



PRESERVING NIAS LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE MARKETING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Alwinda Manao¹, Vanessa Gaffar², Disman³, Hilda Monoarfa⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

e-mail: alwindamano@upi.edu

KEYWORD

Sustainable Heritage Marketing;
Liniha Language Preservation;
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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the growing threat to the preservation of the Nias language and its cultural identity amid globalization, tourism commodification, and socio-economic transformation. Despite increasing scholarly attention to cultural sustainability, limited research has systematically examined the role of sustainable heritage marketing in safeguarding indigenous linguistic and cultural authenticity. Using a protocol-driven systematic literature review, this study critically synthesized peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings published, over the last two decades. The analysis identified five interrelated dimensions: cultural identity and semiotics, sustainable heritage marketing and tourism competitiveness, community resilience and local wisdom, heritage policy and authenticity challenges, and educational strategies with digital communication. The findings demonstrate that participatory and semiotically sensitive heritage marketing can strengthen linguistic pride, cultural continuity, and community resilience while supporting sustainable tourism development. However, tensions between commercialization and authenticity persist when external actors dominate cultural representation. This study contributes a resilience-oriented conceptual framework that integrates language preservation into sustainable heritage marketing and offers practical guidance for policymakers and tourism practitioners in indigenous heritage contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language preservation, cultural identity, and sustainable development has become increasingly critical for indigenous communities confronting globalization and socio-economic transformation. The Nias language (Li Niha) serves as a vital component of cultural identity and sustainable development for indigenous communities in the face of globalization. It encapsulates oral traditions, customary laws, and spiritual beliefs, thus reinforcing collective identity among the Nias people. Research indicates that language plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural heritage, as seen in the preservation efforts of other local languages such as Walikan in Malang, which is seen as a symbol of identity and solidarity [1]. Additionally, the Fondrakö tradition in Nias highlights the importance of oral religious texts in conveying ancestral values and social cohesion, demonstrating that traditional practices can coexist with modernity [2]. The assimilation dynamics observed in other Indonesian communities further illustrate how local languages facilitate cultural exchange while preserving indigenous wisdom [3]. Thus, the preservation of Li Niha is essential not only for cultural continuity but also for fostering sustainable development within the Nias community.

The transformation of Nias into a cultural tourism destination, characterized by traditional villages, megalithic heritage, and unique ceremonies, presents a dual-edged sword for sustainable heritage preservation. While tourism can enhance local economies and rejuvenate cultural practices, it often leads to commodification, resulting in "staged authenticity" that undermines genuine cultural expressions ([4]). Research indicates that heritage tourism can produce both positive outcomes, such as economic gains and improved community wellbeing, and negative impacts, including cultural erosion and restricted local participation [5]. Effective sustainable tourism planning must incorporate the four pillars of sustainability—economic, cultural, environmental, and social—through participatory methodologies that engage local communities in decision-making [6]. Furthermore, the dependency-autonomy paradox highlights the need for local empowerment to navigate the complexities of tourism development, ensuring that it serves as a tool for both economic growth and cultural integrity [7].

Although studies on heritage tourism and language revitalization have expanded, limited research systematically integrates sustainable heritage marketing with indigenous language preservation, particularly in the Nias context. Existing scholarship has largely emphasized archaeological heritage, tourism livelihoods [8], or broader Indonesian language preservation, while the strategic role of heritage marketing in strengthening linguistic pride, cultural continuity, and community resilience remains underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present systematic literature review synthesizes interdisciplinary research on cultural semiotics, tourism competitiveness, local wisdom, policy, and digital education to develop a holistic framework for sustainable heritage marketing. The study argues that language preservation should be positioned as a foundational element of cultural sustainability and resilient community development rather than as an isolated preservation agenda.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure methodological transparency, rigor, and reproducibility [9]. The review was designed to synthesize interdisciplinary scholarship concerning the preservation of the Nias language and cultural identity through sustainable heritage marketing. The methodological process comprised four stages: review protocol development, thematic framework construction, inclusion–exclusion screening, and systematic study selection.

A structured literature search was conducted in September 2025 across four major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of tourism studies, cultural sustainability, heritage management, policy analysis, and indigenous studies. Search strings combined keywords related to “Nias language,” “Li Niha,” “cultural identity,” “heritage marketing,” “branding,” “sustainability,” and “community resilience.” Boolean operators and database-specific filters were applied to improve search precision and relevance. The search focused on publications issued between 2020 and 2025 to capture recent theoretical and empirical developments in sustainable heritage marketing and cultural preservation.

To guide the thematic synthesis, the retrieved literature was organized into five analytical dimensions: (1) cultural identity, language preservation, and semiotics; (2) sustainable heritage marketing and tourism competitiveness; (3) community resilience, local wisdom, and socio-economic transformation; (4) heritage policy, urban regeneration, and authenticity challenges; and (5) educational strategies, digital communication, and knowledge integration. These dimensions provided an integrated analytical framework for evaluating the relationship between linguistic vitality, cultural sustainability, and tourism development.

Studies were included if they: (a) were published in English; (b) focused on Nias language, cultural identity, heritage, tourism, sustainability, or resilience; (c) were published between 2020 and 2025; and (d) consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, or scholarly book chapters. Editorials, short surveys, duplicate records, inaccessible full texts, and studies unrelated to the Nias context were excluded.

The PRISMA-based selection process involved identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion stages. Initial database searches yielded 593 records, consisting of 147 from Scopus, 96 from Web

of Science, 121 from ScienceDirect, and 229 from Google Scholar. After removing 93 duplicate records and 8 incomplete entries, 492 studies remained for title and abstract screening. Two researchers independently conducted the screening process, with disagreements resolved through discussion with a third reviewer to enhance reliability and minimize selection bias. Following the exclusion of 383 irrelevant studies, 58 full-text articles were assessed and retained for final synthesis. The entire selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA flowchart (see Figure 1).

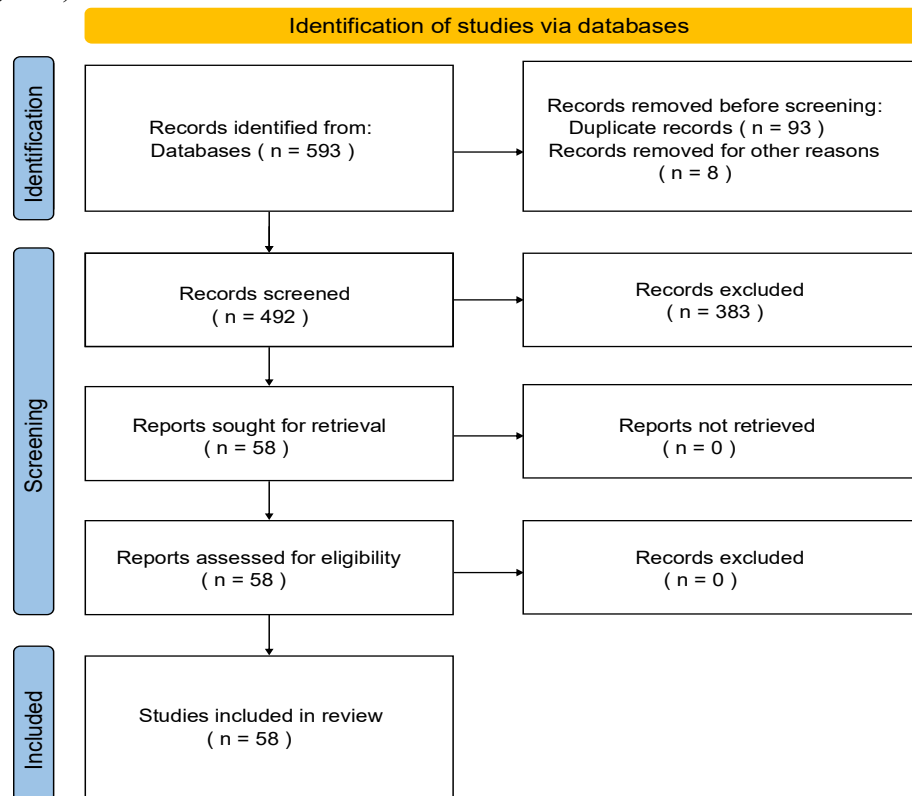


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of the systematic literature review process.

Thematic analysis was subsequently employed to identify recurring patterns, conceptual relationships, and emerging research trajectories across the selected studies. Despite the review's systematic design, several limitations should be acknowledged. Restricting the review to English-language publications may have excluded locally grounded Indonesian or Li Niha perspectives, while the 2020–2025 temporal scope may have omitted earlier foundational studies on authenticity and cultural commodification. Nevertheless, the systematic procedures, multi-database strategy, and independent screening process provide a robust methodological foundation for the analytical synthesis presented in this study.

RESULTS

Results Research Trends

The distribution of 58 reviewed publications between 2020 and 2026 demonstrates fluctuating yet progressively consolidating scholarly attention to Nias heritage, language preservation, and sustainable heritage marketing. Publication output peaked in 2021 with 13 studies, followed by 2020 with 10 publications, indicating early intensification of academic interest. A temporary decline occurred in 2022–2023, with only five and four studies respectively, before a moderate recovery emerged in 2024 with six publications. Projections for 2025 indicate a significant increase to 14 studies, reflecting renewed scholarly momentum and increasing recognition of cultural sustainability and community resilience as major research domains.

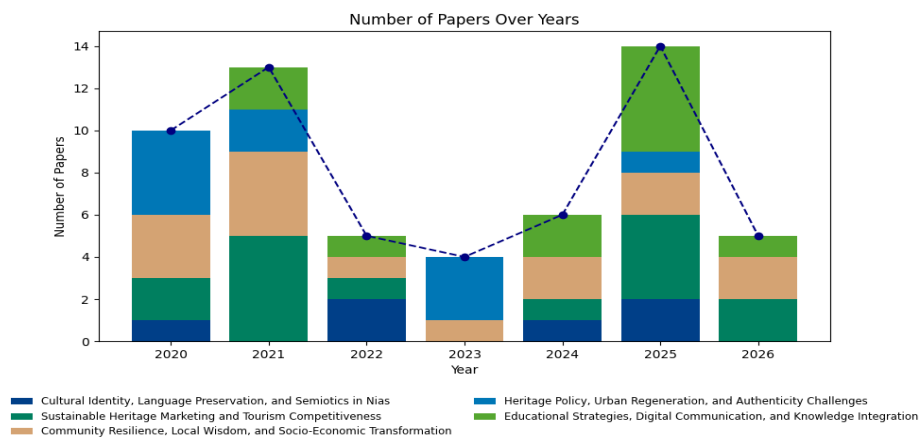


Figure 2. Research trends in the domain of Preserving Nias Language and Cultural Identity through Sustainable Heritage Marketing: Exploring Cultural Sustainability and Community Resilience

Avoid Thematic disaggregation reveals differentiated disciplinary trajectories. “Community Resilience, Local Wisdom, and Socio-Economic Transformation” maintained the most stable publication pattern across the review period, reflecting sustained concern with tourism-driven development, equitable participation, and adaptive capacity. By contrast, “Heritage Policy, Urban Regeneration, and Authenticity Challenges” was concentrated in earlier years, especially 2020, before declining toward more applied and community-oriented research. “Educational Strategies, Digital Communication, and Knowledge Integration” demonstrated the strongest recent growth, increasing from one publication in 2022 to five studies in 2025, indicating the growing relevance of digital media and formal education in sustaining linguistic continuity

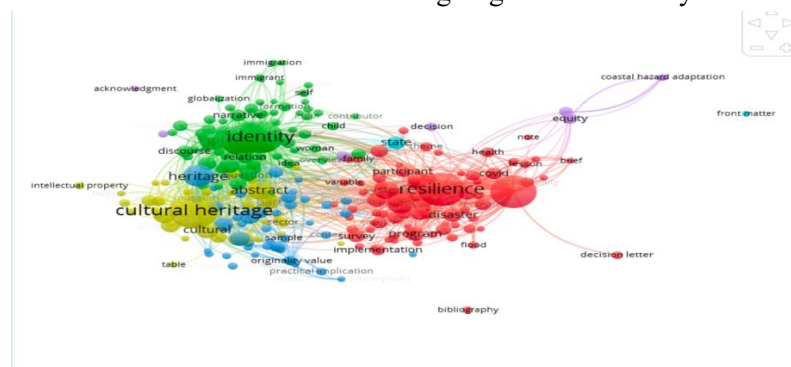
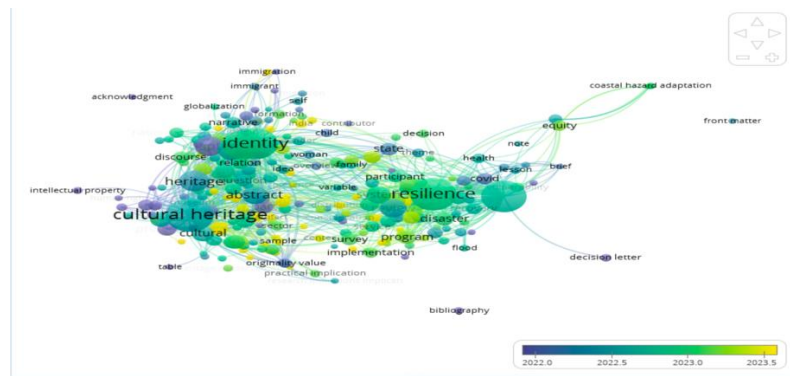


Figure 3. Network visualization of thematic clusters in sustainable heritage marketing and Nias cultural sustainability research.

Collectively, these patterns indicate a transition from fragmented disciplinary inquiry toward a more integrated and interdisciplinary research agenda. Sustainable heritage marketing studies clustered strongly around 2021 and 2025, likely linked to tourism recovery initiatives and destination-branding strategies, whereas foundational linguistic and semiotic studies remained comparatively limited.

Integrated Findings Across Thematic Dimensions

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that language, semiotic systems, local wisdom, tourism governance, educational innovation, and community resilience are deeply interconnected dimensions of cultural sustainability. Semiotic analyses of omo hada architecture revealed cosmological symbolism embedded within spatial arrangements, roof hierarchies, and ceremonial functions, indicating that material culture serves as a repository of social identity and worldview [10]. Similarly, the greeting Ya’ahowu extends beyond a linguistic salutation to convey blessing, social recognition, and spiritual values [11]. These findings suggest that heritage marketing strategies emphasizing only visual attraction risk reducing culturally meaningful symbols into commodified spectacle.



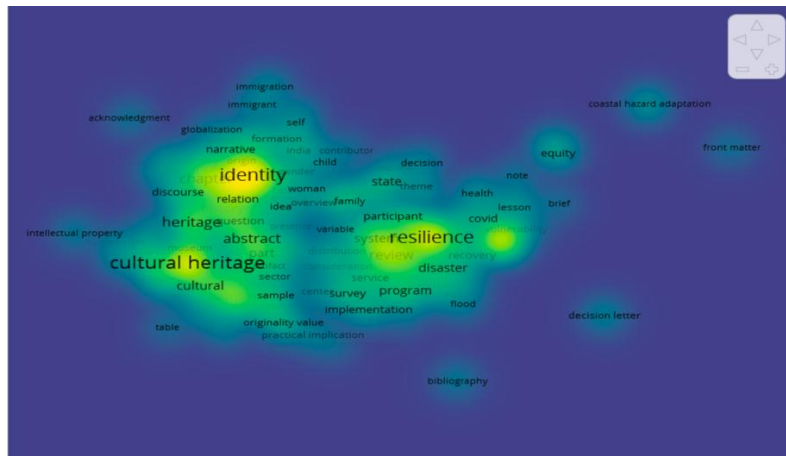


Figure 5. Density visualization of dominant conceptual concentrations within the reviewed literature

Table 1. Integrated Taxonomy of Findings on Sustainable Heritage Marketing, Cultural Sustainability, and Community Resilience in Nias

Thematic Dimension		Key Sub-Dimensions	Principal Findings / Analytical Focus	Representative Sources
Cultural Language Semiotics	Identity, &	Linguistic preservation;	<i>Ya'ahowu</i> as identity marker;	[11] [10]; [12]; [14]; [13]
		architectural semiotics; identity negotiation	<i>omo hada</i> symbolism; globalization pressures; hybrid digital identities; bilingual cultural narration	
Sustainable Marketing & Competitiveness	Heritage Tourism	Branding; certification; knowledge-based tourism; visitor attachment	Authenticity strengthens competitiveness; certification preserves cultural value; participatory tourism enhances revisit intention and satisfaction	[15]; [16]; [31]; Lin (2024); [19]
Community Resilience & Local Wisdom	Local Wisdom	Traditional knowledge; ritual adaptation; food heritage; economic pluralism	Local wisdom operates adaptively; rituals sustain cohesion; tourism may revitalize villages but also risk commodification	[21]; [22]; [23]; (Antonio Lauria, 2022); [32]
Heritage Policy & Authenticity Challenges	Authenticity	Governance; gentrification; regeneration; authenticity politics	Neoliberal heritage policies may marginalize communities; authenticity is negotiated and dynamic rather than fixed	[26]; [27]; Soccali & Cinà (2020); [33]
Educational Strategies & Digital Communication	Digital Communication	CRT–TPACK integration; gamification; linguistic landscape; knowledge governance	Technology-enhanced learning supports language revitalization; public language visibility strengthens linguistic legitimacy	[28]; [34]; [30]; [35]

The integrated evidence demonstrates that sustainable heritage marketing in Nias depends on maintaining community authority over cultural narratives, preserving linguistic and semiotic depth, and embedding tourism development within local social structures and knowledge systems. Effective preservation, therefore requires a multidimensional strategy combining participatory governance, culturally responsive education, adaptive local wisdom, and digitally supported language revitalization.

DISCUSSION

The synthesis across the five thematic dimensions demonstrates that preserving the Nias language and cultural identity through sustainable heritage marketing requires a fundamentally community-centered and resilience-oriented approach rather than a purely economic or promotional strategy. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that linguistic vitality, semiotic meaning, local wisdom, policy governance, and educational innovation are deeply interconnected dimensions of cultural sustainability. Consequently, language preservation should not be treated as a peripheral objective of tourism development but as the primary medium through which authentic cultural experiences are constructed, communicated, and sustained.

A dominant pattern across the literature is the decisive role of community participation. Studies on cultural identity, tourism governance, community resilience, heritage policy, and education consistently show that externally imposed initiatives often prioritize tourism growth and commercialization at the expense of cultural integrity, leading to commodification and weakened intergenerational transmission [10]; [11]; [26]; [28]. Conversely, community-controlled heritage initiatives create mutually reinforcing relationships between cultural pride, linguistic continuity, and local economic benefit. This finding supports the argument that sustainable heritage marketing is most effective when communities retain authority over cultural narratives, tourism management, and benefit distribution.

The review also reveals persistent tensions between global tourism appeal and local authenticity. Research on self-orientalism, UNESCO authentication politics, and English-language tourism promotion illustrates how global marketing frequently simplifies cultural meaning for external audiences [36]; [27]. However, the evidence suggests that authenticity should be understood as a negotiated and adaptive process rather than a fixed historical condition. Approaches such as bilingual narration, community-led storytelling, and preservation of semiotic depth offer mechanisms for balancing international visibility with cultural integrity.

Another significant finding concerns the adaptive nature of local wisdom. Studies on batik, pottery, and ritual traditions demonstrate that indigenous knowledge systems remain viable because communities continuously reinterpret them in response to social change [21]; [22]; [23]. This challenges preservation models that attempt to freeze culture in static forms and instead supports an “innovation within tradition” perspective, where heritage evolves while maintaining its symbolic core.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to heritage tourism scholarship by challenging the conventional assumption that economic development and cultural preservation exist in inevitable tension. The evidence instead supports a resilience-oriented heritage marketing framework in which linguistic preservation strengthens destination authenticity, community cohesion, and sustainable competitiveness simultaneously. Within this framework, Li Niha functions not merely as a cultural artifact but as the central mechanism through which identity, memory, and heritage value are reproduced.

Practically, the review highlights the need for participatory heritage governance, certification systems for authentic cultural products, bilingual marketing strategies, and culturally responsive educational programs integrating digital innovation. The integration of CRT and TPACK frameworks [28], creative learning models [37], and gamified digital tools [29] demonstrates the growing importance of educational and technological interventions for strengthening language transmission among younger generations.

Several limitations must nevertheless be acknowledged. The review relied exclusively on English-language publications, potentially excluding Indonesian and Li Niha perspectives, community documents, and grey literature. The 2020–2025 temporal focus may also have omitted foundational theoretical studies on commodification and language endangerment. Furthermore, keyword-based database searches and the absence of formal quality appraisal tools may have introduced selection and methodological bias. The interpretive nature of thematic synthesis likewise leaves room for subjective categorization and emphasis.

Future research should therefore prioritize empirical and longitudinal studies examining the direct relationship between heritage marketing and language vitality within Nias communities. Additional investigation is needed regarding digital revitalization tools, higher education programs, intellectual property governance for cultural products, and comparative indigenous heritage models. Long-term studies assessing

socio-economic impacts, equity, and inclusion are also necessary to determine whether sustainable heritage marketing can genuinely balance cultural continuity with tourism-driven development.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review demonstrates that sustainable heritage marketing can function as a strategic mechanism for preserving the Nias language and cultural identity while strengthening community resilience. Across the five thematic dimensions, the findings consistently show that linguistic vitality is inseparable from cultural sustainability and must therefore be embedded within heritage policy, tourism development, educational initiatives, and digital communication. Community-led and semiotically sensitive marketing approaches were found to enhance cultural authenticity, reinforce intergenerational language transmission, and support sustainable socio-economic development, whereas externally driven commercialization risks accelerating cultural commodification and linguistic erosion.

The study contributes theoretically by advancing a resilience-oriented framework that positions language as the central medium through which cultural identity, collective memory, and heritage values are constructed and transmitted. This framework extends sustainable heritage marketing beyond economic branding toward a more holistic understanding of cultural sustainability. Practically, the review highlights the importance of participatory governance, bilingual marketing narratives prioritizing Li Niha, culturally responsive education, and the strategic use of digital technologies to support heritage preservation.

Nevertheless, the review is limited by its reliance on secondary literature and the uneven availability of empirical studies specifically focused on Nias. Future research should therefore prioritize longitudinal and community-based investigations examining the direct impact of heritage marketing on language transmission, digital revitalization initiatives, intellectual property governance, and comparative indigenous heritage contexts. Such research is essential for translating the conceptual insights of this review into actionable strategies that sustain Li Niha as a living cultural foundation amid ongoing globalization and tourism transformation.

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