A Multimodal-Cultural Analysis of Malaysia's Tourism E-Advertising

Ha Nguyen Thi Thanh*
Lecturer, Faculty of English, Thuongmai University, Hanoi, Vietnam
Email: nguyenthanhha87@tmu.edu.vn
*Corresponding Author

Received: 19/06/2025 *Revised: 19/08/2025* *Accepted: 23/08/2025*

Abstract

Multimodal-cultural analysis examines how multiple modes of communication, such as language and images, interact within specific cultural contexts to make meaning. This study examines how interpersonal meaning is constructed in Malaysian tourism advertisements through both verbal and visual modes, using a qualitative descriptive approach supported by selected quantitative elements. Drawing on SFG and VG's frameworks, the study also incorporates a high-context & low-context cultural framework to explore how communication style is culturally embedded. 30 English-language tourism advertisements were purposively selected for analysis. The findings reveal that verbal elements predominantly employ declarative mood and low-modality expressions, suggesting a neutral, informative and non-coercive tone. Visually, the frequent use of "offer" images, "medium-to-long" shots, and "oblique" or "eye-level" angles positions viewers as observers, inviting them to imagine personal experiences rather than prompting direct interaction. These choices reflect a high-context cultural orientation, where messages are conveyed subtly and symbolically, reinforcing harmony and indirectness. The study highlights how the interplay between verbal and visual strategies contributes to an effective promotional approach and offers insights into the role of culture in shaping tourism discourse. Implications are offered for multimodal analysis and intercultural marketing strategies in tourism communication.

Keywords: Cultural Context, Interpersonal Meaning, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar, Tourism Advertising

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and intensifying competition within the tourism industry, advertising has shifted from traditional formats, such as radio, television, newspapers and printed brochures to digital forms, including e-advertisements, e-brochures, and integrated campaigns on social media platforms. Recent studies highlight that digital marketing, particularly through social media and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), has become a powerful tool for destination branding and tourist engagement, with platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube significantly influencing travel decisions (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). This shift, driven by technological advancement and changing consumer behaviour, has positioned destination advertising as a strategic means for place branding, tourist attraction, and economic stimulation

Malaysia, one of Southeast Asia's leading tourist destinations with its long-standing "Malaysia Truly Asia" campaign, provides a valuable case for exploring how regional tourism discourse constructs interpersonal meaning through multimodal resources (Azizan, 2010). According to Focus Malaysia (2024), the tourism sector recorded 29 million international visitors in 2023, marking a strong post-pandemic recovery. These figures underscore the vital role of strategic tourism marketing, particularly advertising, in attracting global travellers.

Advertising is not merely an informative medium but a complex discursive practice where verbal and visual elements interact to generate meaning. Within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Halliday (1978) identifies the interpersonal metafunction as encoding the relationship between speaker and listener. Building on this framework, Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) extended the concept to visual communication through Systemic Functional Grammar-Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SFG-MDA), showing that images can establish imagined relationships with viewers through gaze, social distance, angle, and perspective.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), grounded in the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) tradition, has been applied extensively in education (Royce, 2007), and advertising (Cheong, 2004) to examine how semiotic resources construct meaning. In tourism contexts, however, applications of MDA remain comparatively limited. Notable contributions include more recent work such as Lang (2024) on Hangzhou's promotional videos on YouTube, Jabeen et al. (2022) on multimodal strategies in Saudi tourism promotion, and Wang (2023) on urban branding in Xi'an's promotional videos. Together, these studies highlight emerging interest in integrating visual and multimodal perspectives, yet the field still lacks comprehensive accounts of how these resources combine to construct relationships with audiences in tourism advertising. This gap has led to a partial understanding of how verbal and visual resources combine to construct relationships with viewers. Research applying the SFG-MDA framework to tourism advertising is particularly scarce in Southeast Asian contexts. Motivated by the growing role of tourism advertising in national branding and economic growth, and the rising influence of digital, multimodal communication, this study examines how language, visuals, and culture interact to shape persuasive messages in the context of Malaysia. This study examines the linguistic realization of interpersonal meaning in Malaysian tourism advertisements by analyzing mood structures (declarative, interrogative, imperative, and explanative) and modality values (high, median, low). It also investigates the visual construction of interactive meaning through contact (demand and offer), social distance (close, medium, long shots), and perspective (horizontal, vertical angles). Finally, it explores how these linguistic and visual features reflect culturally contextual communication preferences, with particular attention to the high-context style common in Southeast Asia.

These aims lead to the following research questions:

(1) How is interpersonal meaning realized linguistically in Malaysian tourism advertisements?

(2) How is interactive meaning constructed visually in Malaysian tourism advertisements?

(3) In what ways do linguistic and visual features reflect culturally contextual communication preferences?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Systematically Functional Grammar (SFG)

Halliday (1978) emphasizes that language is shaped by its role in social interaction and functions as a system of meaning potential, with meaning emerging from specific contexts. He later (1994) highlights that systemic functional grammar (SFG) is primarily functional rather than formal. Eggins (2004) adds that SFG views grammar as a network of choices for fulfilling communicative purposes, rather than a fixed set of rules. In Halliday's model, language operates through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

The interpersonal function refers to language's role in interacting with others, managing social relationships, influencing interlocutors' actions, conveying attitudes and judgments, and guiding responses. It is linked to the Tenor of discourse and realised through the systems of

Mood and Modality

"Mood" refers to the clause structure comprising two functional components: mood and residue (halliday, 2004). the mood element, comprising Subject, Finite, and Polarity realises interpersonal interaction by defining the clause's communicative role and contextual relevance. The residue, consisting of the Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct, provides the remaining semantic and structural content.

According to Halliday (1994), the interpersonal function of language encodes social roles and speaker attitudes through the exchange of either information (proposition) or goods and services (proposal), based on the roles of giving or demanding in communication. These speech roles are encoded through the mood structure, which consists of two main elements: Subject and Finite.

Mood structures constitute the grammatical basis for realising interpersonal meaning, encoding both speech roles and communicative intent. Declaratives (Subject + Finite) typically express statements, with the exclamative subtype conveying emphasis or emotion. Interrogatives comprise yes–no forms (Finite + Subject) for polar questions and WH-interrogatives for eliciting specific information. Imperatives, often without an explicit Subject, are used to issue commands or offers. Together, these four mood types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamative correspond to the core speech functions of statement, question, offer, and command (Halliday, 2004).

"Modality" constitutes a fundamental grammatical system through which interpersonal meaning is conveyed in discourse, reflecting the speaker's attitude toward the proposition expressed (Halliday 2004) with two primary types: Modalisation and Modulation.

Modalisation conveys the degree of probability or usuality associated with a proposition. It is typically realized through finite modal operators (e.g., must, may, might), Mood Adjuncts (e.g., certainly, probably, sometimes), or grammatical metaphors such as I think, I'm sure.

In contrast, Modulation conveys obligation or inclination, focusing on influencing the behavior of the addressee. It is often found in commands, suggestions, or advice, and is expressed through modals such as must, should, need to, want to, or imperative structures.

In terms of modality values, both modalization and modulation can be classified into three degrees based on the strength of the speaker's commitment or evaluation: high (must, ought to, need to, has to, is to), median (will, would, shall, should), low (may, might, can, could).

This study focuses on the interpersonal function of language, specifically examining how Mood structures (declarative, imperative, interrogative, exclamatory) and Modality values (high, median, low) contribute to meaning-making. By analysing the interaction between Mood and Modality through the systems of Modalisation and Modulation, the study aims to reveal how communicative roles and interpersonal relationships are constructed and maintained in discourse.

2.2 Visual Grammar (VG)

Kress & Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (1996, 2006), grounded in Halliday's systemic functional grammar framework (SFG), and extends the concept of grammar from written language to visual images. Within this framework, Halliday's three metafunctions of language including ideational, interpersonal, and textual are realized in visual communication through three metafunctional dimensions: representational, interactive, and compositional meanings.

Interactive meaning relates to the relationship between the image producer and the viewer, mediated through three key factors: contact, social distance, attitude and modality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Contact has 2 visual elements: Image act and Gaze.

Image act refers to how images affect viewers through the relationship between the viewer and the represented participant with two main types: **Demand** (a direct, interactive connection, requiring the viewer to respond emotionally or through action and **Offer** (no interactive connection; the viewer remains a passive observer, and the image serves to present information objectively).

Gaze determines the type of image act, comprising two forms: **Direct** (the participant looks directly at the viewer, creating a sense of interaction and inviting the viewer into an imaginary relationship) and **Indirect** (The participant looks elsewhere, avoiding connection; the viewer assumes the role of a detached, objective observer).

Social distance is conveyed through the size of the frame with the use of Close Shot (personal/intimate), Medium Shot (social), or Long Shot (impersonal) to suggest varying degrees of intimacy or detachment.

Close shot (personal/intimate): At an intimate distance, only the face or head of the other person is visible. At **close personal distance**, the field of view expands to include the head and shoulders. At a far personal distance, the viewer can see the person from the waist up.

Medium shot (social): At close social distance, the entire body of the other person is visible within the frame. At a far social distance, the whole body is seen along with the surrounding space.

Long shot (impersonal): Public distance allows for the observation of at least four to five people in full view at the same time.

Perspective in visual design refers to the positioning and angle from which the viewer is invited to observe the represented participants, playing a central role in shaping the communicative relationship between the image and its audience. According to Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), perspective can be expressed through two main dimensions: **horizontal angle** and **vertical angle**. In terms of **horizontal perspective**, a frontal angle creates a sense of **involvement**, making the viewer feel directly connected to the subject, while an oblique angle conveys **detachment,** placing the viewer as a more distant observer. Regarding **vertical perspective,** the angle indicates power relation, a high angle suggests viewer power, a low angle emphasises represented power, and an eye-level angle represents equality between the two sides. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006)

Modality reflects the extent to which visual images appear truthful or realistic in relation to the real world, based on elements such as (1) Colour (colour saturation/ colour differentiation/ colour modulation) (2) Contextualization (absence of background/full detail); (3) Representation (maximum abstraction/ maximum representation) (4) Depth (absence of depth/ maximally deep perspective) (5) Illumination (full representation of light and shade/ absence of light and shade) (6) Brightness.

This study examines interactive meaning in images through three key dimensions: **contact** (demand & offer), **social distance** (shot size), and **perspective** (horizontal & vertical angles). These elements reveal the viewer's relationship with the represented participant in terms of engagement, emotional proximity, and power dynamics.

2.3 Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA)

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) has been applied across a wide range of research fields, reflecting the increasingly multimodal nature of communication in contemporary society. In education, scholars such as Jewitt (2008) & Kress et al. (2001) have examined how classroom meaning-making involves gestures, diagrams, layout, and speech. In media and advertising, Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) developed a grammar of visual design to analyse how images work alongside language to convey meaning. In tourism

discourse, Thurlow & Jaworski (2010) and Hiippala (2012) demonstrated how verbal and visual strategies combine to construct persuasive and culturally embedded destination identities. Furthermore, MDA has been widely used in film/media analysis (Machin, 2007; O'Halloran, 2008), where multiple semiotic resources interact in complex ways. From these varied applications, MDA can be defined as a theoretical and analytical approach concerned with how meaning is jointly constructed through the integration of two or more semiotic modes. Emerging from SFL (Halliday, 1978), MDA views meaning as socially situated and realized through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) adapted these metafunctions to the visual mode, identifying key elements such as contact, social distance and perspective that shape viewer interaction and positioning. The present study adopts MDA as a central framework to explore interpersonal meaning in Malaysian tourism advertisements through both verbal and visual modes. By analysing mood structures and modality values, and contact, social distance, and perspective, this study investigates how multimodal strategies are employed to engage viewers and how they reflect culturally embedded communicative preferences.

2.4 Cultural Communication Styles

Hall & Hall (1990) introduced a communication-based framework distinguishing high- and low-context cultures, classifying groups by the extent to which they depend on contextual cues in communication.

In **high-context cultures**, meaning is often conveyed implicitly through non-verbal cues such as spatial arrangements, eye contact, gestures, and social relationships, rather than being explicitly verbalized (Hall & Hall, 1990). Communication tends to be emotionally expressive, flexible, and non-linear, and relies on deductive reasoning, inferring meaning from shared knowledge, moving from general to specific (Würtz, 2005). Conversely, **low-context cultures** emphasise directness and clarity in verbal communication, with meaning encoded explicitly in language. Messages in such cultures are typically structured, logical, and information-focused, favoring inductive reasoning (from specific to general). Here, the priority is placed on what is said, rather than how or by whom it is said (Peace, 2011). These distinctions underscore fundamental differences in how communication and meaning-making are culturally mediated. The study examines Malaysian tourism advertisements to identify high- or low-context cultural orientation, analysing visual and verbal elements such as implicitness, non-verbal cues, linguistic clarity, and reasoning style, thereby revealing how culturally informed strategies shape Malaysia's national image.

2.5 Tourism advertising vs tourism attractions

Tourism advertising combines principles of advertising and tourism to promote destinations and experiences, aiming not only to inform but also to evoke emotional engagement and shape culturally meaningful destination images (Belch & Belch, 2004; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010). Tourist attractions whether natural, cultural, or event-based are central to shaping travel motivations and destination image and can be seen as symbolic constructs tied to identity, memory, and cultural narratives (Edelheim, 2015). This study examines tourism advertisements for attractions, analysing how they construct meaning through verbal and visual modes.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 The Conceptual Framework of the Study

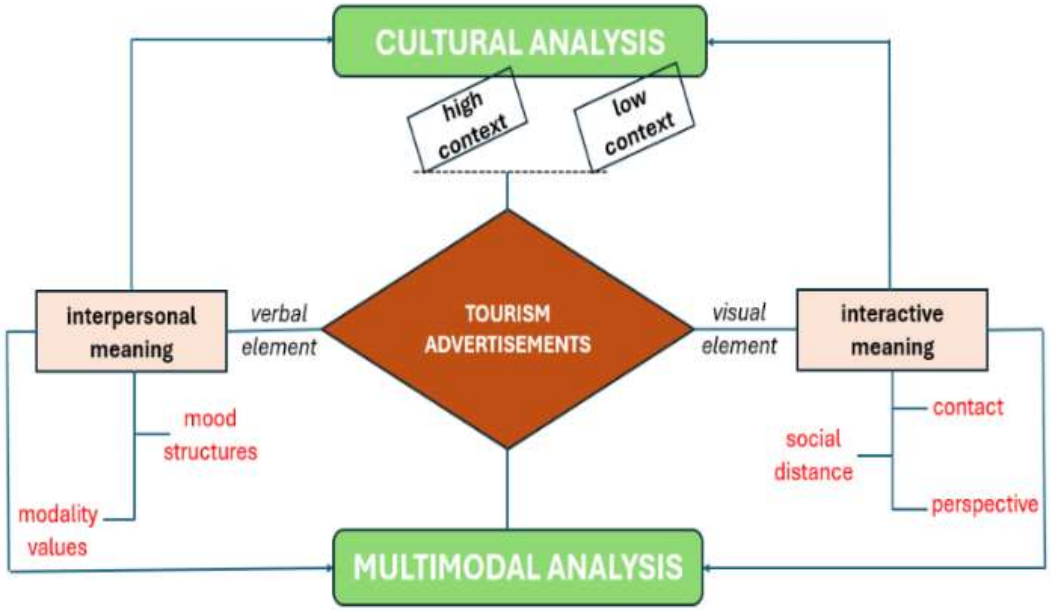


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

The study is grounded in two interrelated perspectives: cultural analysis and multimodal analysis, applied to Malaysian tourism advertisements. In cultural analysis, Hall & Hall's (1990) high-context/low-context framework explains how meaning is shaped by cultural communication styles. Multimodal analysis, informed by Halliday's (1978) SFG and Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2006) VG, examines how verbal and visual elements interact to create meaning. In the verbal mode, interpersonal meaning is realized through mood structures: declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamative (Eggins, 2004), and modality values (high, median, low) that position the audience. In the visual mode, interactive meaning is conveyed through contact (demand/offer), social distance (close, medium, long shots), and perspective (horizontal/vertical angles) (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Linking both perspectives, tourism advertising in high-context settings like Malaysia combines linguistic strategies and visual cues to create culturally resonant and persuasive messages.

3.2 Research Design

This study employs a primarily qualitative research design, supported by quantitative frequency counts. The approach is based on Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), aiming to explore how interpersonal meaning is constructed in tourism advertisements of Malaysia through both verbal and visual modes. Verbal elements are analysed in terms of mood structures and modality values, while visual ones through contact, social distance, and perspective, following Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006). To interpret cultural orientation, the study applies Hall and Hall (1990) framework of high-context and low-context communication, focusing on implicitness, non-verbal cues, and reasoning styles to uncover culturally embedded discourse strategies.

3.3 Data Collection

This study analyzed 30 English-language tourism advertisements from Malaysia, presented as static images and purposively selected from the eBrochures Malaysia Travel platform, an official channel of Tourism Malaysia, between January and May, 2025. All e-brochures published in 2024 were reviewed, and materials were screened using adapted criteria

from Cheong's (2004) multimodal analysis framework including complete and standalone pages, inclusion of both verbal and visual elements, and presence of clear interpersonal features (contact, social distance, attitude, mood structures, modality). The selection was validated by an independent tourism marketing expert unaffiliated with the Malaysian Tourism Office. Malaysia was chosen for its position as a leading Southeast Asian tourist destination, attracting about 29 million international visitors in 2023 (Focus Malaysia, 2024) and contributing 8.6% to GDP (WTTC, 2024). The dataset reflects both national identity and broader ASEAN tourism discourse, offering regionally relevant insights into interpersonal meaning-making and cultural representation.

3.4 Data analysis

In this study, 30 English-language tourism advertisements from Malaysia, each comprising one image and an accompanying text, were purposively selected and coded from Ad1 to Ad30. This coding ensures consistency in referencing throughout the analysis and supports a systematic examination of interpersonal meaning conveyed through both linguistic and visual elements. The texts were analysed for mood structures and modality values, while the images were examined across three dimensions of interactive meaning: contact, social distance, and perspective based on Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2006) framework.

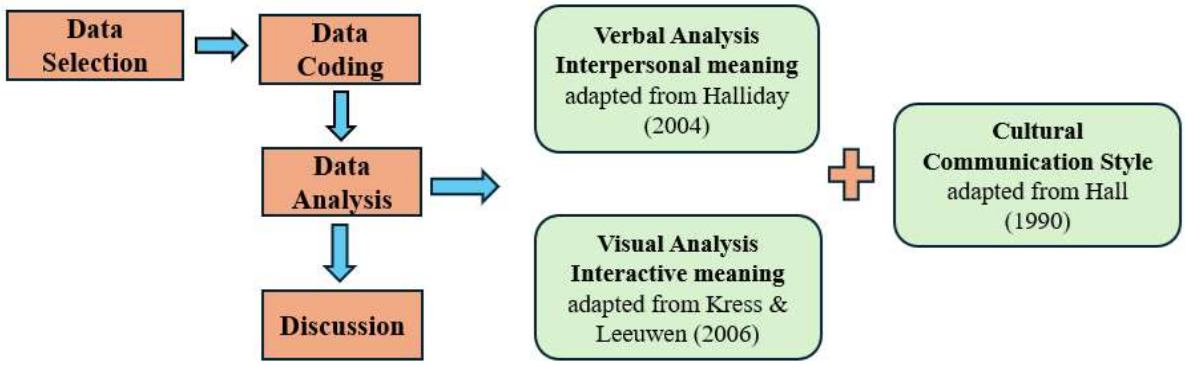


Figure 2. Research Procedures

4. Findings

This section illustrates the findings from the analysis of verbal and visual elements, along with cultural dimensions in Malaysia's tourism advertisements. Due to space constraints, only a selection of representative examples was discussed in detail.

4.1 Analysis of interpersonal meaning in verbal mode

Mood Structures

The analysis of mood structures in tourism advertisements focuses on four primary clause types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamative as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The results of Mood Structures

Mood Structures	Number	Percentage
Declarative	102	85.7%
Interrogative	-	0%
Imperative	17	14.3%
Exclamative	-	0%
Total	119	100%

Source: Author's analysis

The findings from Table 1 show that declarative clauses overwhelmingly dominate the dataset (94 instances, 84.3%), imperatives occur far less frequently (14.3%), while interrogatives and exclamatives are entirely absent. This distribution reflects a genre-specific tendency in tourism advertising to prioritize the clear, one-way delivery of factual and reliable information. In Halliday's system, the declarative mood serves to present information with both authority and neutrality, a function that aligns with the communicative purpose of such texts. Advertisements such as Ad29 (**"**Salar de Uyuni or Sky Mirror (S) is named (F) after the world's largest salt flat in Bolivia which (S) is known (F) as the World's Largest Natural Mirror") and Ad11 ("In old Malay, kawi (S) denotes (F) reddish brown, hence Langkawi (S) means (F) 'reddish brown eagle"), which contain a high density of declarative clauses, exemplify the typical Subject + Finite structure, maintaining a professional tone that supports Claudia's (2014) and Elena's (2016) observations on the predominance of declaratives in online tourism promotion.

Despite their lower frequency in the dataset, imperative clauses (e.g., Ad4, Ad16) function as calibrated prompts rather than direct commands, serving as soft calls-to-action such as "relax…", "explore…", and "enjoy…". From an SFL perspective, these clauses shift the speech role to one of demanding goods and services; however, they maintain a non-impositional tone by omitting explicit Subjects and begin with a base verb functioning as the Predicator, reflecting the unmarked imperative mood structure. This pattern corroborates Bhatia's (2005) and Fuertes-Olivera et al.'s (2001) findings that tourism discourse strategically blends factual presentation with gentle persuasion.

The absence of interrogatives and exclamatives indicates a preference for avoiding direct questioning or overt emotional expression. Overall, the combination of declaratives and imperatives in the dataset constitutes an effective strategy to inform and subtly persuade, achieving communicative goals while aligning with cultural norms.

Modality Values

The analysis of modal values in the tourism advertisements, as shown in Table 2, categorizes modality into three main levels: high, median, and low.

Table 2. The results of Modality Values

Modality Values	**High**				**Median**				**Low**			
Modal Operators	*must*	*ought to*	*has to*	*is to*	*will*	*would*	*shall*	*should*	*may*	*might*	*can*	*could*
Total clauses	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	1	-	12	-
Percentage	**0%**				**23.5%**				**76.5%**			

Source: Author's analysis

The results from Table 2 indicate that "low" modality values dominate the dataset, accounting for 76.5% with 12 clauses distributed across 10 advertisements, notably, Ad28 and Ad29 each contain two such clauses. These are predominantly realized through the modal operator "can", which is widely used in advertising discourse due to its semantic flexibility including both describing possibilities and implying invitations to action. In the context of tourism advertising, "can" serves two primary interpersonal functions:

As Modalization, "can" is used to present objective, neutral, and factual information about what is available or possible at the tourist site, without exerting pressure on the viewer. This function is evident in clauses such as "One can witness and photograph crocodiles and

alligators...” (Ad2); “Visitors can experience a simulated Arctic environment” (Ad12); “This amazing sight can also be seen...” (Ad29).

As Modulation, “can” subtly encourages or invites viewers to engage in the promoted activities. While not overtly directive, it still serves to promote behavior in a subtle way. For example, “You can sample freshly cut fruits...” (Ad17); "Visitors can watch these huge mammals..." (Ad18); “Visitors can learn...” (Ad28)

Meanwhile, “median” modality values account for 23.5% of the data (4 clauses), realized through the modal operator “will”. These instances reflect modalization and are primarily used to build trust and convey certainty, guiding viewers toward a positive expectation of the experience. For instance, “Visitors will get the opportunity to watch how each piece is created.” (Ad6); “Shoppers will find brands such as Cotton On, Puma, G2000, Carlo Rino...” (Ad14)

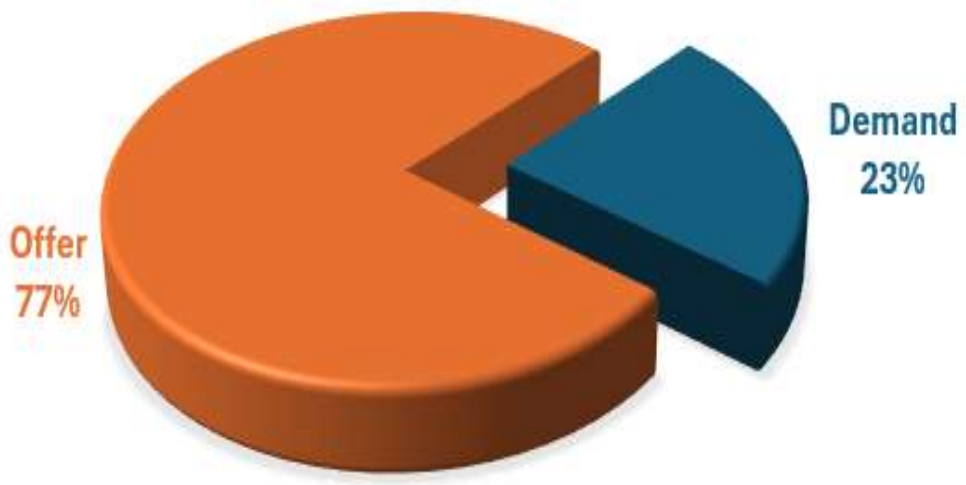
The complete absence of “high” modality values (0%) suggests a strategic discursive choice aimed at constructing a welcoming and non-impositional brand image. By eschewing expressions of strong obligation or authority, the advertisements adopt a gently persuasive tone that supports the promotional objectives of tourism discourse.

4.2 Analysis of interactive meaning in visual mode

Contact

The analysis of visual contact in tourism advertisements centers on two primary image acts: demand and offer as shown in Chart 1. Demand images create a direct visual link with the viewer to encourage engagement, while offer images present participants as objects to observe, keeping the viewer detached (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Chart 1. Contact (Image Act)



Source: Author’s analysis

The results from the chart 1 reveal that the “offer” type overwhelmingly dominates with 77% (23/30), while “demand” accounts for only 23% of the total images analysed in Malaysian tourism advertisements, which reflects a clear strategic trend in how these advertisements construct interactive relationships with viewers.

The high prevalence of “offer” indicates that Malaysian tourism advertisements aim to portray attractions as desirable experiences, emphasizing visitors' voluntary engagement and positive emotions rather than imposing pressure or direct demands. This tendency is exemplified in Ad17, where a female tourist is admiring a durian, while a male participant

looks on with a smile. Both are immersed in the activity and do not establish direct gaze with the viewer. The lack of eye contact characterizes this as an "offer" image, positioning the viewer as a passive observer, encouraged to imagine the sensory pleasure of the scene (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). The vibrant display of fruit enhances the aesthetic and emotional appeal which suggests that visual content in lifestyle and promotional genres often aims to elicit affective responses rather than directive communication. In addition, in Ad23, three women are seen walking and conversing joyfully under architecturally striking canopies, with no eye contact with the camera. This reinforces the "offer" image function by showcasing a relaxed and scenic environment where the audience is free to project themselves into the scene.

Ad17

Ad23

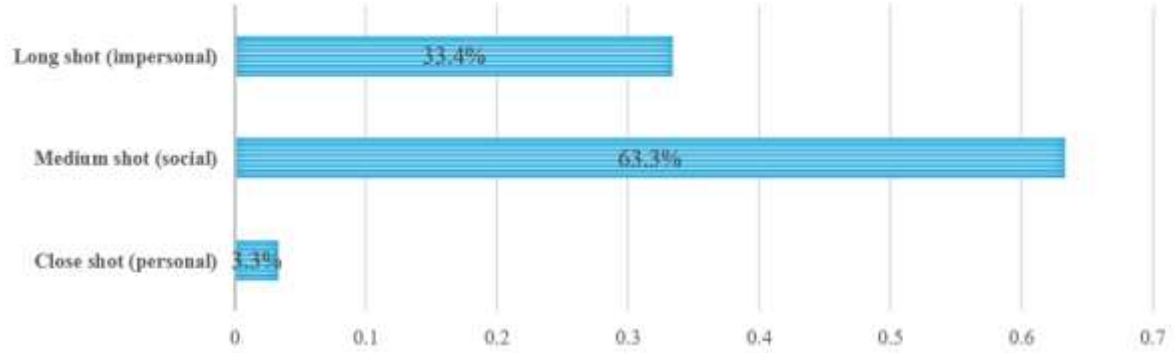
On the other hand, the presence of "demand" at 23% (7/30) still plays an important role in establishing a sense of connection, making the images more dynamic and interactive in certain specific contexts. For example, the participants directly gaze at the camera while mid-air on the zipline. This eye contact creates a strong sense of immediacy and emotional engagement, as if they are inviting the viewer to join in their exhilarating adventure (Ad1). Similarly, in Ad15, a cheerful family looks straight at the viewer while posing in front of the vibrant park entrance. Their direct gaze and enthusiastic body language convey a welcoming gesture that strengthens interpersonal involvement. These "demand" images are employed not merely for visual appeal but to simulate a dialogue between the advertisement and its audience, thereby enhancing the persuasive impact by fostering a sense of inclusion and shared experience.

Ad1

Ad15

Social distance

Chart 2. Social Distance (Size of Frame)



Source: Author's analysis

The results displayed in the chart 2 indicate a dominant use of medium shot (63.3%) in Malaysian tourism advertisements, followed by long shot (33.4%) and a minimal presence of close shot (3.3%). This distribution reveals a deliberate visual strategy in establishing a social distance that is friendly yet respectful, aligning with the framework of Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), who argue that shot distance conveys levels of interpersonal proximity between the viewer and the represented participants.

The high frequency of medium shots suggests an intention to foster social familiarity. According to Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), a medium shot, typically capturing participants from the waist or knees up constructs a "social interactive space" where viewers can observe gestures, actions, and some facial expressions while still recognising the context. In Ad28, the medium shot depicts a group of students or visitors attentively listening to a guide, which allows viewers to feel the academic atmosphere and imagine themselves engaging in the educational experience. Next, the significant proportion of long shots (33.4%) illustrates a contrasting visual strategy. As noted by Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), this type of shot presents participants in relation to a larger environment, positioning the viewer as an observer of the setting rather than a direct participant. Ad30 exemplifies this with its wide-angle framing that glorifies the grandeur of the historical fortress gate and direct attention to the tourist site itself rather than interpersonal interaction. In contrast, the very limited use of close shots (3.3%) is a noteworthy finding. Close shots, with their ability to create high levels of intimacy and emotional engagement (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), appear to be consciously minimized in Malaysian tourism advertising. Ad25, however, offers an exception, where a close-up of a man inspecting a durian fruit creates an intimate, sensory-oriented viewing experience. This rare use of close distance serves to foreground the sensory appeal of local produce and can be seen as a tool to personalize the destination on an emotional level.

Ad25_close shot

Ad28_medium shot

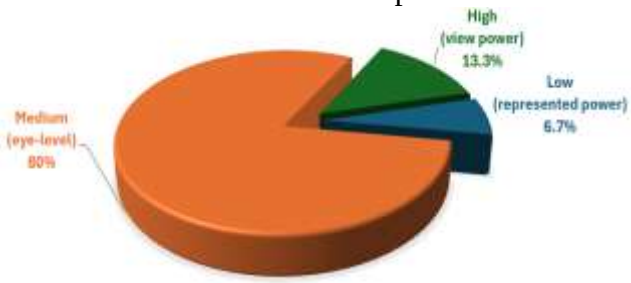
Ad30_long shot

Overall, the visual strategies observed indicate that Malaysian tourism advertisements carefully balance emotional appeal and informational value. The dominant use of medium and long shots constructs a tone that is welcoming and aspirational while avoiding overt personal intrusion—inviting viewers to imagine themselves in the scene, yet allowing them to maintain autonomous judgment.

Perspective

Chart 3. Horizontal Perspective

Chart 4. Vertical Perspective



Source: Author's analysis

The results presented in Chart 3 and Chart 4 offer insightful evidence into the visual strategies employed in Malaysian tourism advertisements regarding perspective, particularly through horizontal and vertical angles.

In horizontal perspective, the dominance of oblique angles (63.3%) suggests a strategic use of visual detachment, positioning viewers as external observers rather than active participants. As noted by Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), this approach encourages contemplation of the destination's aesthetic or cultural value, rather than emotional immersion or direct involvement. Conversely, the use of frontal angles (36.7%) fosters emotional involvement and viewer inclusion (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), inviting a sense of connection. However, this is used selectively, reinforcing an overall strategy that prioritizes viewer autonomy and reflection over emotional immersion. Regarding vertical perspective, the dominance of eye-level angles (80%) reflects a strategy of presenting equality between viewer and participant (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), aligning with the communicative goal of presenting tourism as an accessible and friendly experience. Meanwhile, the use of high angle (13.3%) and low angle (6.7%) shots is comparatively limited, but still meaningful. High angles may be used to depict overview scenes or to render participants as less dominant, while low angles can elevate the subject's significance, such as monumental structures or heroic representations of people or places.

Ad3_front angle (attachment) & medium (eye-level)

Ad5_oblique angle (detachment) & low (represented power)

Ad3 exemplifies how Malaysian tourism advertisements combine visual perspectives to balance viewer autonomy and emotional engagement. While the couple on the Jet Ski is shown obliquely (reflecting the overall dominance of oblique views at 63.3%), the woman's direct gaze and smile transform the image into a "demand," fostering interpersonal connection and emotional involvement (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). The eye-level angle (80% prevalence) further establishes equality, creating a welcoming atmosphere. In contrast, Galeria Perdana (Ad5) employs an oblique horizontal view to encourage aesthetic appreciation and a strong low angle to magnify the ornate ceiling, conveying grandeur and cultural significance. Together, these strategies illustrate how perspective choices align with broader quantitative trends while serving distinct communicative purposes.

4.3 Cultural interpretations of verbal and visual modes

The analysis of Malaysian tourism advertisements, using Hall and Hall's (1990) framework, reveals a strong high-context cultural orientation, reflected through both linguistic and visual features.

Table 3. The Results of Cultural Communication Style

Cultural Communication Style (Hall & Hall, 1990)	Findings in Ads	Interpretation (High-Context Indicator)
Information Explicitness	declarative sentences (85.7%), low modality (76.5%)	indirect, non-assertive meaning
Use of Non-verbal Cues	offer images (77%), symbolic/visual focus over text	non-verbal contextual focus
Social Relationship	medium and long shots (96.7%)	formal social distance
Viewer Relation	oblique angle (63.3%), eye-level (80%)	detachment, subtle style
Reasoning Style	no explicit justification; relies on shared cultural knowledge	deductive reasoning, context-based meaning
Message Structure & Logic	non-linear, non-confrontational presentation	indirect, flexible discourse

Source: Author's analysis

The results from Table 3 show that verbally, the advertisements employ a dominant use of declarative sentences (85.7%) and low modality expressions (76.5%), avoiding direct

commands or high-authority language. This reflects a communication style that is indirect and non-assertive, aligning with the high-context preference for subtle meaning expression. Visually, several features further support this orientation. The prevalence of offer images (77%) and oblique angles (63.3%) suggests a detached and non-confrontational viewer relationship, typical of high-context visuals. In addition, the use of medium and long shots (96.7%) maintains formal social distance, while eye-level perspectives (80%) reflect neutral power dynamics, both reinforcing a sense of harmony and indirect engagement. Moreover, the reasoning structure in these advertisements does not follow a linear, explicit logic but rather relies on shared cultural knowledge and contextual interpretation, consistent with deductive reasoning as found in high-context communication patterns. Overall, the combination of non-verbal contextual focus, indirect linguistic strategies, and subtle visual composition demonstrates that Malaysian tourism advertisements strongly reflect a high-context cultural orientation, as theorized by Hall and Hall (1990).

4. Discussion

This study set out with three objectives: (1) to examine how interpersonal meaning is realized linguistically, (2) to analyze how interactive meaning is constructed visually, and (3) to explore how both modes reflect culturally contextual communication preferences in Malaysian tourism advertisements.

Regarding the first objective, the findings show that in the verbal mode, declarative clauses overwhelmingly dominate, supported by low modality values. This linguistic pattern fulfills the communicative goal of delivering clear, factual, and non-impositional information. It also corroborates earlier research (Claudia, 2014; Elena, 2016), confirming that Malaysian tourism advertisements prioritize informative discourse over directive discourse, with imperatives functioning as soft prompts rather than direct commands.

In terms of the second objective, the analysis of the visual mode reveals the dominant use of offer images, medium and long shots, and oblique, eye-level perspectives. These choices construct a respectful, non-intrusive relationship with viewers, encouraging voluntary engagement instead of imposing participation. Such strategies are consistent with the genre's emphasis on aesthetic appeal and indirect invitation.

Addressing the third objective, the integration of verbal and visual findings reveals a strong high-context cultural orientation. The advertisements rely on indirect information delivery, non-verbal cues, maintenance of formal social distance, and subtle viewer involvement. This demonstrates that the communicative design reflects culturally embedded preferences for indirectness and harmony, characteristic of Malaysia's high-context culture.

Taken together, the alignment between linguistic and visual choices not only directly addresses all three objectives but also confirms that Malaysian tourism advertisements employ a dual-mode strategy: verbally informing with clarity and gentle persuasion, while visually inviting contemplation and self-projection. By combining SFG and VG's analysis with Hall and Hall's (1990) cultural framework, the study provides empirical evidence that the communicative design of these advertisements is both genre-specific and culturally embedded, thereby resolving the research problem.

Implications for Business and Marketing Practice

Beyond linguistic and cultural contributions, the findings also offer practical implications for business and marketing. The dominance of declarative, low-modality clauses suggests a strategic emphasis on building consumer trust through factual and non-impositional discourse, aligning with persuasion strategies that respect autonomy and foster positive attitudes. Visually, the use of "offer" images and respectful perspectives enables potential tourists to project themselves into the advertised destination, thereby strengthening destination

brand attachment and influencing decision-making. At a broader level, these multimodal strategies reflect a high-context orientation that may enhance Malaysia's regional competitiveness in culturally similar markets, while highlighting the need for adaptation in low-context contexts where directness and explicit persuasion are more effective. Finally, linking these multimodal strategies to marketing performance metrics, such as consumer engagement, booking conversions, or brand equity offers a pathway for future interdisciplinary studies. By integrating discourse analysis with measurable outcomes, tourism boards and marketers can evaluate not only the cultural appropriateness of their messages but also their tangible impact on competitiveness and market share.

5. Conclusions

This study examines interpersonal meaning in Malaysian tourism advertisements through verbal and visual analysis, drawing on Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 2004), Visual Grammar (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), and Hall & Hall's (1990) high-/low-context framework. The analysis of 30 English-language ads shows a predominance of declarative clauses and low-modality expressions, creating a neutral, informative tone that supports voluntary decision-making. Visually, frequent use of "offer" images, medium-to-long shots, and oblique or eye-level angles positions viewers as observers, encouraging imaginative engagement rather than direct interaction. These strategies reflect high-context communication preferences, conveying messages indirectly and harmoniously. The findings highlight Malaysia's effective intercultural promotional approach and suggest broader implications for Southeast Asian tourism discourse, with potential for comparative ASEAN studies.

6. Limitations

This study is limited to 30 English-language static tourism advertisements, excluding other formats such as video, television, or interactive digital platforms. The analysis focuses exclusively on interpersonal meaning, without addressing representational and compositional meanings, and interprets cultural orientation solely through Hall's (1990) high-/low-context framework, which may not fully capture the hybridity of contemporary tourism discourse. Additionally, while systematic coding was applied, the researcher's subjectivity may still have influenced interpretation.

7. Recommendations for Future Studies

Given its linguistic orientation, the study did not examine business-oriented aspects such as marketing performance metrics, audience segmentation, or brand positioning. Future research could extend the present findings by incorporating tourism advertisements from other Southeast Asian countries for comparative analysis, examining dynamic media formats to uncover additional multimodal strategies, addressing representational and compositional meanings for a more comprehensive account, and integrating broader cultural models (e.g. Hofstede's dimensions). For studies aiming to bridge discourse analysis with marketing practice, linking multimodal choices to consumer behavior theories and measurable outcomes such as engagement, bookings, or brand equity would enhance both academic and practical relevance.

References

Azizan, M. (2010). Tourism development in Malaysia: A review of federal government policies. *Theoretical and Empirical Research in Urban Management, 8*(17), 85-97.

Bezemer, J., & Kress, G. (2008). Writing in multimodal texts: A social semiotic account of designs for learning. *Written Communication, 25*(2), 166-195. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088307313177

Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analysing genre: Language use in professional settings*. Routledge: UK.

Cheong, Y. Y. (2004). The construal of ideational meaning in print advertisements. In K. L. O'Halloran (Ed.), *Multimodal discourse analysis: Systemic-functional perspectives* (pp. 163-195). Continuum.

Claudia, E. M. (2014). *The discourse of tourism and national heritage: A contrastive study from a cultural perspective* [Doctoral Thesis, Universidad Autónoma De Madrid]: Spain. http://www.isfla.org/Systemics/Print/Theses/MagyaPHD.pdf

Cooper, C., Fletcher, J., Fyall, A., Gilbert, D., & Wanhill, S. (2005). *Tourism: Principles and practice* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education: UK.

Edelheim, J. R. (2015). *Tourist attractions: From object to narrative*. Channel View Publications.

Elena, M. (2016). *Persuasion in tourism discourse: Methodologies and models*. Cambridge Publisher: UK.

Focus Malaysia. (2024, February). Malaysia recorded 29 million visitor arrivals in 2023. https://focusmalaysia.my/malaysia-recorded-29-million-visitor-arrivals-in-2023/

Fuertes-Olivera, P. A., Velasco-Sacristán, M., Arribas-Baño, A., & Samaniego-Fernández, E. (2001). Persuasion and advertising English: Metadiscoursal in slogans and headlines. *Journal of Pragmatics, 33*(8), 1291-1307. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(01)80026-6

Hall, E., & Hall, M. (1990). *Understanding cultural differences*. Intercultural Press.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. Edward Arnold: UK.

Halliday, M. A. K. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed., revised by C. M. I. M. Matthiessen). Arnold: UK.

Hiippala, T. (2012). The localization of advertising print media as a multimodal process. In W. L. Bowcher (Ed.), *Multimodal texts from around the world: Linguistic and cultural insights* (pp. 97-122). Palgrave: UK.

Jabeen, I., Hameed, A., & Afzal, N. (2022). The wake of modernistic tourism in the kingdom: A multimodal analysis of online discourse. *Journal of Education, Culture and Society, 13*(1), 385-401.

Jewitt, C. (2008). Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms. *Review of Research in Education, 32*(1), 241–267. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X07310586

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2012). *Marketing management* (14th ed.). Pearson: UK.

Kress, G., Jewitt, C., Ogborn, J., & Tsatsarelis, C. (2001). *Multimodal teaching and learning: The rhetoric of the science classroom*. Continuum.

Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge: UK.

Lang, L. (2024). The Asian Games and city branding in China: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of Hangzhou's promotional videos on YouTube. *Place Brand and Public Diplomacy, 20*, 504-516. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-024-00359-0

Machin, D. (2007). *Introduction to multimodal analysis*. Hodder Arnold: UK.

Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. Sage: UK.

O'Halloran, K. L. (2008). Systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA): Constructing ideational meaning using language and visual imagery. *Visual Communication, 7*(4), 443–475. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357208096210

Peace, C. (2011). *Culture matters: The Peace Corps cross-cultural workbook*. Peace Corps Information Collection and Exchange: US.

Royce, T. D. (2007). Intersemiotic complementarity: A multimodal perspective on discourse coherence in Spanish as a foreign language textbook discourse. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 16*(3), 158–173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.07.002

Thurlow, C., & Jaworski, A. (2010). *Tourism discourse: Language and global mobility*. Palgrave Macmillan: UK.

Tourism Malaysia. (2024). *Malaysia: Truly Asia*. Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board. https://ebrochures.malaysia.travel/#

Tran, N. L., & Rudolf, W. (2022). Social media and destination branding in tourism: A systematic review of the literature. *Sustainability, 14*(20), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3390/su142013528

Wang, Y., & Feng, D. (2023). History, modernity, and city branding in China: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of Xi'an's promotional videos on social media. *Social Semiotics, 33*(2), 402–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2020.1870405

Würtz, E. (2005). A cross-cultural analysis of websites from high-context cultures and low-context cultures. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 11*(1), Article 13. http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue1/wuertz.html