

TOURISM FACING A PANDEMIC: FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY



edited by Federica Burini



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*To our students of the Master Course
in Planning and Management of Tourism Systems
of the University of Bergamo*

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From #traveltomorrow to #MagicalKenya: a sociosemiotic analysis of a tourism narrative response to Covid-19

Cinzia Spinzi and Stefania M. Maci*

Abstract:

Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism was found to be the sector most affected internationally. The UNTWO has intervened by launching a campaign embraced by the member countries. The main purpose of this work is the functional and semiotic investigation of meaning construction in the UNTWO tourism campaign and of Kenya's response to it. The analysis has shown that the message of solidarity and unity in the face of such uncertain times is an invitation for shared responsibility among travelers and a stress of core values. Kenya's response to the main campaign reinforces the refrain #stayingathome and introduces a promise of visiting Kenya by combining information and promotion.

Keywords: *sociosemiotics; multimodal analysis; discourse analysis*

1. Setting the scenario

Without prejudice to the considerable economic repercussions that the Covid-19 pandemic is already having in every economic area, tourism is certainly the most directly affected sector. This is because of the constrained immovability encapsulated by the well-known slogan "stay at home" which is in antithesis with the very soul of tourism whose prerequisite is a movement through time and space, as we read on the UNTWO (U.N. World Tourism Organization)⁵².

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism

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⁵² <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms> Last accessed April 2020.

has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure.

Coronavirus impact assessment is a very complicated estimation mainly due to the uncertainty regarding the behavior of the virus itself, which is unknown and new to mankind. Furthermore, uncertainties exist about the direct economic impact of the virus, but also about the psychological effects on individuals and institutional actors, which in turn have direct and indirect consequences on both supply and demand.

Against this backdrop, the United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has launched a campaign condensed in the hashtag “Stay home today, travel tomorrow” which conveys, as explicitly stated on the UNWTO website, a message of solidarity and hope. It is also, as we read, an invitation for shared responsibility among travelers and a stress of the core values of tourism: “Discovering different cultures, practicing solidarity and respect, caring for the environment, continuing to learn, fostering decent work, development and sustainability, generating new opportunities for all”⁵³.

The considerable impact of this online campaign is visible on digital media, where some country members have published their own response to it, thus intensifying and unifying the voices of tourism and at the same time rousing travel enthusiasms for the future.

The aim of this study is to look at how the emergency crisis due to Covid-19 affects the representation of the tourist offer in those countries that have embraced the campaign, given that the individual campaign is also a strategy for keeping alive the image and memory of the destination. More precisely, this contribution analyzes the initiative launched by the UNWTO and the response from the only country member, Kenya, which has replied in English. Moving in the social semiotic framework of visual communication grammar (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006), grounded in Halliday’s systemic functional theory (1978), this

⁵³ <https://www.unwto.org/news/stay-home-today-traveltomorrow> Last accessed April 2020.

study investigates the multifaceted identity of tourism discourse in that it looks at both verbal and non-verbal texts.

In order to carry out such analysis, this contribution will draw on a socio-semiotic analysis and develop this in the following sections: section two will give the background and an overview of the literature review; section three will offer a description of the collected data and of the methodological approach, followed, in section four, by an analysis and interpretation of the data collected; section five will offer a conclusion.

2. Literature review and theoretical background

Compared to traditional promotional tools (e.g. brochures, magazines), tourist videos display more alluring information by combining visual, verbal and audio modes. This integration of modes has been investigated in the literature through the application of multimodal analysis that, since its inception in the early 1990s, has developed considerably, mainly espousing a social semiotic approach. Drawing upon Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978, 1994), scholars have addressed a number of issues: from the grammar of visual design (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006), to the investigation of sound and music (Van Leeuwen, 1999) and gestures (Martinec, 2000). Multimodal analysis has also been applied to the study of visual semiosis in films (O'Halloran, 2004) and hospital documentaries (Iedema, 2001), whereas Baldry and Thibault (2006) have transcribed, annotated and investigated a corpus of video texts.

In the field of tourism, although tourism text genres “resort to a wide range of interconnected modes and modal resources” (Francesconi, 2017, p. 50) a limited number of studies on multimodality can be acknowledged (Francesconi, 2011, 2017; Poonia, Chauhan, 2015; Manca, 2016; Spinzi, 2016; Maci, 2012a, 2012b, 2007). All these studies show that a combination of approaches is however critical to investigating multimodal texts. Francesconi (2018), for example, draws from both genre analysis and multimodal analysis when examining the video texts of a less popular Italian region that is Basilicata. She shows that tourist videos represent an innovative mode which combines promotional and informative concerns with narrative and dialogical forms. In

her multimodal analysis of the tourist campaign the *Brand USA*, Spinzi (2016) demonstrates how images and texts play a pivotal function in the promotional message, conveying core values associated with traditional American icons. Thus, our work contributes to this quite young trend of research which looks at the integration of modes in tourism discourse where promotion and persuasion remain the main goals.

The theoretical background to our work is based on the combination of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (1994; henceforth SFG) and Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic framework of visual communication grammar (2006), with the latter grounded in the former. In Halliday's systemic functional theory (1978) the construction of meanings encompasses multiple semiotic systems, and semantics is one among many, and comprises three metafunctions (Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual). Systemic Functional Grammar, or SFG, aims to reveal that language is a means of social interaction and that language system and the forms that make it up are inevitably determined by the functions which they serve. For an overview of this model see Fig. 1.

Following these premises, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 1) state that visuals, just like words, have their own semantics and syntax and, thus, investigation of the syntagmatic relations of a sign, such as colour, size, positioning, discloses patterns of images that may evoke various meanings. Kress and van Leeuwen's model matches Hallidayan social semiotic metafunctions: the Representational metafunction (Ideational in Halliday's theory) refers to the ability of a semiotic system to represent the experience in the external world, what is actually going on. The processes constructed in visual images may be of two types: Narrative (action, relational and verbal processes) or Conceptual (classificational, analytical and symbolic processes). Whereas in Narrative processes, the movement of images is given graphically by vectors, Conceptual processes lack movement and hence they are considered as attributing values to carriers and construing taxonomic relations. The Interactive metafunction (Interpersonal in Halliday's theory) indicates the ability of a semiotic system to epitomize the social relations between the producer of an image

and its addressee. Contact (demand or offer), size of frame (close-ups, medium shots, long shots), perspective (high angle, low angle, eye level) are parameters on the basis of which social distance, and familiarity and positioning may be understood. The linguistic interpersonal resource of modality is visually denoted by the degree of 'credibility' manifest in the image, varying from high degree of truthfulness (e.g. naturalistic images) to low degree of modality (e.g. less real images). Finally, Composition is related to the arrangement of images. For the purposes of this study only these two metafunctions (i.e. Ideational and Interpersonal) will be taken into account.

Process type	Core meaning	Participants
Material	Doing, happening	Actor, goal
Mental	Sensing	Senser, phenomenon
Perception	Perceiving	
Cognition	Thinking	
Affection	Feeling	
Relational	Being	
Attributive	Attributing	Carrier, attribute
Identifying	Identifying	Identified, identifier
Verbal	Saying	Sayer, receiver
Behavioral	Behaving	Behaver
Existential	Existing	Existent

Figure 1 - Ideational metafunction: processes, meanings and participants

3. Data and Methods

The data collected for this study comprise two videoclips centring around the #StayAtHome #TravelTomorrow campaign launched by UNTWO on all social media, which, as described in the introductory section, has the purpose of helping State Members to cope with the Covid-19 issue. Campaign is formed by the #TravelTomorrow (0.25 seconds) videoclip, in three languages (English, French and Spanish), and the #TravelTomorrow posters in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic. A resource

platform⁵⁴ was created to provide various options for stakeholders to join this initiative. Germany, Morocco, Mongolia, Oman and Uruguay, as well as Wien and Bogotá endorsed the initiative by using the #TravelTomorrow hashtag, but Kenya only responded by creating the #MagicalKenya (1.17 seconds)⁵⁵ video in English, response to the #TravelTomorrow videoclip. For these reasons, the analysis will take into consideration the only two available videoclips in English representing the tourism industry reaction against the Covid-19 issue: #TravelTomorrow⁵⁶ and #MagicalKenya.

In order to fully understand what content and messages have been delivered, how meanings have been constructed both explicitly and metaphorically and the values and feeling evoked, the analysis of our data is carried out on two levels, verbal and visual. Firstly, relying on the Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 1994), the verbal component is explored in terms of Ideational meanings (i.e. Participants, Processes and Circumstances) and Interpersonal meanings (i.e. modality). Secondly, the videos have been divided into 16 (#TravelTomorrow videoclip) and 50 shots (#MagicalKenya videoclip) which have been explored in the light of the social semiotic framework of visual communication grammar (Kress, van Leeuwen, 2006). Drawing on Thibault (2000), shots have been identified by a change, a break, or a pause in the rhythm of movement (in both videos, of the camera, dynamic graphic displays and/or the human body); or by a corresponding shift in the visual or linguistic thematic or the interpersonal orientation (cf. Lemke, 1988). Representational meanings of visual resources (i.e. participants, process types, circumstances) and Interactive meanings (i.e. size, angle and modality) have been investigated.

4. Analysis

⁵⁴ <https://trello.com/b/5JV7MfiW/unwto-covid-19> Last accessed April 2020.

⁵⁵ <https://magicalkenya.com/> Last accessed April 2020.

⁵⁶ https://trello-attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/5e78947c896b2686dedda9b8/5e7898d67284007917643a5c/39b1825651518664ff1b0dfe2fcb6c00/Travel_Tomorrow_EN_360.mp4 Last accessed April 2020.

4.1 The analysis of the campaign #TravelTomorrow

In #Travel Tomorrow campaign 100% of shots feature a green landscape that tends to infinity. The landscape could be anywhere and therefore takes on a universal characterization. Rather than describing or narrating the landscape, the video seems to suggest a set of values that are then also rendered in verbal form. The feelings or rather the emerging values visualize solidarity, environment, sustainability and work. The focus is on *push* factors rather than *pull* factors (Dann, 1996a).

The UMTWO videoclip #TravelTomorrow is very simple in its composition: an overimposed text can be read while looking at the view seen as if from an airplane. At first, only green land and countryside is seen, as depicted in Figure 2, below:



Figure 2 - #TravelTomorrow video. Initial shot.

This is the first frame; in each of the following shot the text #TravelTomorrow is completed with the preposition *for* which, functionally speaking, realizes a Circumstance of Purpose followed

by the value to acquire: so we have the #TravelTomorrow *for discovery* shot, #TravelTomorrow *for solidarity*, #TravelTomorrow *for respect*, #TravelTomorrow *for environment*, #TravelTomorrow *for learning*, #TravelTomorrow *for jobs*, #TravelTomorrow *for development*, #TravelTomorrow *for sustainability*, #TravelTomorrow *for opportunity*, #TravelTomorrow *for you*, #TravelTomorrow *for us*, #TravelTomorrow *for tomorrow*. Each of these substantives/ pronouns are written in a different colour: *discovery* is in yellow, *solidarity* in orange, *respect* in blue, *environment* in yellow, *learning* in green, *jobs* in orange, *development* in blue, *sustainability* in green, *opportunity* in light blue, *you* in yellow and *us* in white, as summarized in Fig. 3 below:

Colour	Item
Yellow	<i>Discovery</i> <i>Environment</i> <i>you</i>
Orange	<i>Solidarity</i> <i>jobs</i>
Blue	<i>Respect</i> <i>development</i>
Green	<i>Learning</i> <i>Sustainability</i>
Light Blue	<i>Opportunity</i>
White	<i>#TravelTomorrow</i> <i>Us</i> <i>Tomorrow</i> <i>UNTWO</i>

Figure 3 - Breakdown of videoclip words and their colour

There is an invisible line made with the use of colour connecting words: *you* is linked with *discovery* and *environment* through yellow; *solidarity* and *jobs* through orange; *development* cannot exist without *respect* and this is seen through blue; and if you #TravelTomorrow such opportunity (light blue) can really be for *us*, *tomorrow*, thanks to UNTWO: #TravelTomorrow, *us*, *tomorrow* and UNTWO are all written in white.

Interestingly, when the #TravelTomorrow *for opportunity* shot appears, the frame changes perspective: prospective tourist who will be *travelling tomorrow* can start seeing the horizon and the frame from green becomes blue: from a sense of hope the video is veering to *opportunity*.



Figure 4 - #TravelTomorrow video. *Opportunity* shot.

From this *opportunity*, indeed, you can see how *tomorrow* will be:



Figure 5 - #TravelTomorrow video. *Tomorrow* shot.

There is a change in the musical rhythm and tone when the frame #TravelTomorrow *for respect* appear, which, as a refrain, comes back in the *tomorrow* shot, as if indicating that only if you respect, you can have a future, *tomorrow*.

4.2 The Functional Analysis of the verbal text in #MagicalKenya

The functional investigation of the verbal text is based on the transitivity analysis of the Ideational function through which we will explore the deep social significance of the text. The Transitivity system construes our experience of life into a set of Processes, of Participants involved and a range of Circumstances. The text may be divided in two parts: the first part describes the serious trouble the world is experiencing whereas the second part contains the promise of enjoying the magic of Kenya.

The text⁵⁷ starts with the inclusive Participant 'we' that, together with the other two occurrences, shows clearly the speaker's attempt to align with the hearer. This use of 'we' is also 'expressive' in that it communicates solidarity (Mühlhäusler, Harré, 1990). The other occurrences of 'we' in the final part of the text are exclusive and represent the speaker who offers the destination to the recipient.

A total of 23 clauses is found in the verbal campaign where the Material Process accounts for half of the processes (50%), followed by Relational Processes (24%), and Mental Processes (12%). Existential Processes have not been used and their absence

⁵⁷ "We are living in unprecedented times, uncertain times in circumstances that see us as shoving our travel plans and instead #stayingathome. Because this is the right thing to do now. But this hot cloud of uncertainty will pass, giving way to a new dawn, a fresh start when we can get back to doing what we love, travelling the world, seeing new places and making new memories. Because adventure is worthwhile. Magical Kenya will be waiting to embrace you with the hospitality of its people, of warm sunny beaches. We'll be there to explore your mind, body and spirit. Be ready for an adventure of a lifetime as you go on unforgettable safari, enjoying our diverse culinary delights and take in the magic of Kenya. We will be ready for you to tee off of to that important meeting. We will be here for you to live the magic. #MagicalKenya, the magic awaits."

may be due to the need of avoiding depictions of disorder and monotony.

Material Processes, those which involve “doing”, give the audience a feeling of power and strength. Firstly, they are used to describe the emergency situation of the time (e.g. *we are living in unprecedented times*) and the action required to overcome these hard times (e.g. *stay at home*). Secondly, through the application of Material Processes, the speaker is intentionally hoping the listener to react since this *hot cloud will pass*. The use of the metaphor of the ‘dawn’ matches this hope. Dawn is the light that is born, it is the novelty that awaits us in the day, it is the renewal of life because the sun begins its service and life begins again frenetically and relentlessly. Starting a new today, it feels like leaving behind everything that weighed on us, while hoping for the change of tomorrow. This metaphorical image gives us the strength to face this situation in the hope of returning to normal life soon.

Relational Processes account for a quarter of all processes. The first Relational Process of the Identifying type makes the rule to be respected crystal clear: staying at home *is the right thing to do now*. The second Process of the same type identifies the reward for this effort of being isolated now (e.g. *Because adventure is worthwhile*). The following Relational Processes are of the Circumstantial type and they set up a relation between the speaker who will be waiting for the recipient/tourist (e.g. *we will be there for you*) in the promised land that is Kenya.

The third type of process most represented is the Mental one, namely processes of “sensing”. In the first part of the text the Circumstance of time of the first clause (e.g. *in unprecedented times*) becomes the Senser of the following Mental Process (e.g. *see*) where the Phenomenon is seen as the Fact (e.g. *us as shoving our travel plans*) that cannot be changed. Mental Processes, which express such inner activities like affection and perception, shape the second part of the verbal campaign to strike a sympathetic chord in the hearts of the audience (e.g. *what we love; enjoying our diverse culinary delights*). In this way, the audience will unconsciously accept the speaker’s viewpoint and make themselves on the same side, which is what the speakers want.

Apart the initial Circumstance of Time, which is in line with the topic of the campaign, there are other Circumstances worth mentioning such as the Circumstance of Accompaniment (e.g. *with hospitality of its people*) that realizes what complements the magic Kenya and the Circumstance of Purpose (e.g. *for an adventure of a lifetime*) which represents the type of holiday people will enjoy.

At the interpersonal level of the language, the analysis focused only on Modality, which expresses the attitude and viewpoint, communicative intention of the speaker and cultural information in discourse. The most frequent modal operator in the text is 'will' which performs two functions: it is employed in terms of modulation (goods-and-services) where the speaker is seen as the guarantor of truth (e.g. *the hot cloud will pass*) and as a modalizer when supplying information about what will happen in the future on the basis of his/her intentions.

4.2.1 Visual analysis of #MagicalKenya

The #MagicalKenya video is a representation in various shots of what the narrator is saying. In other words, what is said and visually depicted: namely, that we are living in unprecedented and uncertain times, but staying at home is necessary for our safety. When we can come back we will travel again, and Kenya will welcome us. All this is underlined with an over-imposed text and with a changing rhythm of the music at 00:01; 1:05; 1:15 seconds, to make the whole clip more dramatic. The *unprecedented times* are depicted with empty airports; the *hot cloud of uncertainties* are represented with clouds, which *will give a new a new dawn* – immediately reproduced with a shot of a dawn on a (Kenyan) seaside resort; this *fresh start* will give us back what we love more, i.e., travelling; and here, an airplane of Kenya airline company is seen flying. From this moment on, the texts stop being overimposed and the #MagicalKenya promotional tone begins: Kenya awaits prospective tourists with its hospitality, *sunny beaches, adventures, safari, culinary delight*, or even to help them in *important meetings*. All these words, again, are visually accompanied by corresponding shots, where Narrative pictures

are mixed with the Conceptual picture of delights as in the examples below in Fig. 6.

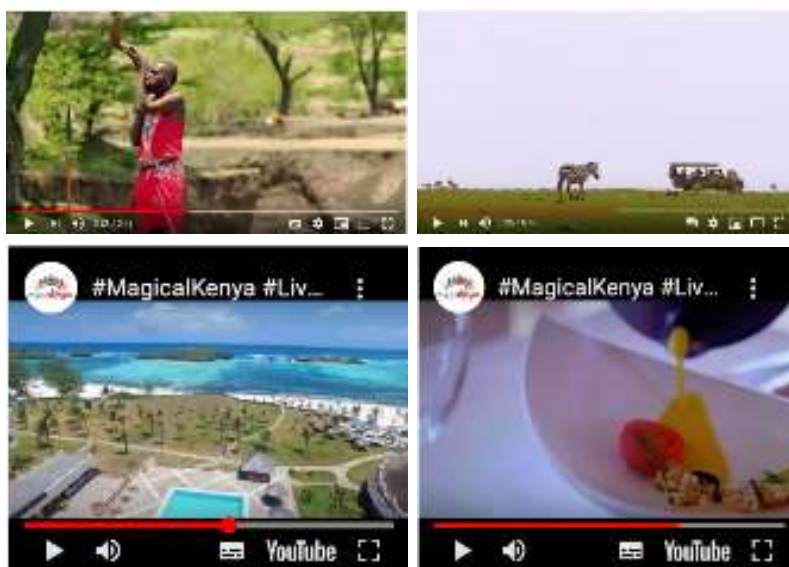


Figure 6 - #magicalKenya. Representation of *sunny beaches, adventures, safari, culinary delight*

In all the shots, people in the videoclip are usually depicted as rarely looking at the camera: in line with modulation emerged in the verbal text, they are offering themselves as models, specimens of the locals living in the destination. They are an example of authenticity (Dann, 1996) as can be seen in the frame on the top left of Fig. 6: Kenyans are always with local and traditional dresses, acting as local guides in the safari, or dancing the local Maasai Adumu dance – which incidentally is a warrior rite of passage. Medium long shots reproducing locals imply a certain level of intimacy (Kress, van Leeuwen, 2006): they are perceived as ‘friends’. Locals are indeed shot as smiling people, confirming the hospitality the narrator speaks about. Safaris are represented as a form of not too dangerous adventure: animals are never represented as aggressive, but quietly strolling here and there, to such an extent that prospective tourists can walk on the savanna. Climate is wonderful and food tasty – to Western standard (cf. Maci, 2013).

Finally, the frontal angle used in most of these pictures reinforces the message of solidarity in that this choice suggests that what we see here is part of our world, something we are involved with.

5. Discussion and conclusion

With the purpose of exploring the relationship between linguistic structures and socially constructed meaning in the UNTWO campaign, a functional analysis has been performed on the short text of the campaign followed by a semiotic analysis on the shots displayed in the videoclip.

The transitivity analysis has demonstrated that the speaker predominantly made use of Material Processes which was quite revealing in terms of actions people are called to. Following the persuasive style of the verbal text, the audience is then assumed to be swayed to stay at home and give up travelling now. Persuasion is then reinforced by emotions, realized through Mental Processes, whereas the promise activated by Circumstantial Relational Processes represents Kenya as the magic destination where the reunion with the audience will take place.

The video #TravelTomorrow created to help the tourism industry to cope with the coronavirus issue all around the world is a subtle videoclip which plays with words and colours: the meaning has to be understood by the prospective tourist or the stakeholder who, by linking various words through colour, can have a correct reading of the text by putting in the correct order the different implicit coloured lines, as if having different tiles of a puzzle: because from all this a big *opportunity* will be given for *tomorrow*. The hashtag #TravelTomorrow has been picked up by Kenya Tourism Board as revealed by their response #MagicalKenya. The videoclip they created starts from trying to cope with a real issue, which can be solved with #StayingAtHome. As can be detected, #StayingAtHome is a request for the #TravelTomorrow for *respect* and *opportunity*. An opportunity Kenya jumps at, by offering all the possibilities prospective tourists will have once everybody will be ready to start again. Colour and music put an emphasis on the magic Kenya offers – authenticity

hidden in the usual stereotypes the tourism industry creates to persuade prospective tourists to buy holiday packages off the beaten track (Maci, 2013).

The two-level investigation has revealed that information mingles with persuasion; furthermore, if on the one hand the campaign is an invitation to accept and respect the world decision to fight against the virus, on the other hand it represents an opportunity to promote a known tourist destination. The metaphor of the dawn highlights the division between the uncertain present due to covid-19 and the bright future in Kenya as a tourist choice.

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