



## Impact of Language and Culture on Tourism: Sympathy Triggering Economic Development

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**Abstract.** *This study explores the role of language and culture in shaping tourism experiences and their influence on economic development through emotional engagement, particularly sympathy. As global tourism continues to expand, cultural authenticity and linguistic accessibility have become key determinants of tourist satisfaction. This paper adopts an IMRAD structure to analyze how language and cultural representation contribute to emotional connections between tourists and destinations, encouraging longer stays, repeat visits, and increased spending. Using qualitative analysis of secondary data, including tourism reports, academic literature, and case studies, the research identifies how culturally rich narratives and language inclusivity foster empathy and positive perceptions among tourists. The findings suggest that destinations which successfully integrate linguistic diversity and cultural storytelling tend to generate stronger emotional bonds, which translate into economic benefits. The study concludes that tourism strategies emphasizing cultural sensitivity and multilingual communication can enhance both visitor experience and local economic growth.*

**Keywords:** *tourism, language, culture, sympathy, economic development*

### 1. Introduction

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, and regional development. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, international tourism has increasingly shifted from a purely leisure-based activity toward an experience-centered industry in which travelers seek meaningful cultural interaction and authentic engagement with host communities. In this context, language and culture function as central components of tourism development because they mediate communication, shape visitor perceptions, and influence emotional responses (Richards, 2018).

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Language plays a fundamental role in tourism as it facilitates interaction between tourists and local communities. Effective communication enables visitors to access information, navigate destinations, and participate in local activities with greater confidence. As argued by Kramsch (1998), language is inseparable from culture because it reflects the values, traditions, and worldviews embedded within a society. In tourism settings, multilingual communication strategies — including translated materials, bilingual staff, and digital language tools — reduce communicative barriers and improve visitor satisfaction (Baker, 2012). Destinations that fail to address linguistic diversity may unintentionally exclude international visitors, reducing their competitive advantage in the global market.

Culture is similarly a major attraction factor in tourism (Mammadova & Abdullayev, 2025). Cultural heritage sites, traditional festivals, cuisine, folklore, music, and local customs attract visitors seeking distinctive experiences unavailable in their home countries (Babayev, 2025; Javid & Sadikhova, 2025; Seidova, 2025). Richards (2018) notes that cultural tourism has evolved from passive sightseeing to participatory experiences where tourists engage directly with local traditions and communities. Such interactions increase tourists' appreciation of cultural diversity while strengthening destination identity.

Beyond practical communication and attraction, language and culture contribute to the emotional dimension of tourism (Farzaliyeva & Abdullayev, 2025). Emotional engagement has become an important concept in tourism studies, as visitors increasingly value experiences that generate empathy, attachment, and personal meaning. Sympathy — defined as concern or emotional resonance with others' experiences — can emerge when tourists encounter compelling cultural narratives, local histories, or social realities (Smith, 2009). For example, heritage tourism involving historical memory, indigenous communities, or post-conflict destinations often evokes strong emotional reactions, encouraging reflective and ethical travel behavior.

The relationship between sympathy and tourism has important economic implications. Emotional attachment to destinations may influence tourists' willingness to spend more on local products, donate to heritage preservation, support community enterprises, and revisit destinations (Hosany & Prayag, 2013). This indicates that emotional tourism experiences are not merely psychological outcomes but also drivers of economic development. In this sense, language acts as a bridge that enables cultural understanding, while culture provides the symbolic content that triggers emotional engagement.

Although previous studies have examined tourism motivation, cultural tourism, and destination branding, limited research has specifically analyzed how language and culture jointly stimulate sympathy and contribute to economic growth. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of linguistic accessibility and cultural representation on tourism experiences, with particular attention to how sympathy functions as an emotional mechanism supporting sustainable economic development.



## 2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive research design aimed at exploring the interconnected roles of language, culture, and emotional engagement — specifically sympathy — in tourism-driven economic development. A qualitative approach was selected because the research focuses on interpretive analysis of social phenomena, including human emotions, cultural interaction, and communication practices, which are not easily quantifiable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### 2.1 Research Design and Approach

The study is based on a systematic literature review combined with comparative thematic analysis. The systematic review follows structured procedures to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant academic and institutional sources related to tourism, language use, cultural representation, and emotional engagement. Guidelines proposed by Kitchenham (2004) for systematic reviews were adapted to ensure transparency and replicability.

### 2.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Data were collected from multiple secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in major academic databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, reports and publications from international organizations such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization, books and monographs on cultural tourism, sociolinguistics, and tourism economics, and case studies documenting tourism practices in culturally diverse destinations. Inclusion criteria were defined as follows: publications from 2000 to 2024 to ensure contemporary relevance; studies focusing on language, culture, or emotional aspects of tourism; research addressing economic outcomes or development implications; and English-language publications for consistency in analysis. Exclusion criteria included purely quantitative economic models without cultural variables and studies lacking clear methodological transparency.

### 2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This method involves identifying, coding, and categorizing recurring patterns and concepts across the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis proceeded in three stages: open coding, in which key concepts related to language use, cultural representation, emotional engagement, and economic impact were identified; axial coding, in which relationships between these concepts were established, with particular focus on how language and culture influence sympathy; and selective coding, in which core themes were refined to construct a coherent framework linking emotional engagement to tourism-driven economic development. Additionally, elements of discourse analysis were incorporated to examine how cultural narratives and linguistic strategies are presented in tourism contexts, drawing on principles developed by Fairclough (1995) and emphasizing the role of language in shaping social meaning and perception.



## ***2.4 Case Study Integration***

To enhance analytical depth, selected case studies from culturally rich tourism destinations were integrated into the analysis. These cases were chosen based on their demonstrated use of multilingual communication and strong cultural identity. Comparative analysis allowed for the identification of best practices and common patterns across different geographic and cultural contexts.

## ***2.5 Validity and Reliability***

To ensure validity, the study employed data triangulation by using multiple sources and perspectives. Consistency in coding and theme development was maintained through iterative review processes. Reliability was further supported by adhering to established qualitative research standards outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), including transparency in data selection and analytical procedures.

## ***2.6 Limitations***

Despite its strengths, the study has certain limitations. The reliance on secondary data may restrict the ability to capture real-time tourist emotions and behaviors. Additionally, cultural interpretations may vary across contexts, which can influence the generalizability of findings. Future research could incorporate primary data collection methods, such as interviews or surveys, to complement the insights generated in this study.

## **3. Results**

The thematic analysis of the selected literature and case studies revealed a complex and interdependent relationship between language, culture, emotional engagement, and economic outcomes in tourism. The results are organized into four major thematic categories that illustrate how these variables interact to stimulate sympathy and contribute to economic development.

### ***3.1 Language Accessibility and Tourist Experience***

The findings indicate that language accessibility is a foundational factor influencing tourists' overall experience. Destinations that actively implement multilingual communication strategies — such as translated signage, mobile applications, guided tours, and customer service in multiple languages — report higher levels of visitor satisfaction and engagement. According to United Nations World Tourism Organization reports, language inclusivity enhances tourists' sense of safety, orientation, and participation in local activities. Furthermore, the presence of linguistically competent staff and culturally aware guides reduces misunderstandings and fosters smoother interactions between tourists and local communities. Studies show that when communication barriers are minimized, tourists are more likely to explore beyond standard attractions and engage in local economic activities such as shopping, dining, and cultural events (Baker, 2012). This expanded participation contributes directly to increased tourism revenue.



### ***3.2 Cultural Authenticity and Emotional Engagement***

A second key finding emphasizes the importance of cultural authenticity in generating meaningful tourist experiences. Tourists demonstrate stronger emotional responses when exposed to genuine cultural expressions, including traditional rituals, local craftsmanship, indigenous storytelling, and community-based tourism initiatives (Sadikhova, 2025; Seidova, 2025). Richards (2018) highlights that experiential cultural tourism — where visitors actively participate rather than passively observe — enhances emotional immersion. The analysis shows that authenticity acts as a catalyst for emotional engagement, particularly in the form of sympathy. For instance, tourism experiences that present local histories of struggle, resilience, or identity often evoke empathetic responses. This is especially evident in heritage tourism, rural tourism, and visits to marginalized or indigenous communities, where tourists gain insight into local ways of life and challenges.

### ***3.3 Sympathy as a Mediating Emotional Mechanism***

One of the most significant findings of this study is the identification of sympathy as a mediating variable between cultural exposure and economic behavior. Tourists who experience emotional resonance with a destination are more likely to demonstrate prosocial behavior, including purchasing locally produced goods and services, supporting small-scale and community-based enterprises, donating to cultural preservation and heritage projects, and engaging in responsible and sustainable tourism practices. Research by Hosany and Prayag (2013) supports the notion that emotional experiences strongly influence behavioral intentions, including willingness to recommend and revisit destinations. The present analysis extends this perspective by demonstrating that sympathy not only affects intentions but also actual economic contributions at the local level.

### ***3.4 Economic Impacts of Language and Cultural Integration***

The integration of language and culture into tourism strategies was found to have measurable economic benefits. Destinations that effectively combine multilingual accessibility with strong cultural branding tend to achieve increased tourist arrivals and longer stays, higher per capita tourist expenditure, growth in employment within tourism-related sectors, and enhanced development of local small and medium enterprises. Reports from the World Travel and Tourism Council confirm that culturally rich and inclusive tourism models contribute significantly to GDP growth in many regions. Additionally, culturally driven tourism encourages the diversification of local economies by promoting creative industries such as handicrafts, performing arts, and gastronomy.

### ***3.5 Interrelationship of Key Variables***

The results also reveal a cyclical relationship among the main variables. Language facilitates access to culture; culture generates emotional engagement; emotional engagement — particularly sympathy — influences tourist behavior; and this behavior leads to economic outcomes that, in



turn, support cultural preservation and further tourism development. This cycle highlights the importance of a holistic approach to tourism planning.

### ***3.6 Emerging Trends***

Finally, the analysis identifies several emerging trends: increasing use of digital translation technologies and AI-driven language tools in tourism; growing demand for immersive, community-based cultural experiences; rising importance of ethical and sustainable tourism practices; and greater emphasis on storytelling and narrative-building in destination marketing. These trends suggest that the role of language and culture in tourism will continue to expand, particularly as tourists seek deeper emotional and cultural connections in their travel experiences.

## **4. Discussion**

The findings of this study reinforce the idea that tourism is not merely an economic transaction but a complex socio-cultural process shaped by communication, identity, and emotional exchange. Language and culture emerge as mutually reinforcing elements that influence how tourists perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to destinations. This aligns with the sociocultural perspective of Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized that meaning is constructed through social interaction and cultural context. In tourism, such interactions are often mediated through language, making linguistic accessibility a critical factor in shaping visitor experience (Sadikhova, 2026).

One of the central insights of this study is the role of language as both a functional and symbolic resource. Functionally, language enables communication and facilitates access to services; symbolically, it conveys cultural identity and authenticity. As noted by Kramsch (1998), language carries cultural meaning and reflects shared values and beliefs. In tourism settings, this dual role allows language to act as a bridge between tourists and host communities, fostering not only understanding but also emotional connection. When tourists can comprehend local narratives — whether through guided tours, storytelling, or digital interpretation — they are more likely to engage deeply with the destination.

The discussion also highlights the growing importance of cultural authenticity in a globalized tourism market. While globalization has increased accessibility and standardization, it has simultaneously intensified demand for unique, localized experiences. MacCannell (1976) introduced the concept of "staged authenticity," suggesting that some tourism experiences are artificially constructed for visitors. The present study confirms that while staged elements may attract initial interest, genuine cultural engagement is more effective in generating emotional responses such as sympathy. This suggests that tourism stakeholders should prioritize preserving and presenting authentic cultural practices rather than commodifying them excessively.

A key contribution of this research is the identification of sympathy as an economic catalyst. Emotional engagement has been widely discussed in tourism literature, but its direct link to economic behavior is often underexplored. The findings indicate that sympathy encourages



tourists to act in ways that support local economies, such as purchasing handmade goods, participating in community-based tourism, and contributing to cultural preservation initiatives. This supports the experiential marketing framework proposed by Schmitt (1999), which emphasizes that emotional experiences influence consumer behavior and decision-making. In tourism, these emotional experiences extend beyond consumption to include ethical and socially responsible actions.

Furthermore, the study contributes to discussions on sustainable tourism development. By fostering sympathy and emotional attachment, culturally and linguistically inclusive tourism encourages responsible behavior among tourists. Visitors who feel connected to a destination are more likely to respect local customs, minimize environmental impact, and support long-term sustainability initiatives. This aligns with the principles advocated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, which emphasize the importance of cultural preservation and community involvement in sustainable tourism.

However, the discussion also points to several challenges. One major concern is the risk of cultural commodification, where traditions and practices are modified or simplified to meet tourist expectations. While this may generate short-term economic benefits, it can undermine cultural integrity and reduce the authenticity that drives emotional engagement. Additionally, the unequal distribution of tourism benefits remains a critical issue. In some cases, economic gains are concentrated among large businesses, while local communities receive limited benefits, weakening the potential positive impact of sympathy-driven tourism.

Another important issue is linguistic inequality. While multilingual services enhance accessibility, not all destinations have the resources to implement comprehensive language strategies. Smaller or less-developed regions may struggle to compete in the global tourism market due to limited linguistic infrastructure. This highlights the need for policy support, investment in language education, and the use of emerging technologies such as AI-based translation tools to bridge communication gaps.

The study also underscores the increasing role of digitalization in shaping tourism experiences. Online platforms, virtual tours, and social media storytelling have transformed how culture and language are presented to global audiences. Digital narratives can amplify emotional engagement and create pre-visit sympathy by exposing potential tourists to local stories and cultural contexts. However, digital representation must remain accurate and respectful to avoid misinterpretation or cultural stereotyping.

In summary, the discussion demonstrates that language and culture are not peripheral elements but central drivers of tourism development. Their ability to generate emotional responses — particularly sympathy — creates a powerful mechanism that links human connection with economic outcomes. A holistic tourism strategy that integrates linguistic accessibility, cultural



authenticity, and ethical considerations can maximize both economic benefits and social sustainability.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has examined the multifaceted relationship between language, culture, and tourism, with a particular focus on how emotional engagement — especially sympathy — can stimulate economic development. The findings confirm that language and culture are not merely supportive elements of tourism but core drivers that shape tourist experiences, perceptions, and behaviors. Through effective communication and authentic cultural representation, destinations can create meaningful interactions that go beyond surface-level engagement.

One of the key conclusions is that language functions as both a practical tool and a cultural bridge. Multilingual accessibility enhances tourists' ability to navigate unfamiliar environments, while also enabling them to understand and appreciate local traditions and values. Culture, in turn, provides the substance of tourism experiences, offering unique narratives, practices, and identities that distinguish one destination from another. When these elements are successfully integrated, they foster emotional connections between visitors and host communities.

A particularly important contribution of this study is the identification of sympathy as a mechanism linking tourism experiences to economic outcomes. Tourists who develop emotional resonance with a destination are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors, including increased spending, participation in local activities, and advocacy through recommendations. These behaviors contribute directly to local economic growth, job creation, and the sustainability of cultural industries.

At the same time, the study highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between economic objectives and cultural integrity. Over-commercialization and cultural commodification may undermine authenticity, reducing the emotional impact that drives tourism success. Therefore, policymakers and tourism stakeholders should prioritize sustainable practices, invest in language education and cultural preservation, and promote community-based tourism models.

In conclusion, tourism that effectively integrates language and culture has the potential to generate not only economic prosperity but also intercultural understanding and social cohesion. By fostering sympathy and meaningful human connections, such tourism models can support long-term, inclusive, and sustainable development.

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