on a 5-point scale), $t(1998) = 8.34$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.37$. Social proof elements ("popular with travelers," "top-rated") appeared in 361 reviews (18%) and were associated with higher perceived trustworthiness ratings (M = 4.1 vs. 3.6), though the post-hoc nature of trustworthiness assessment and potential confounding variables limit this analysis. The relatively low frequency of social proof elements suggests that their presence may serve as a distinctive signal that differentiates reviews in users' evaluation processes.

These correlational patterns suggest potential relationships between specific persuasive elements and user engagement, though experimental validation would be needed to establish causal relationships. Future research could employ controlled experimental designs manipulating these linguistic features while holding content constant to isolate their independent effects on user perceptions and behaviors. In addition, longitudinal studies tracking how these linguistic patterns evolve over time and across different platform contexts would provide valuable insights into the stability and generalizability of these relationships.

Table 5: Persuasive Elements and Engagement Metrics

Element Type	Frequency	% of Reviews	Association with Helpfulness	Effect Size (r)
Direct Recommendations	456	23%	Positive correlation	.28**
Urgency Indicators	234	12%	Positive correlation	.19**
Social Proof	361	18%	Positive correlation	.31**
Comparative Language	298	15%	Weak positive correlation	.12*

Note. $p < .05$, $p < .01$.

Mixed-Methods Integration

The integration of quantitative patterns with qualitative insights reveals convergent themes while highlighting areas of uncertainty. Statistical findings showing higher ratings for positive adjective use align with thematic analysis, revealing the prevalence of emotionally charged descriptors. However, the modest effect sizes (explaining 5-15% of rating variance) suggest that linguistic features, while meaningful, represent only part of the complex factors influencing review evaluations.

Qualitative analysis provided context for statistical patterns, revealing that positive language often co-occurred with detailed experiential accounts and cultural engagement. For example, highly rated reviews frequently combined vivid descriptors with specific cultural references: "The riad's courtyard was breathtakingly beautiful, with intricate tilework that transported us back centuries." However, the analysis also revealed potential limitations. Some reviews with extensive positive language received lower helpfulness ratings when perceived as "over-enthusiastic" or lacking specific details, suggesting threshold effects that quantitative analysis alone might miss.

Language Strategies in Destination Marketing

Official Marketing Content Analysis

To address Research Question 3, a systematic analysis of official tourism marketing materials was conducted using ATLAS.ti software. The corpus included content from primary institutional sources: Moroccan National Tourist Office website, Regional Tourism Council materials, and verified social media accounts, spanning January 2022 to July 2024.

Content analysis revealed strategic use of culturally significant terminology across platforms. Frequency analysis showed 'medina' appearing 150 times per 10,000 words,

'riad' 120 times per 10,000 words, and 'souk' 95 times per 10,000 words. These terms served dual functions: as descriptive elements and as markers of cultural authenticity.

Table 6: **Marketing Language Analysis**

Platform	Linguistic Strategy	Frequency	Purpose	Observed features
Websites	Cultural Terms	High density (150/10k words)	Authenticity signaling	Prominent placement in headers/ descriptions
Social Media	Emotive Adjectives	65% of posts	Emotional engagement	Frequent use of sensory descriptors
Advertisements	Metaphorical Language	40% of materials	Curiosity generation	"Jewel," "gateway," "crossroads" imagery
Overall Content	Inclusive Language	70% of content	Personalization	"Discover your," "experience," direct address

Note. Analysis based on textual content examination. Effectiveness indicators would require access to platform analytics data, which is not available for this study.

The prevalence of cultural terminology across platforms suggests a deliberate strategy to establish authenticity while maintaining accessibility for international audiences. Metaphorical language patterns, particularly references to Marrakech as a "cultural crossroads" or "jewel in the desert," appeared consistently across different communication channels, indicating coordinated messaging approaches.

However, determining the actual effectiveness of these linguistic strategies would require access to platform analytics, conversion data, and user engagement metrics that were beyond the scope of this textual analysis study. The patterns identified here represent strategic choices in language use rather than demonstrated performance outcomes.

Thematic Strategies in Promotional Content

Qualitative analysis identified five dominant themes in official marketing materials:

1. Heritage Emphasis: Frequent references to UNESCO status, historical significance, and cultural continuity
2. Sensory Appeal: Vivid descriptions emphasizing colors, sounds, and textures
3. Adventure Framing: Language positioning Marrakech as an exploration destination
4. Authenticity Claims: Emphasis on "genuine" and "traditional" experiences
5. Accessibility Assurance: Inclusive language welcoming diverse visitor types

Metaphorical language appeared strategically, with expressions like "jewel in the desert" and "cultural crossroads" appearing in approximately 40% of promotional materials. Call-to-action language was present in 65% of social media content, though the relationship between this frequency and actual conversion rates requires further investigation.

Marketing-Review Language Alignment

Comparison between official marketing language and user-generated review content revealed interesting patterns of convergence and divergence. Both domains emphasized cultural terminology and sensory descriptors, suggesting either successful marketing influence on tourist expression or authentic experiential reflection of shared cultural encounters. Marketing materials used terms such as "medina," "riad," and "souk" consistently, and these terms also appeared frequently in user reviews (71% contained cultural references). This alignment could indicate either that marketing language effectively captures authentic experiences or that tourists have internalized promotional terminology in describing their visits. However, reviews showed greater variation in tone and more frequent mention of practical concerns (safety, navigation, pricing) that were largely absent from marketing materials. User-generated content included both highly positive expressions ("breathtaking," "magical") and more nuanced perspectives ("overwhelming but fascinating," "beautiful chaos") that official materials typically avoided.

The analysis suggests a potential feedback loop between institutional branding and tourist expression, though determining causality requires longitudinal study designs beyond the scope of this research. The observed linguistic convergence between marketing and review domains may reflect successful destination branding, authentic experiential validation, or simply shared cultural scripts about exotic destinations. Furthermore, this study analyzed linguistic content without access to performance metrics such as conversion rates, engagement analytics, or booking data. While patterns of language use can be identified and compared, determining the actual effectiveness of specific linguistic strategies in driving tourism outcomes would require experimental designs and access to platform analytics data that were not available for this research. The findings, therefore, represent patterns of strategic language choice rather than demonstrated marketing effectiveness.

Study Limitations and Interpretive Cautions

Several important limitations affect the interpretation of these findings. The demographic classification system, while based on explicit textual indicators, likely misclassifies some reviewers and may not capture the full complexity of traveler identities. The English-language focus potentially excludes important perspectives from francophone, Arabic-speaking, or other language communities.

Statistical effect sizes, while significant, were generally modest (explaining 2-15% of variance), indicating that linguistic features represent important but not dominant factors in review evaluations. The correlational nature of most analyses limits causal inferences, and alternative explanations for observed patterns warrant consideration. The temporal scope (2022-2024) provides contemporary relevance but may not capture longer-term patterns or account for external events (such as pandemic effects) that could influence both language use and tourism perceptions.

Finally, the mixed-methods integration, while providing complementary perspectives, should be viewed as exploratory rather than confirmatory. The patterns identified here warrant replication and experimental validation before strong practical recommendations can be made.

DISCUSSION

This study reveals modest but meaningful relationships between linguistic features and tourist perceptions in Marrakech's digital tourism discourse. The findings suggest that while language plays a role in shaping tourist experiences, its influence is more nuanced and limited than often assumed in tourism marketing literature.

The Limited but Significant Role of Language

The most striking finding is the consistently small effect sizes across all analyses. Demographic factors account for only 2.4% of sentiment variance, while linguistic features explain between 5-15% of rating variance. Despite these modest effects, certain patterns warrant attention. The demographic variations in sentiment, particularly the 14-17 percentage point gap between solo female travelers and other groups, point to underlying experiential differences that transcend mere linguistic expression. The lower satisfaction among solo female travelers likely reflects genuine safety concerns rather than linguistic choices, suggesting that destination management organizations should focus on addressing substantive issues rather than merely adjusting marketing language.

Confronting the Modest Effects Paradox

Our findings highlight a paradox within tourism linguistics: language does have statistically significant effects, yet these effects remain relatively modest. This contradiction warrants closer scrutiny rather than being overlooked. The evidence suggests that linguistic influence on tourist perceptions is far less decisive than often is assumed, raising important questions about the actual weight of words in shaping tourism experiences. Several explanations can account for the limited impact of language. One is experiential dominance, as tourists base their evaluations more heavily on tangible aspects such as service quality, infrastructure, and personal safety. For instance, the 15% lower satisfaction rate among solo female travelers is more plausibly linked to safety concerns than to the way destinations are linguistically represented. Another explanation is semantic saturation: in today's competitive digital environments, the widespread use of positive and vivid descriptors diminishes their persuasive power. When nearly two-thirds of reviews employ this strategy, the language becomes conventional rather than compelling. A third factor is the cultural translation gap. By focusing exclusively on English reviews in a multilingual context such as Morocco, our analysis may understate the role of language, as Arabic and French expressions often resonate more authentically with local hospitality traditions.

These insights call into question some foundational assumptions in tourism linguistics. Established frameworks such as narrative transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2000) and appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2003) may overestimate the persuasive role of language in contexts where experiential realities outweigh textual influences. This does not mean that these theories should be abandoned, but rather recalibrated to recognize the primacy of service experience over linguistic framing.

For tourism practitioners, the practical implications are clear. Efforts and resources would be better invested in enhancing service quality and safety than in excessive linguistic fine-tuning. The data show that the difference in ratings between reviews with and without positive adjectives, a 0.4-point gap (Cohen's d = 0.42), is modest and easily overshadowed

by a single negative service encounter. Ultimately, authentic improvements in visitor experience carry more persuasive power than carefully optimized language.

Theoretical Implications and Limitations

The application of appraisal theory, narrative transportation, and politeness theory to tourism discourse yields mixed results. While these frameworks help explain why certain linguistic strategies correlate with higher engagement (narrative reviews receiving 25% more "helpful" votes), they cannot fully account for the weak overall effects. The modest correlation ($r = .23$) between cultural terminology density and satisfaction ratings suggests that theoretical predictions about authenticity markers may be overstated in tourism contexts. More critically, the convergence between marketing language and user-generated content raises questions about causality that our correlational design cannot answer. Do tourists adopt marketing terminology because it effectively captures their experiences, or does exposure to this language shape how they perceive and describe their visits? The cross-sectional nature of our data precludes definitive conclusions, highlighting a fundamental limitation in much digital tourism research.

Methodological Constraints and Alternative Interpretations

Several methodological limitations constrain our interpretations. The exclusive focus on English-language reviews from two Western-oriented platforms (TripAdvisor and Google) likely captures a specific segment of Marrakech's visitors, especially those who are digitally literate, comfortable with English, and culturally aligned with these platforms' norms. The experiences of French-speaking, Arabic-speaking, or offline tourists remain invisible in our analysis. Furthermore, the 2022-2024 timeframe coincides with post-pandemic tourism recovery, potentially inflating positive sentiment as travelers express relief at resumed mobility. The reliance on self-reported demographics through textual cues introduces classification errors of unknown magnitude. Our "family" category, for instance, might include various configurations from nuclear families to extended groups, each with different linguistic patterns and satisfaction drivers.

The use of VADER sentiment analysis, while efficient for large-scale analysis, may miss cultural nuances in how satisfaction is expressed. Moroccan cultural norms of hospitality might lead even dissatisfied visitors to couch criticism in polite language, artificially inflating positive sentiment scores.

Reconsidering Practical Implications

Given these findings, tourism stakeholders should temper expectations about language-based interventions. While our data shows that reviews with positive adjectives average 4.3/5 versus 3.9/5 without them, this 0.4-point difference (Cohen's $d = 0.42$) represents a modest effect that could easily be overshadowed by a single service failure. Rather than pursuing linguistic optimization as a primary strategy, destination marketers might focus on:

1. Addressing substantive concerns: The 15% lower positivity among solo female travelers suggests that safety improvements would yield greater returns than linguistic adjustments.
2. Platform diversification: Our English-language bias reveals the need to engage with tourists across multiple languages and platforms, particularly French and Arabic, given Morocco's linguistic landscape.

3. Temporal awareness: The small effect sizes suggest that language modifications should be tested longitudinally rather than assumed effective based on correlational evidence.
4. Authentic representation: Instead of crafting idealized narratives, allowing genuine diversity in tourist experiences, including constructive criticism, might build greater long-term trust.

Toward a More Nuanced Understanding

This study's primary contribution lies not in confirming language's importance but in quantifying its limitations. While linguistic features demonstrate statistically significant associations with tourist perceptions, their practical impact remains modest. This finding should prompt tourism researchers to move beyond surface-level textual analysis toward understanding the complex interplay of factors, service quality, cultural expectations, personal circumstances, and yes, language, that collectively shape tourist experiences. Future research should employ experimental designs to establish causality, incorporate multilingual corpora to capture diverse tourist voices, and extend temporal coverage to distinguish enduring patterns from pandemic-related anomalies. Only through such methodologically rigorous approaches can we move beyond correlational observations to actionable insights that genuinely enhance destination competitiveness.

In conclusion, while language matters in digital tourism discourse, it matters less than the industry might hope and in more complex ways than simple sentiment scores reveal. Recognizing these limitations represents not a failure but a maturation of tourism linguistics research toward a more realistic and ultimately more useful understanding.

CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods analysis of 2,000 English-language reviews and official marketing content from Marrakech reveals a fundamental paradox in digital tourism discourse: while language demonstrates statistically significant associations with tourist satisfaction, its practical influence remains surprisingly constrained. Linguistic features explained only 5-15% of rating variance, challenging prevailing assumptions about textual persuasion in destination marketing. The findings paint a complex picture across our three research questions. Cultural terminology such as "riad" and "medina" correlated with higher engagement metrics, yet the relationship between cultural references and satisfaction remained weak ($r = .23$). Demographic variations emerged as expected, with solo female travelers expressing notably lower positivity, a difference more likely reflecting safety concerns than language preferences. Official marketing content showed associations with engagement, though causality cannot be established from correlational data.

From a theoretical perspective, established frameworks, including appraisal theory and narrative transportation, appear to overpredict language effects in real-world tourism contexts where service experiences dominate textual presentation. This disconnect suggests these theories require recalibration when applied to multicultural service environments where authenticity and tangible quality often outweigh rhetorical strategies. For tourism practitioners, these results counsel balanced expectations about language-based interventions. Resources would yield greater returns when directed toward substantive improvements, service quality, safety infrastructure, and cultural authenticity,

rather than extensive textual refinement. The English-only limitation suggests that multilingual content strategies may prove more valuable than optimizing single-language prose, particularly given Marrakech's diverse visitor base.

Several methodological constraints contextualize these findings. The focus on TripAdvisor and Google Reviews may exclude perspectives from regional platforms, while an English-only analysis overlooks francophone and Arabic-speaking communities central to Marrakech's tourism landscape. The post-pandemic timeframe may have influenced sentiment patterns, and correlational designs prevent causal inference about marketing influence on tourist expression.

These limitations point to productive research directions: experimental validation through randomized trials, multilingual analysis that captures diverse cultural voices, and longitudinal studies that track language evolution over extended periods. Moving beyond satisfaction ratings to examine booking behavior and return visits would provide more concrete evidence of linguistic impact on tourism outcomes.

The central contribution lies not in confirming the importance of language, but in empirically delineating its boundaries within digital tourism discourse. This finding should prompt fundamental reconsideration of resource allocation in destination marketing, directing attention toward the experiential factors that overwhelmingly determine tourist satisfaction while positioning linguistic analysis as a diagnostic tool rather than a primary strategy. Tourism linguistics can mature by embracing these limitations, evolving from optimistic assumptions about persuasive power toward a nuanced understanding of when, how, and why language strategies succeed or fail in complex cultural contexts. This humility about linguistic influence may paradoxically yield more effective outcomes by ensuring textual approaches complement rather than overshadow the substantive improvements that drive genuine tourist satisfaction.

IMPLICATIONS

This study makes a dual contribution to the fields of tourism marketing and applied linguistics by highlighting the limits of linguistic influence in shaping tourist perceptions. For tourism research, the findings underscore the importance of moving beyond surface-level textual analysis to examine how language interacts with experiential and cultural dimensions. The modest effect sizes documented here challenge overly optimistic assumptions about the effectiveness of linguistic interventions and redirect attention toward the broader ecosystem of factors that influence destination evaluations.

From an applied linguistic perspective, the results demonstrate how real-world contexts can constrain theoretical expectations about language's persuasive capacity. The gap between frameworks such as narrative transportation theory and the empirical outcome of this study suggests that insights derived from controlled, laboratory-based settings may not fully transfer to multicultural service environments, where authenticity and tangible quality of service often outweigh rhetorical strategies.

Future research in tourism linguistics would benefit from methodological innovation in three key areas. First, experimental validation through randomized controlled trials can test the causal impact of specific linguistic interventions on booking decisions. Second, multilingual integration that compares Arabic, French, and English would capture a fuller range of culturally authentic expression, particularly in contexts like Morocco, where linguistic diversity is central to tourism discourse. Third, longitudinal tracking across

extended periods would allow researchers to distinguish enduring patterns of tourist evaluation from temporary anomalies tied to specific events or trends. The practical implications for destination managers point toward a balanced approach to communication strategies. Investments should focus primarily on improving service quality, which explains the vast majority of satisfaction variance beyond linguistic factors. At the same time, multilingual content strategies that honor cultural authenticity should complement rather than replace these efforts. Finally, linguistic analysis is most effectively deployed as a diagnostic tool for uncovering underlying service issues, not as the cornerstone of destination marketing. This orientation ensures that language use remains meaningful without overshadowing the substantive improvements that ultimately drive tourist satisfaction.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to the content of this article.

Ethics Statement

This study analyzed publicly available online reviews and official marketing texts. No interaction with individuals occurred, and no personally identifiable information was retained. In line with standard practice for research on public web data, individual consent was not required; data were handled in accordance with the platform Terms of Service, and results are reported in aggregate. The study adhered to institutional ethical guidelines for the analysis of public online content. All analyzed content was posted voluntarily in public forums where users explicitly made their reviews accessible to the general public. Data collection procedures complied with TripAdvisor and Google Reviews' terms of service regarding academic research use of publicly posted content. Reviewer identifications were systematically removed during data collection, and only aggregated findings are reported to prevent individual identification.

The research was conducted with cultural sensitivity and awareness of potential issues of representation, actively avoiding orientalist or reductive interpretations of Moroccan tourism discourse. The analysis focused on linguistic patterns rather than individual reviewer characteristics, and findings were reviewed for potential cultural bias to ensure respectful portrayal of cultural elements within the tourism discourse.

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Bios

Rachid Ed-dali is an Associate Professor of English Language and Linguistics at Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech, where he serves as Head of the Department of English Language and Literature. His teaching and research focus on discourse analysis, translation studies, applied linguistics, and the integration of digital technologies in higher education. He has authored and co-authored several peer-reviewed articles in international journals on topics including EFL pedagogy, translation practices, discourse and media, and AI-assisted learning. In addition to research, he plays an active role in curriculum design and program coordination at both undergraduate and graduate levels, and he has supervised numerous Master's and doctoral theses. Email: r.eddali@uca.ma

Wyssal El Gourari is a Moroccan researcher in English Studies whose work focuses on applied linguistics, discourse analysis, and language education. She has co-authored research on the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into EFL textbooks in Morocco and is examining how language and pedagogy intersect with issues of culture, identity, and sustainability in education. Email: *w.elgourari.ced@uca.ac.ma*