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Corpus-based Analysis of Multimodal Tourism Narratives on Instagram: Evoking Romantic Gazes of Evaluation as Means of Persuasion

Understanding the intentions behind communicative events is crucial in a society pervaded by asymmetrical relationships in the dissemination of information. Although new digital affordances provide the opportunity to express meaning in a way that reflects socio-economic trends and needs, they also create a breeding ground for the development of novel forms of promotional discourse (Francesconi 2014).

This paper investigates current rhetorical strategies of digital tourism discourse that convey an ideologically based perception of reality and positive attitudes towards a destination through significant visual semiotic labor and subordinate written text (Bateman 2014; Dann 1996; Urry and Larsen 2011). It aims at defining an Instagram image-centric genre of tourism representations based on the stimulation of attention and irrational response through evocative and highly evaluative multimodal orchestrations (Stöckl et al. 2019; Manca 2016).

For the measurement of multimodal strategies, six sub-corpora of texts and images were collected from the official websites and Instagram accounts of three popular English-speaking tourism boards. Successively, the multimodal sub-corpora were analyzed through the lens of *Systemic Functional Linguistics* and the *Grammar of Visual Design*. In particular, the lexicogrammatical instantiations realizing ideational and attitudinal meaning in both semiotic resources were examined and compared. The main objective is to understand whether context-sensitive patterns of material regularities (Bateman et al. 2017) reflect changes in the discourse semantics and unveil the existence of novel communicative purposes and generic trends (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014; Thompson et al. 2019; Martin and White 2005; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006).

The visual strategies were quantified through both manual annotation with a data-driven tagging system and statistical measurement of the variance between channel corpora. The reproducibility of the tagging procedure was tested by means of Inter-Annotator Agreement. Linguistic variance and degree of specificity, on the other hand, were measured through wordlists and keyword lists analysis. This procedure was followed by qualitative insights into syntagmatic relations and the socio- discursive context.

The visual analysis revealed a large number of Instagram *reaction processes* involving spectacular aerial views of solitary, back posing individuals surrounded by aesthetically pleasant natural environments. This shapes an impersonal relationship with dehumanized subjects that fosters visual pre-consumption through a *romantic gaze* of capitalist privilege and illusion of control over an extra- ordinary experience (Debord 1977). The commodification of the intangible service also stimulates in-group identification.

The linguistic analysis unveiled *Transitivity* narratives that raise emotive expectations. These are constructed through *relational processes* describing the destination's aesthetic attributes

and *mental processes* that assign to prospective tourists the role of passive *Sensors*. *Evoked satisfaction* was detected as the key *Affect* attitudinal resource of *Appraisal*, whereas *reactions* and *evoked valuations* were classified as the most frequent *Appreciation* resources (Thompson and Alba-Juez 2014). These are upscaled by both graduation strategies of *infused intensification* and positive connotation that leverages sociologically established desires for the *authentic* and *uncontaminated*.

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