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Representation of Cultural Identity in the Toponymy of Mandailing Restaurants in North Sumatra: A Semiotic Analysis

Abdul Gapur[1], Muhammad Yusuf [*2], Min Adlina[3], & Taulia[4]
[1,2,4]*Faculty of Language and Communication, Universitas Harapan Medan, Medan, Indonesia*
[3]*Universitas Tjut Nyak Dhien, Medan, Indonesia*

[*]Corresponding Author: muhammadyusuf@unhar.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The naming of commercial spaces, particularly traditional restaurants, serves not merely as a means of establishing business identity but also as a cultural showcase for heritage preservation. This study investigates the representation of Mandailing ethnic cultural identity through the toponymy of restaurants in North Sumatra, responding to the widespread use of generic labels that may generate ambiguity in gastronomic tourism information. Employing a descriptive qualitative design grounded in Roland Barthes' cultural semiotic approach, visual-textual data from restaurant signboards were systematically collected throughout July 2026. The data were then subjected to interactive analysis to unpack their denotative and connotative meanings. The findings reveal two dominant patterns in naming strategies: the use of geographical indicators referring to places of origin, such as Sipirok and Madina, and the affirmation of kinship systems through the inclusion of clan names (marga), such as Nasution. From a semiotic perspective, cultural lexicons such as Dalian Na Tolu and Sopo Saba extend beyond their literal meanings, functioning as cultural signifiers that evoke collective agrarian memories and sustain the philosophy of social harmony within Mandailing society. The study concludes that the explicit articulation of these toponyms serves a dual function: as a marker of the authenticity of ancestral heritage and as an inclusive spatial communication strategy within a heterogeneous urban landscape. Greater transparency in the naming of culinary spaces is therefore essential for reducing tourists' informational confusion and merits integration as a strategic pillar in the formulation of a sustainable culinary tourism roadmap.

Keywords: *Toponymy, Cultural Identity, Mandailing Restaurant, Semiotics, Culinary Tourism*

1. Introduction

North Sumatra is recognized as a province characterized by remarkable ethnic diversity and a rich cultural mosaic, in which local culinary traditions of various ethnic groups have emerged as one of the pillars of regional tourism appeal, including those of the Mandailing people. The existence of cultural sites and public tourism spaces plays a crucial role in introducing and communicating the identity of a particular region (Naibaho & Sinulingga, 2022). This is consistent with the view that sustainable tourism development requires the strengthening of destination identity so that destinations can offer compelling narratives to visitors (Lase, Eraku, & Pambudi, 2026). In the context of gastronomic tourism, traditional restaurants serve not merely a commercial function as places to stop for meals but have also evolved into spaces for cultural preservation. Furthermore, the naming or toponymy of such tourism spaces is imbued with local wisdom that connects people with the philosophical understanding of their environment (Septiani & Fateah, 2025). Accordingly, restaurants specializing in Mandailing ethnic cuisine also assume the responsibility of functioning as both custodians and living showcases of Mandailing cultural identity.

As cultural spaces, restaurant naming practices are closely associated with the study of toponymy, a field that examines the meanings, origins, and histories underlying place names. Toponymy is fundamentally more than a mere marker of physical geography; it functions as a linguistic artifact that preserves collective narratives, traces of civilization, and local identities transmitted from one generation to another (Arfah et al.,

2026). The naming of a place constitutes a form of historical actualization and reflects profound collective memory, through which the social and spiritual values of a community are materially inscribed (Maulana, 2025). Among the Batak ethnic groups, including the Mandailing, toponymy often serves as a means of transmitting historical values, kinship systems, and forms of reverence for ancestors (Hadiati Maswah et al., 2026). More broadly, the preservation of culturally based place names is crucial for maintaining local identities that are increasingly threatened by intensive development and the forces of globalization (Setiyadi, Sobarna, & Lyra, 2025).

Amid the rapid growth of culinary tourism, a paradoxical phenomenon and problem has emerged concerning the naming practices of ethnic restaurants, particularly Mandailing restaurants. Although such establishments play a central role in cultural literacy, contemporary commercial naming practices sometimes overlook the depth of cultural meanings and tend to employ generic labels with limited philosophical significance (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2025). The use of generic names frequently obscures information concerning the distinctive spices, culinary philosophies, and specific cultural identity of the Mandailing ethnic group. Consequently, rather than functioning as spaces for cultural education, overly general names may generate informational ambiguity that constrains tourists' understanding of local food culture. In this regard, the integration of narrative and informative toponymy is highly relevant to enriching tourists' learning experiences while simultaneously strengthening the attractiveness of tourism destinations (Baruadi et al., 2026).

To address this information gap and the degradation of cultural identity, a cultural toponymic approach is considered essential. Restaurant toponyms should not be regarded merely as business labels but as open texts containing linguistic codes, social values, and historical narratives of the communities that produce them. Place names consistently represent the worldview of surrounding communities while incorporating social dimensions and representations of the natural environment in literal and symbolic forms (Tambunan et al., 2025). In other words, the name of an ethnic restaurant may embody profound philosophical values rooted in kinship systems, spatial memories of places of origin, and the agrarian practices and traditions of the community. Examining such names has the potential to uncover sociocultural dynamics and traditional values reflected in the linguistic structures employed by their users (Fajria & Arimi, 2024).

To unravel the complexity of meanings embedded in these toponyms, a semiotic approach, particularly the model developed by Roland Barthes, provides a highly relevant analytical framework. Barthesian cultural semiotics enables researchers to examine the meanings embedded in toponyms through the levels of denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (cultural meaning) (Afifi et al., 2025). For instance, the use of local vocabulary in place names not only reflects the physical characteristics of a particular area but may also carry profound associations with legends, mythology, and value systems embraced by the communities that use them (Latifatussolehah et al., 2025). Through a semiotic lens, the names of Mandailing restaurants derived from clan names (*marga*) or geographical names can be deconstructed to reveal layers of philosophical meaning that may no longer be fully recognized by contemporary urban communities.

Furthermore, the clarity of toponyms used for traditional restaurants is closely related to spatial communication strategies in the modern tourism industry. Historically, gastronomic toponymy, as exemplified by the traces of spice routes, has played a role in documenting cross-cultural interactions and commodities that constitute the distinctive products of particular communities (Wardah & Malihatunnajiah, 2022). In the context of Mandailing restaurants in North Sumatra, clear and representative names play a vital role in mitigating informational uncertainty, including uncertainty regarding the halal or non-halal status of the dishes served. Place names constructed around social dimensions and cultural aspirations can facilitate inclusive communication by bridging differences in understanding between local restaurant operators and visiting tourists (Rahmah et al., 2026).

Based on the foregoing phenomenon and the urgency of the proposed approach, this study aims primarily to explore in depth the representation of Mandailing cultural identity through the medium of restaurant names. Specifically, the study seeks to identify naming patterns, elucidate the semiotic meanings underlying the toponyms of traditional Mandailing restaurants, and evaluate their effectiveness as a communication strategy for preserving cultural identity. This comprehensive investigation is expected not only to contribute theoretically to the fields of ethnolinguistics and toponymy but also to provide a conceptual foundation for stakeholders in developing a more educational, safe, and inclusive culinary tourism roadmap for North Sumatra.

2. Methods

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design with an exploratory-analytical orientation. This methodological choice was deliberately made to accommodate the need to explore, unpack, and interpret the depth of meaning underlying the naming of public spaces, rather than merely calculating their frequency

statistically. To examine these layers of meaning, Roland Barthes' semiotic framework is employed as the primary analytical lens. The Barthesian approach was selected because of its capacity to analyze linguistic sign systems at multiple levels, ranging from literal meaning or denotation to the philosophical foundations, memories, and ethnic ideologies embedded at the level of connotation (Afifi et al., 2025; Aritonang et al., 2026). From this perspective, a restaurant name is not treated as a static sequence of alphabetic characters but as a living cultural text that continually interacts and negotiates with the social context of the surrounding community.

The primary corpus of this study consists of qualitative visual-textual data in the form of toponyms or naming practices associated with traditional restaurants that specifically serve Mandailing cuisine. Field data collection was conducted intensively throughout July 2026, covering urban and peri-urban landscapes across North Sumatra, with particular attention to culinary centers and tourist mobility routes. The investigation focused on restaurants that explicitly or implicitly displayed their ethnic identity through signboards, building-front banners, and supporting attributes such as menus. The data collection period was considered particularly suitable because it coincided with increased tourist mobility during the middle of the year, allowing the researcher to observe how these names "communicate" amid the movement of heterogeneous visitors.

To collect primary field data, the researcher employed visual documentation accompanied by direct observation (Gapur et al., 2024; Pujiono, Br. Barus, et al., 2025; Pujiono, Gapur, et al., 2025). Restaurant signboards, typographic choices, and accompanying elements such as slogans were photographed to obtain authentic physical evidence. To validate the historical motivations underlying the selection of particular names and to avoid a single-interpretation bias, observations were complemented by informal interviews. These conversations were conducted with restaurant founders, successors, and managers. Such source triangulation is essential in ethnolinguistic toponymy research because it ensures that interpretations of historical and cultural meanings are grounded in the collective memories of the communities associated with the names rather than being based solely on the researcher's assumptions.

Once all visual data and field notes had been collected, the subsequent stage involved systematically processing the findings according to the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The first phase consisted of data condensation, in which the researcher sorted, focused, and reduced restaurant names that were merely repetitive or did not substantially convey Mandailing identity. The filtered data were then organized through the data display phase. At this stage, the names were arranged in a sign-analysis matrix and classified according to their patterns, such as geographical indicators and kinship systems, before being examined in terms of their denotative and connotative meanings. At the final stage of the cycle, conclusions were drawn inductively to formulate broader patterns concerning identity-preservation strategies and models of communication within Mandailing culinary spaces in North Sumatra.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings presented in this section reveal how Mandailing cultural identity is articulated through the naming practices of traditional restaurants in North Sumatra. The analysis focuses not only on the linguistic forms of the names but also on the cultural, spatial, and symbolic meanings embedded within them. The first subsection examines geographical naming patterns and the spatial memories they evoke, providing a foundation for understanding how culinary spaces function as sites of cultural identity negotiation.

3.1 Geographically Based Naming Patterns and Spatial Memory

The investigation of data collected throughout July 2026 across various parts of North Sumatra's culinary landscape revealed a strong pattern of place-based naming. Most restaurants that foreground Mandailing identity and its surrounding regions demonstrate a pronounced tendency to employ toponyms referring to places of origin. This finding confirms that geographical names function not merely as markers of physical location or spatial orientation. More significantly, geographically based naming has evolved into a spatial communication strategy employed by restaurant managers to assert cultural roots, project culinary authenticity, and evoke visitors' collective memories, particularly among members of the diaspora who long for their homeland.

Table 1. Representation of Geographically Based Toponymy and Spatial Memory in Mandailing Restaurants

No.	Restaurant Name	Analysis of Naming Meaning (Toponymy)	Restaurant Location (Urban Space)
1	RM. Madina / Pesisir Khas Mandailing Tapanuli Selatan	Uses the regional acronym (Mandailing Natal) and an administrative identity (South Tapanuli) to reinforce its geographical origin.	Jl. Amir Hamzah, Medan

2	RM. Sipirok	Adopts the name of a subdistrict in South Tapanuli in its entirety to evoke spatial memories of the place of origin.	Jl. Sunggal No. 14, Medan
3	RM. Sipirok Buk Ros	Combines geographical identity (Sipirok) with the personal authority or identity of the owner (Buk Ros).	Jl. Yos Sudarso, Mabar–Medan Deli
4	RM. Khas Sipirok	Emphasizes the authenticity of recipes and flavors specifically associated with the Sipirok region.	Jl. Sei Kapuas No. 10, Medan Baru
5	RM. Mandailing Sorik Marapi	Combines ethnic identity (Mandailing) with a topographical or landscape entity (Mount Sorik Marapi).	Jl. Veteran Ps. 7, Tj. Mulia, Medan
6	RM. Jenggala	Utilizes a street toponym or micro-spatial marker associated with the location where the restaurant operates.	—

The use of regional names as primary identity markers is particularly evident in the prominence of the toponym **"Sipirok,"** a locality in South Tapanuli known for its distinctive culinary heritage. The presence of names such as **"RM. Sipirok"** on Jl. Sunggal No. 14, Medan**; "RM. Sipirok Buk Ros"** in the Mabar–Medan Deli area; and **"RM. Khas Sipirok"** on Jl. Sei Kapuas, Medan Baru, indicates the strong semiotic appeal of this toponym. In these names, the term "Sipirok" does not refer to the physical location of the restaurants, which are situated in Medan, but instead establishes a geographical reference to the place of origin associated with the cuisine. This phenomenon creates an imaginary bridge between the urban space in which the restaurants operate and the distant cultural space of South Tapanuli.



Figure 1. The Use of the Regional Name "Sipirok" as a Restaurant Name

In addition to "Sipirok," this geographical naming strategy extends to the use of regency names and other administrative or territorial entities. One prominent example is **"RM. Madina/Pesisir Khas Mandailing Tapanuli Selatan,"** located on Jl. Amir Hamzah, Medan. The simultaneous use of the acronym **"Madina"** (Mandailing Natal) and **"Tapanuli Selatan"** (South Tapanuli) constitutes a dual affirmation of the spatial and cultural identities being projected. A similar pattern can be observed in **"RM. Mandailing Sorik Marapi"** in Tanjung Mulia, Medan, where "Sorik Marapi" refers to the iconic volcano in the Mandailing Natal region. The invocation of this topographical entity reinforces the notion that collective memories of the homeland are continuously reproduced within commercial spaces established in migrant or diasporic urban settings.

Fundamentally, this naming practice represents an attempt to re-present spaces of the past and places of origin within contemporary urban realities. For restaurant managers, geographical toponyms function as markers of the authenticity of the traditional spices and recipes being served. For consumers, meanwhile, names such as **Sipirok** and **Madina** operate as semiotic codes that evoke a romantic longing for the homeland. The complete data on the various restaurant naming practices, which also demonstrate intersections between geographical elements, kinship relations, and other ethnic identities.

3.2 Naming Patterns Based on Kinship Systems and Personal Identity

The traditional culinary sphere often serves as a stage for asserting the existence and identity of individuals and kinship groups. In the context of Mandailing society, the inclusion of a *marga* (clan name) or personal name in a restaurant name is not merely a marker of ownership or property. Rather, this practice functions as a semiotic instrument for asserting cultural authority while simultaneously establishing the authenticity of the recipes being served. Given that the ethnic social structure in North Sumatra is strongly rooted in lineage, attaching clan identity to a culinary business entity can be understood as a form of social quality assurance. The family name functions as a seal of authenticity, signaling that the dishes represent ancestral culinary traditions and remain faithful to their original conventions.



Figure 2. Restaurant Naming Using Clan Names (***Marga***)

This phenomenon is clearly reflected in the use of prestigious clan names in several commercial brands. In the cases of **"Ikan Bakar Khas RM. Boru Nasution"** and **"RM. Mandailing Dita Nasution,"** the inclusion of the *marga* highlights an individual from the respective lineage as the legitimate custodian of traditional culinary knowledge. More interestingly, the affirmation of personal identity is often integrated with a sense of communal solidarity, as observed in **"RM. Mandailing Iyan Sahuta."** The term *sahuta* in the local language means "from the same village" or "one village." Consequently, the name does not merely promote the owner ("Iyan") but also constructs a collective emotional bond among visitors who perceive a shared geographical or ancestral origin. Names incorporating dimensions of kinship therefore perform a dual function: they serve as commercial identities while simultaneously extending an invitation to solidarity and fraternity among members of the diaspora in urban landscapes.

To provide a more concrete illustration of naming patterns based on kinship and personal identity, the following table presents a classification of data derived from the field findings.

Table 2. Representation of Toponymy Based on Kinship Systems and Personal Identity

No.	Restaurant Name	Analysis of Naming Meaning (Kinship Semiotics)	Restaurant Location
1	Ikan Bakar Khas RM. Boru Nasution	The lexeme *Boru* ("daughter" or "female descendant"), combined with the clan name *Nasution*, foregrounds a female descendant of the clan as the custodian of the family's authentic culinary recipes.	Jl. Lintas Sibuhuan
2	RM. Mandailing Dita Nasution	Combines ethnic identity (Mandailing) with the owner's personal identity (Dita) and the reinforcing clan name (Nasution) to establish cultural authority.	Jl. Letda Sujono, Tembung, Medan
3	RM. Mandailing Iyan Sahuta	Combines the owner's name (Iyan) with the spatial-kinship term *sahuta* ("from the same village" or "one village"), creating a sense of affection and solidarity among people sharing the same place of origin.	— *(Recorded in the data corpus)*
4	Holat Lena Nst	The abbreviated clan name *Nst* (Nasution) is placed after the personal name (Lena), representing individual ownership and cultural authority over the traditional dish *Holat*.	Jl. Besar Padangri Simatahari, Labusel
5	RM. Arsik Bu Hajjah	Employs a personal socio-religious status (*Hajjah*) as an attraction, combined with the identity of the traditional culinary dish (*Arsik*).	—

3.3 Semiotic Analysis: Unpacking Denotative and Philosophical Connotations

Drawing on the structural semiotic perspective developed by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1977), a name or linguistic sign never remains confined to its dictionary meaning. Barthes proposes a two-level system of signification: denotation, which refers to the literal or objective level of meaning, and connotation, which extends into the domains of myth, history, and cultural ideology. In the context of Mandailing restaurant toponymy, the sequence of words displayed on restaurant signboards is transformed into a highly dynamic cultural text. The selected lexical items serve to translate systems of values, worldviews, and local wisdom into commercial spaces. Accordingly, examining these names requires moving beyond the boundaries of purely linguistic analysis and engaging with the cultural philosophies deeply rooted behind them.

At the level of the social system, the use of the name **"*Rumah Makan Dalian Na Tolu*"** presents a particularly profound layer of meaning imbued with local wisdom. Denotatively, the phrase literally means

"the three-legged hearth," referring to a traditional cooking hearth constructed from three stones that support a cooking pot. At the connotative level, however, this lexicon represents a material embodiment of the fundamental philosophy underlying the kinship system of Mandailing society. The three supporting stones symbolize three pillars of balanced social relations: *Mora* (the family or group that gives a daughter in marriage and is accorded respect), *Kahanggi* (same-clan relatives who occupy an equal social position), and *Anak Boru* (the family or group that receives a daughter in marriage and assumes service-related responsibilities). By incorporating this concept into the name of the business, the restaurant owner projects an ideal of communal harmony while simultaneously emphasizing the restaurant as a meeting point for various kinship networks.

A shift in spatial and emotional signification becomes particularly apparent in culturally oriented place names, such as **"*Rumah Makan Sopo Saba*."** At the first level of signification, or denotation, *sopo saba* literally refers to a hut or shelter commonly built in the middle of a rice field. Its connotative significance, however, operates in a far more complex manner in the minds of visitors, particularly members of the diaspora. The name effectively evokes the collective memory of an agrarian society, recalling communal rituals associated with harvest activities as well as the tranquility of traditional rural landscapes. Amid the bustle of the contemporary urban landscape, this toponym functions as a psychological oasis that promises a sense of domestic comfort reminiscent of the homeland.

More specifically, within the domain of ethnic gastronomy, local culinary entities frequently become instruments for asserting regional and cultural boundaries. The case of **"*Holat Lena Nst*"** demonstrates how a culinary dish can be transformed into a marker of cultural-geopolitical identity.



Figure 3. Traditional Restaurant Named After the Dish "Holat"

Denotatively, *holat* specifically refers to a dish characterized by an astringent broth made from shavings of *balakka* tree bark (Mawaddah et al., 2025, 2026), combined with the personal name of its owner, Lena Nasution. Connotatively, the presence of the term *holat* in the public sphere challenges the homogenization of generic North Sumatran culinary menus while simultaneously proclaiming the distinctive identity of South Tapanuli cuisine in relation to other regional culinary traditions. These three findings reinforce the premise that linguistic signs embedded in restaurant toponymy are not passive labels but rather constitute arenas in which local knowledge, cultural values, and collective identities are continuously reproduced and sustained.

Table 3. Semiotic Deconstruction (Denotation and Connotation) of Mandailing Restaurant Toponyms

Linguistic Sign (Toponym)	Thematic Classification	Literal Meaning (Denotation)	Philosophical/Cultural Meaning (Connotation)
Rumah Makan Dalian Na Tolu	Social System & Kinship	A cooking hearth supported by three stones.	Symbolizes the three pillars of balanced social relations in Mandailing society (*Mora, Kahanggi*, and *Anak Boru*), representing harmony and equality in communal interaction.
Rumah Makan Sopo Saba	Cultural Space & Ecology	A hut or wooden shelter constructed in a rice-field area.	Evokes nostalgia and collective memory of agrarian civilizational roots, representing tranquility, simplicity, and communal togetherness.

Holat Lena Nst	Ethnic Gastronomy & Cultural Boundaries	A dish with an astringent taste made from *balakka* tree extract and associated with a figure named Lena bearing the Nasution clan name.	Serves as a marker of distinctive South Tapanuli ethnic identity and reflects cultural resistance to the dominance of generic culinary menus in the urban landscape of North Sumatra.

3.4 Identity Negotiation and Inclusive Communication

The expansion of ethnic culinary spaces into urban centers such as Medan City—as exemplified by the growing presence of such establishments along Jl. Letda Sujono and Jl. Amir Hamzah—should not be understood merely as a phenomenon of market expansion. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, this development represents a tangible manifestation of identity negotiation undertaken by business actors within the heterogeneity of a metropolitan environment. Restaurant signboards that prominently display local vocabulary or regional expressions become a form of proactive communication strategy. Amid rows of predominantly modern commercial buildings, these cultural toponyms function as spatial markers that assert the presence and visibility of Mandailing culture. Through this linguistic medium, restaurant owners are not merely marketing food products but are also engaging in a form of cultural diplomacy with a diverse urban audience.

Beyond serving as a means of affirming cultural existence, the deliberate selection of names for these culinary spaces carries significant pragmatic implications for the regional tourism ecosystem. Explicit and transparent ethnic naming functions as a vital information filter, particularly by reducing ambiguity concerning the halal or non-halal status of the dishes served—an issue of considerable importance within a multicultural gastronomic tourism landscape. When local and international tourists encounter nomenclature that is both transparent and culturally meaningful, their cultural literacy can gradually be enhanced. Such clarity in spatial information, particularly when it is educational and inclusive in character, consequently provides an essential foundation for supporting the development of a welcoming, safe, and sustainable culinary tourism roadmap for North Sumatra.

3.5 Discussion: Comparison with Other Cultural Toponymic Landscapes

The findings concerning Mandailing restaurant naming patterns, particularly their emphasis on geographical entities and kinship systems, resonate with various toponymic studies conducted in other regions. In general, spatial identities are frequently constructed through collective memory and the physical characteristics of the surrounding environment. An anthropolinguistic study by Suriani, Ino, and Mustopa (2023) in Baito District, Southeast Sulawesi, revealed that the names of local areas are strongly influenced by environmental features, including aquatic and geomorphological characteristics, as well as local social dynamics. This evidence reinforces the premise that the use of regional names—such as Sipirok or Madina in Mandailing restaurants—is not merely coincidental but rather represents a broader human tendency to continually connect individual and collective existence with places of origin and spatial memory, even after migration to urban centers.

The relationship between naming practices, identity, and culinary spaces is also grounded in the historical trajectory of the Indonesian archipelago. Toponymic investigations frequently provide an entry point for tracing the development of gastronomic traditions in the past. Research by Wardah and Malihatunnajiah (2022) in Banten demonstrates that the tracing of toponyms can reveal ancient spice-trading routes that subsequently transmitted local wisdom through the development of gastronomic civilization. This finding closely parallels the reality of traditional restaurants in Medan City, where restaurant signboards function as cultural showcases that preserve ethnic culinary knowledge while simultaneously responding to the dominance of contemporary culinary practices.

From a broader tourism perspective, naming strategies embedded with cultural elements have been shown to be essential for constructing a sustainable destination ecosystem. Lase, Eraku, and Pambudi (2026) emphasize that toponymy rooted in collective memory and local identity constitutes a crucial conceptual pillar for supporting sustainable tourism development. Consistent with this perspective, the classification of place names according to the ethnic groups inhabiting a particular area is also commonly observed elsewhere, as documented by Juniarti, Nadra, and Darmawan (2022) in their study of residential toponymy in Sijunjung. The practice of incorporating *marga* or clan names into culinary spaces in North Sumatra operates according to a comparable logic: it does not merely promote culinary commodities but also actively introduces tourists to the social structures and kinship systems underlying the cultural identity of the community.

4. Conclusion

Based on the ethnolinguistic investigation and semiotic analysis presented above, it can be concluded that toponymic practices among Mandailing restaurants in North Sumatra extend far beyond the boundaries of commercial pragmatism. The signboards of culinary establishments function as powerful canvases for the representation of cultural identity. This study identifies two principal axes that dominate the naming patterns: the use of geographical indicators—such as Sipirok, Madina, and Sorik Marapi—and the affirmation of kinship systems through the inclusion of *marga* or clan names, such as Nasution. These two linguistic strategies function not merely as distinctive labels amid intense competition in the urban business environment but also as mechanisms for asserting cultural authority and guaranteeing the authenticity of the gastronomic heritage being offered.

From the perspective of cultural semiotics, the linguistic signs displayed in public spaces contain multilayered philosophical meanings. The use of metaphorically rich names such as **"*Dalian Na Tolu*"** and **"*Sopo Saba*"** provides empirical evidence that commercial establishments can be transformed into mediums for preserving traditional values. These lexicons operate beyond their literal or denotative meanings; they engage collective memory to sustain philosophies of harmonious social order, reinforce the spirit of kinship, and preserve the collective memory of the Mandailing agrarian community amid the pressures of urban modernization.

Practically, the richness of meaning embedded in these toponyms carries strategic implications for the regional tourism ecosystem. Clear naming practices that explicitly communicate ethnic identity provide tourists with authentic, reliable, and informative cues concerning the culinary offerings. Within a heterogeneous urban landscape, such explicitness also helps reduce ambiguity, particularly regarding the halal status and historical origins of particular dishes. Cultural transparency conveyed through language therefore not only enhances visitors' cultural literacy but should also be considered an essential conceptual pillar in formulating an **Inclusive Culinary Tourism Roadmap for North Sumatra**. Preserving the wisdom embedded in place names is, ultimately, a fundamental step toward sustaining cultural heritage and safeguarding the continuity of civilization.

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