Discursive Representation of Ecotourism on the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) Homepage: A Multi-Modal Social Semiotic Framework

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Abstract Ecotourism is one form of nature-based responsible travel that preserves environment and its natural areas. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) is the inaugural American non-lucrative institution dedicating its efforts to cultivate the ideals and principles of ecotourism. What is intriguing about TIES homepage is that it deploys multimodal units in ensembles to explicate human-nature relationship. Moreover, the TIES homepage illustrates a kind of semiotic complexity in communicating ecological and touristic issues and this asserts the significance of this homepage at two interrelated levels: genre level and mode level. Accordingly, the paper presents a multimodal visual social semiotic analysis of the TIES homepage's hypertextuality based on a hybrid of multimodal semiotic frameworks, namely genre analysis, layout analysis, and image analysis. The findings formulate that TIES is viewed as a typical discursive practice as it expounds how the interplay of different semiotic resources construe social practices and reflect social realities relating to environmental threats and values.

Keywords: Genre analysis, Layout analysis, Webpage investigation, Multimodality, Ecotourism

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1. Introduction

Arief et al. (2022) presume that technological development is rapidly advancing at an accelerated pace in both developed and developing countries, and with the advancement of technology and the amplification of high-tech environments, new virtual genres have been produced. Homepages, as a typical instance of such genres, perform as the main document at the highest level of a website (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005) that works as an official gateway to maintain public images for organizations and institutions. As forms of digital text, homepages afford a sense of interactivity and intertextuality that enable visitors and viewers to achieve some effects through utilizing links, buttons, and search fields. This multimodal nature has a colossal effect on communication and public discourse, especially when examined amalgamated with ecotouristic issues.

Alternatively, ecotourism is one of the developing genres of tourism which expresses human-nature relationships. Ecotourism is viewed as rational, sensible, and reliable travel to natural areas with the aim of conserving the environment (Kiper, 2013). Primarily, ecotourism focuses on experiencing and understanding nature with all its elements: landscapes, habitats, frosts, rivers, seas, and wildlife. Recent tides have included various activities related to ecotourism, such as developing experiences that bring travelers closer to nature, both sensually and physically, assimilating sustainability into the guest experience, such as pedal-powered television viewing, tree plantings, supporting old schools, and local community initiatives (Bricker, 2017).

Ecotourism, environmental tourism, or what is called green tourism involves habituating natural areas to perform various environmentally friendly activities (TIES, 2015). These activities are ecologically and economically sustainable, and this indicates that the primal concern of ecotourism is to increase tourists' appreciation of natural, social, and cultural values and to conserve and maintain biological diversity and environmental resources (Kiper, 2013).

The term ecotourism was first utilized in 1983 by the environmentalist Ceballos-Lascuráin (Kiper, 2013), and The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) was the first American non-profit organization devoting its efforts to promote the ideals of ecotourism (TIES, 2015). Patterson (2002) posits some principles of ecotourism, the most focal are: (i) it encourages individuals, societies, and tourists to develop and implement environments, (ii) it orients tourists and visitors on the places and areas to be visited, (iii) it assures that wildlife is safe and not hassled and (iv) it respects local people's life and culture. Thus, the TIES homepage is viewed as a multi-modal text that expounds multilayered semiotic meanings inherited in the sign "ecotourism".

Based on the theories of genre analysis (Batman, 2015), layout analysis (Bezemer & Kress, 2015), and image analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the study focuses primarily on how the design of the TIES homepage with its micro units and modules contribute to the understanding and the realization of ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions of the sign "ecotourism" conveyed by TIES webpage. That's why the paper aims to find an answer to the following key question: what are the multi-modal aspects of ecotourism, and how is it represented as a sign conjoining environmental and touristic meanings in TIES homepage? In order to answer the above-mentioned central question, some sub-inquiries have been upheld:

(i) What are the variant multi-modal modes employed by TIES producers to design its layout and to represent the aims and the principles of ecotourism?

(ii) How are different modes overworked in a visual-spatial landscape to construct the TIES homepage as a brand that realizes ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of ecotourism as a meaning-making sign?

2. Theoretical Framework

Visual grammar, visual semiotics, visual semiosis, or visual design is a method that is used to describe the manner in which portrayed and depicted elements, encompassing people, locations, and objects, are allocated in a visual scheme (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Visual social semiotics is an interdisciplinary approach to semiotics that focuses mainly on doing meaningful practices. It is a branch of semiosis that studies the multilayered and convoluted modes of communication that social interactors manipulate and develop to delineate their understanding of the social world. Lemke (1990) presumes that social semiotics involves combining variant viewpoints in the examination of social meaning and social action.

Visual social semiotics emerged in the 1990s in the works of O'Toole (1994) and Kress and van Leeuween (1996, 2006). According to visual social semiotics, interaction is a part of the meaning-making process in which interlocutors form different choices from a network of different alternatives. These alternatives are called "modes", "resources", or "modalities" (Hyland & Paltridge, 2011), and they are the key terms in visual grammar. For van Leeuween (2005), the concept of "mode" refers to the various means through which people convey communication through both actions and artifacts.

These acts and artifacts can be produced differently through words, body movements, facial expressions, or modern technology.

In visual social semiotics, the term "resource" or "mode" is investigated and analyzed as a semiotic system characterized by distinctions, contrasts, and oppositions that raises various meanings in different contexts (Levine & Scollon, 2004). According to van Leeuwen (2005), resources are understood as signifiers, and this connotes their special potential for meaning-making. In this sense, visual social semiotics involves not just conceptualizing the intricate set of semiotic resources (O'Halloran, 2010) but also considers the design, development, and dissemination of these resources (Hyland & Partridge, 2011).

2.1. Investigating Genre Analysis and Layout Design

Genre is defined as "a social, culture-bound entity reflecting both the historical development and the contemporary needs of the society" (Tomaskova, 2015, p. 78). According to Bateman (2014), the genre is conceptualized as a "second-order phenomenon: a patterning of patterns" (p. 241). The multiple choices made across divergent echelons and levels are socially-motivated, and this means that genres have allocated communicative aims and social goals: the integration and selection of different semiotic modes support the completion of these goals (Bateman, 2014). One of the new forms of digital genres is "webpage" or "homepage", which has been defined, according to Baldry and Thibult (2006), as "a visual-spatial unit displayed on a computer screen" (p. 104). It is a juxtaposition of written and visual resources that share some features of the printed page, and at the same time, it possesses the capability for dynamic action. Linguistically, the structure of genre is analyzed from two points of view, namely linear and staged. Linear and staged genre analysis represent distinct methodologies within the theoretical framework of genre analysis, each focusing on distinct facets of how genres perform and function in communication. Linear genre analysis examines genres by accentuating them as sequential progressions of communicative events, setting up the organization and flow of different components within a genre. Conversely, staged genre analysis interprets genres as sets of repetitive stages or structures, underscoring the recurrent patterns that define a particular genre (Rodrigo, 2014).

When it comes to multi-modal genres, like websites, linguists find it difficult to apply these two perspectives to a multi-modal text. New approaches to genre multi-modal analysis have been proposed. Andersen and van Leuween (2017) present the notions of "subgenre" or "microgenre", which are the main units and components of the homepage. TIES, for instance, is considered a supra or macro genre that consists of sub-microgenres exemplified in its homepage and its related hyperlinked items. According to Adami (2015), hypertextuality, interactivity, and non-linearity of texts are ubiquitous features of digital multi-modal text. Miller (2017) concludes that multi-modal genre analysis must provide an explanation of visual, verbal, and auditory aspects of the multi-modal text, taking into consideration their non-linear and interactive features.

Bateman (2015) and Hiippala (2012) present the genre and multimodality approach, which is abbreviated as (GeM). This theoretical framework divides the genre analysis of the given homepage into three layers: (i) base layer, (ii) rhetorical layer, and (iii) navigation layer. The base layer includes layout analysis of visual and verbal units positioned in the homepages, such as titles, drawings, shapes, images, figures, hyperlinks, etc. It is the layout that "does not name or depict; it does however 'dispose', organize and indicate aspects of the social/ontological 'status' of representations" (Kress, 2010, p. 92). In terms of the rhetorical layer, it shows the interrelation between various units placed on the homepage and the navigation layer, which explicates the hypertextuality and the interconnectivity of the whole webpage. In his explication of layout as a mode of communication, Kress (2010) posits three questions: "can the layout form entities that are coherent" and that cohere with the outer world?, "can layout trigger and realize interpersonal meaning?" and "can layout represent meanings about the world of states, actions, and events?" (p. 88). That's why Kress and van Leeuween (2006) and Kress (2010) adopted to offer an in-depth analysis of the interrelation and affordances of the various modes.

In short, layout analysis holds significant importance within the multi-modal analysis framework as it accentuates the spatial organization and composition of distinctive semiotic modes within a specific artifact. Also, this analytical framework focuses on the interconnection between multiple elements such

as text, images, colors, and spatial distribution, aiming to discern how these elements interconnect to communicate specific meanings. In the following paragraphs, a condensed overview is presented, accentuating the fundamental basics within the domain of layout analysis in the realm of multimodality, according to Batman (2011, 2013) and Alvarez (2016).

Spatial organization is the initial step in layout analysis that explores the positioning of various elements relative to one another. This means scrutinizing how text, images, and other visual modes of communication are posited, aiming to understand their hierarchy and significance. Moreover, great attention is also given to the employment of space and margins, as these aspects play a role in shaping the overall visual arrangement. Textual layout is the second step in layout analysis, which evaluates textual elements by investigating formatting elements such as font style, size, and color it also inquires about the organizational aspects, encompassing the analysis of headings, subheadings, and paragraphs, which disclose the underlying structure of the text. Additionally, it takes into account the alignment and justification choices applied to the text, recognizing their impact on both readability and the overall visual flow. Alternatively, hyperlinks are deemed a significant element of the text's arrangement; the arrows accompanying them elucidate additional layers of meaning.

The third step, image placement and composition, explores the interplay of images within the layout, investigating how they are seamlessly collaborated. Besides, it analyzes the dimensions, placement, and framing of images in order to comprehend their role in conveying meaning, and it considers the systematic integration between text and images, evaluating how they either complement or contrast with each other in the overall composition. The fourth phase, which involves color and visual components, examines closely the color palette utilized in the layout and its symbolic interpretations. At the same time, it evaluates the use of shapes, lines, and other visual elements aimed at amplifying specific facets of the message. Additionally, it examines the overall aesthetic appeal and its role in advancing the communicative objectives of the text.

Multi-modal integration examines the interplay and synergy between distinct semiotic modes, such as text, images, hyperlinks, and color. Through this integration, we are able to assess how the layout facilitates a comprehensive explanation of the content by seamlessly incorporating various modes.

2.2. Image as a Discursive Visual Social Semiotic Resource

The basis of visual social semiotics is Halliday and Mathiessen's systemic functional grammar theory, or what is called the theory of metafunctions (2004) which posits that language carries out three metafunctions, namely ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Kress and van Leeuween (1996, 2006) extend the same metafunctions, and use the terms representational, interactive, and compositional instead. Representational metafunction explicates the visual encoding of the experience, thus showing the different ways participants, events, and circumstances are realized (Bezerra, 2011). Kress and van Leeuween (2006) conclude that the representational meaning annotates how the semiotic resource represents the internal (mental) and external world as humans perceive and experience it. This multifaceted process takes place through what is called, in Kress & van Leeuween's (2006) words, participants, processes, and circumstances.

In conformity with Kress and van Leeuween (2006), there are two types of participants in the given image: interactive and represented. Interactive participants are those who are engaged in the process of communication, and those who play, walk, read, write, eat, or drink. Otherwise, Represented participants are those "who constitute the subject matter of the communication; that is, the people, places and things (including abstract 'things') represented in and by the speech or writing or image, the participants about whom or which we are speaking or writing or producing images" (p. 48).

Representational meaning is explained through two processes: narrative and conceptual. In narrative representations, participants are represented as doing some action, and they are connected together by vector. Wasintapa and Vungthong (2019) assume that a distinctive feature of the visual narrative is the existence of a vector. This vectorial representation illustrates the various actions, events, and circumstances. Certainly, in visuals, vectors can be represented via different means, such as parts of the human body or instruments used to perform the action.

Different classifications of narrative processes are distinguished according to the different kinds of vectors, namely, action, reactional, mental, and speech. In the action process, there is a vector formed by a specific element or an arrow emanating from a specific participant. Action process can be transactional (contains an actor and a goal) or non-transactional (contains only an actor). In a non-transactional action process, "the vector is formed by an eyeline, by the direction of the glance of one or more of the represented participants" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 67). In this sense, the participant that does the act of looking is called the "reacter", and it can be a human or an animal, while the second participant is called the "phenomenon". In the case of mental and speech processes, there are mental balloons/dialogue balloons that connect sayers to their thoughts/utterances.

In narrative representations, there are other types of participants that are called circumstances, i.e., secondary participants or those who are not connected by vectors. Circumstances are of multifarious kinds: locative (connect participants with the setting), means (tools and instruments used to explicate action process), and accompaniment (unconnected participants) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Kress and van Leeuween (2006) define non-narrative representations as conceptual processes that entail depicting participants according to class, structure, or meaning. There are three subdivisions of conceptual processes: classification, analytical, and symbolic. Regarding the classification process, there is one participant, the "superordinate", who is closely related and connected to another participant, the "subordinate". In respect to the analytical process, there is a part-whole relationship between participants: the "carrier" (the whole) who possesses many "possessive attributes" (parts). The symbolic process focuses on the symbolic meaning of the participant, and it consists of a carrier and a symbolic attribute. The carrier is the participant whose meaning is fulfilled, and the symbolic attribute is the meaning itself.

Interactive meaning explicates the relationship between participants and viewers. Jewitt and Oyama (2012) point out that "[i]mages can create particular relations between viewers and the world inside the picture frame … they interact with viewers and suggest the attitude viewers should take towards what is being represented" (p. 147). Three aspects have to be considered while analyzing the interactive meaning in visuals: contact (gaze), social distance, and perspective. Gaze "is the look of the interactive and the represented participants to the viewer" (El-Masry, 2020, p. 97) and it denotes the relationship between participants, viewers, and image's producer. Gaze can be analyzed in compliance with two terms: "demand" and "offer". If the participants look directly at the viewers, they demand them to do some actions. Here, the image's producer asks the viewer to interact with him through what is called a demand image. Gestures, smiles, and body movements are among the many ways that can be used by image's producer to form a relationship with the viewer. Alternately, offer image means that participants do not look directly at the viewers. Offer images picture participants as objects which give the viewer specific information about the image.

Social distance or size of the frame is the second component of the interactive metafunction. Kress and van Leeuween (2006) indicate that the function of the size of the frame and social distance is to determine whether participants are close to or far away from the viewers. Social distance is influenced by the different kinds of shots, namely close-up shots, medium shots, and long shots. Each type has its own features, which indicate the relationship between the viewer and the depicted participants. Furthermore, Machin (2010) assumes that distance works as an indicator of social relations as human beings usually keep their distance from strangers or those whom they do not like.

Perspective, point of view, or attitude is the last facet of the interactive metafunction. In visuals, participants and objects are portrayed from various angles, each showing a specific relationship with the viewer. In accordance with Kress and van Leeuween (2006), participants are depicted from two different angles: horizontal or vertical. A horizontal angle explains whether the viewer is involved with or detached from the participants, and it can be frontal or oblique. Frontal angle means involvement, while the oblique angle expresses the meaning of detachment. On the other hand, the vertical angle discloses the power relation between viewers and participants. From a vertical angle perspective, participants are depicted from a high angle, a low angle, or at eye level. The high angel portrays participants as insignificant or infinitesimal. On the other hand, low angle delineates participants as more significant and more powerful. Finally, eye level angle gives the meaning of equality. Modality

is another focal aspect of interactive meaning that is constructed by a convoluted interaction of markers, such as color saturation, color differentiation, color modulation, representation, contextualization, illumination, depth, and brightness.

Regarding compositional meaning, Kress and van Leeuween (2006) define it as the way "in which representations and communicative acts cohere into a meaningful whole we call 'text'" (p. 181). Royce (2006) supports this idea, and he supposes that variant units and segments of visuals are not arbitrarily arranged, but they are organized in a way that induces a feeling of cohesion and collaboration. This consistency takes place through three interrelated systems: framing, information value, and salience.

Framing is the real and fictitious lines that divide participants, objects, and viewers so that they can appear as connected or disconnected, involved or detached. Color differences, empty spaces, or vectors are instances of framing in visuals. The second element that realizes the compositional meaning is information value, which is, in Kress and van Leeuween's (2006) words, "the placement of elements" in the given image (p. 177). Systematically, elements that composite images are placed in three visual areas: left-right, top-bottom, and center-margin. From a horizontal perspective, the left-side alignment is dedicated to given, already known, and familiar information, while the right-side depiction is related to unknown, new, and unfamiliar information. From a vertical frame, essential and ideal information is positioned on the top of the visual, and on the bottom, there is rare and specific information. Centre-margin alignment is also important as primary information is usually on the center, and secondary and subservient information is marginalized. To conclude, Salience is the last aspect in the composition of visual meaning. Factually, some objects are viewed as more important and more attractive than others, and this is the core of salience. The visual clues explicating salience are size, color contrast, sharpness, etc.

2.3. The Websites' Multi-Modal Social Semiotic Studies

This section tackles certain related research on the genre of the websites' multi-modal social semiotic analysis. Mafofo and Banda (2014) investigated three South African universities' homepages from a multi-modal visual perspective. The results showed that the three universities employed both visual and verbal resources in designing their homepages in an attractive way, thus forming the identity of their universities and presenting them as an attractive brand to the clients. Cheng and Suen (2014) presented a contrastive multi-modal discourse analysis of some selected homepages of three-star, four-star, and five-star hotels in the city of Hong Kong. Based on two theoretical frameworks, those presented by Kress and van Leeuween (2006) and Martin and White (2005), the study showed that luxury hotels, i.e., five-star hotels, employ various visual and verbal semiotic modes that make them distinct.

Kong (2018) investigated the homepages of two hospitals UCLH in the UK and NH in China, in order to explicate the interrelation and the deployment of the different modes, such as layout, writing, and image in the design of the two websites. Three interrelated frameworks are employed: (i) Kress theory of genre and layout analysis (2010), (ii) Visual semiotics (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), and (iii) image-text linking or what is called elaboration and extension theory (Van Leeuwen, 2005). The study showed that the layout design of the two homepages employs different interconnected modes that realize interpersonal, ideational, and textual meanings. Fernández-Vázquez (2021) conducted a multi-modal ecolinguistic analysis of 20 homepages of 20 companies that are described to be the greatest polluters of the environment. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multi-modal theoretical framework was employed to investigate the differences and similarities between the selected corpus.

Salama (2022) examined the signs of COVID-19 on the official homepage of the World Health Organization (WHO) at three aspects/levels: (i) discourse level, (ii) genre level, and (iii) mode level. The analysis revealed that the WHO homepage's layout, image, and writing realize the three metafunctions successfully at the above-mentioned three levels. Moreover, the three modes, which are utilized in ensembles, were viewed in a coherent spatial context that forms social relations between the homepage's producers and the viewers.

The present paper attempts to look into the hypertextuality of The International Ecotourism Society's (TIES) homepage, and show how the design of its layout succeeds in communicating the ideational,

interpersonal, and textual meanings of the sign "ecotourism" and presenting its homepage as an appealing brand for the viewers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Material

According to TIES's official website (https://ecotourism.org/), established in 1990, TIES is a non-profit institution dedicated to espousing the issue of ecotourism. At the limelight of ecotourism's expansion, TIES has offered valuable contributions by affording and dispensing significant guidelines, rules, initiatives, standards, and technical and educational support. The multinational network fostered by TIES, consisting of ecotourism professionals and experts, initiates endeavors to mutate tourism into a compelling tool for biodiversity protection, bio-cultural diversity conservation, and a sustainable future. Besides, TIES succeeds in representing the knowledge about ecotourism in addition to delineating and depicting the shaped world as a visual semiotic layout that comprises many integrated multi-modal resources

3.2. Procedure

The major aim of this paper is to carry out a multidimensional visual social semiotic analysis of the TIES homepage to explore the representation of the sign "ecotourism". Drawing on the system of the three meta-functions (i.e., ideational, interpersonal, and textual), three interrelated subsections are discussed in the analysis. Each subsection presents an investigation of one of the modules that form a basic unit in the layout of the TIES homepage that has been divided into four reciprocal modules. Consequently, the sign "ecotourism" is investigated in each module from an ideational, interpersonal, and textual perspective. At the ideational level, the TIES homepage discourse on ecotourism and its principles is considered; at the interpersonal level, the sign "ecotourism" is examined as part of the genre of TIES homepage on the basis of the relationship between TIES webpage's producer(s) and its visitors/viewers; at the textual level, the arrangement of the three modes, writing, color, and image, is tackled, explaining how the sign ecotourism has been visually and semiotically communicated through the TIES homepage.

4. Results

Within this section, the findings of a comprehensive analysis of the three connected subsections, exposing the four modules of the TIES homepage, unveil the multifaceted composition of the organization's official website.

### 4.1. The Setout of the First Module of the TIES Layout

The TIES homepage works out properly in representing the concept and the issue of ecotourism as a new, global, discursive, and multi-modal sign that annexes recent environmental issues and primary touristic concerns of entertainment and adventure. Also, the TIES homepage succeeds in defining the social context of the sign "ecotourism": some tourism experts communicate their ideals and principles with laypeople in a multi-modal background. What is enthralling about the TIES homepage is that it consists of various interrelated modes, including layout (base), which is composed of some related small units: image, color, and typography (writing). Moreover, most images, figures, and shapes employed on the TIES homepage are informative as they disclose and give out certain stories about ecotourism or TIES society. Through this discursive integrative design of TIES layout, its producers succeed in communicating directly with the website's visitors and, at the same time, promoting the ideals and the principles of ecotourism as a sign realized ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Moreover, this linear design succeeds in establishing the TIES homepage as a brand that attracts many clients.

A deep look at the TIES homepage mirrors the interrelationship of assorted units or modules that are organized in a specific visual space which is named "layout". The TIES webpage is divided into four primary modules, which are rearranged in a specific linear order. Figure 1 demonstrates the first module, which is placed at the top of the homepage and consists of the organization's logo and some informative captions like "Home", "About us", "Programs", "Membership" and "For Members". There is a small

arrow beside each caption, which refers to many related informative pages. These captions refer to the communicative design of calling viewers and readers. By looking at the left logo positioned at the top part of the homepage, it can be observed that the logo consists of two main participants: the green tree and the green circle. The green tree is the primary participant (actor) from whom nine vectors emanate. These nine vectors are directed to an undetermined goal, which is the visitor or the viewer of the homepage. As a result, there is a non-transactional narrative process through which nature is closely viewed in ensembles with human beings. Furthermore, the green circle is depicted as an actor or a superordinate that performs an explicative symbolic process exemplifying our planet Earth. The interrelation between the tree and the planet denotes the primary intent of TIES: "you, as a human being, have to preserve our planet", in other words, "it is your responsibility to keep green life on a green planet". This visual-verbal copula realizes the identity of TIES at a multi-modal level.

Figure 1
Top Module of the TIES' Homepage
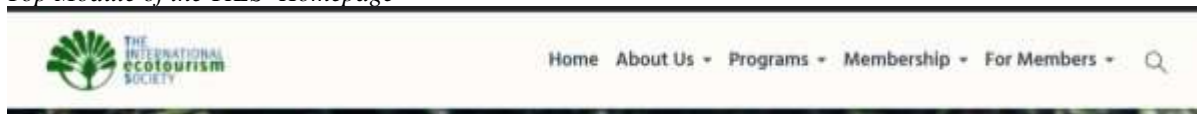
In regard to the interpersonal and the textual genre-specific aspects of this module, modality, perspective, salience, information value, and typography have been genuinely investigated. The title "THE INTERNATIONAL ecotourism SOCIETY", which is placed side by side with the logo, is typographically salient as it is written using blue upper case letters except for the word "ecotourism" which is not capitalized, and at the same time, it takes a different natural color that is "green". This variation captivates the viewer and puts emphasis on the discursive features of the sign "ecotourism".

Moreover, employing bright, saturated green and blue colors communicates the interpersonal meaning of ecotourism, and shows how the TIES homepage addresses viewers with a high modality level of color, thus accepting the TIES' message. Some interactive meanings have been communicated almost through the horizontal alignment of the different titles in the left part. Using frontal or horizontal design indicates a deep involvement with the given information. Besides, clicking on the links, the visitor finds more detailed information in the hyperlinks, and this is another way of expressing significance and salience to the layout. Concerning writing, all captions are nominal; there are no processes, and this implies the significance of participants.

With respect to information value, the organization's logo is placed on the left side, and the hyperlinks are positioned on the right, and this explains the viewer's journey from the known to the unknown. In other words, it is already known that the TIES' logo consists of a tree and a circle, but for more information about the organization's principles, membership, and participation in various activities, the viewer has to move to the right hyperlinks.

4.2. The Formation of the Second Module of the TIES Layout

As Figure 2 represents, the second module of the TIES homepage consists of two staged interrelated images (Figure 2.a and 2.b). It is already known that the primary concern of TIES, as its name suggests, is to tie, attach, associate, and relate human beings to nature. This is clear in Figure 2.a which shows a group of male and female young people who look directly at someone and smile. Ideationally, this is a non-transactional narrative action process in which reactors (young males and females) perform the action of looking and smiling. The use of their limbs as vectors is an invitation to the viewer to join this organization and its "eco-human" activities.

Regarding the interpersonal and textual design, the image offers a medium shot, which indicates a sense of social relation between participants, producers, and viewers. Also, the direct look of the interactive participants indicates mutual relationship and involvement. In relation to perspective, the frontal horizontal view dominates to affirm deep involvement with viewers. Furthermore, Figure 2.a is depicted from a low modality perspective exemplified in black and white colors, in contrast to Figure 2.b, which

is depicted with highly saturated and bright colors. This opposition accords an allusion that human beings' actions cause environmental destruction. So, the low modality in Figure 2.a, which represents fear of human actions, contrasts with the freshness and the beauty of the environment presented in Figure 2.b.

In order to add salience and hook the viewers' attention, the producers of TIES utilized angular writings with bright and sharp white color that contrasts with a detailed grey background. Even more intriguing is that both writing and image are centered on indicating the importance of the displayed event "ecotourism and sustainable tourism awards in 30 categories". This event reflects the importance and the popularity of The International Ecotourism Organization.

Figure 2.a
Human Beings as Part of Nature

Figure 2.b
Representation of Nature with Fascinating Wildlife

In contrast to Figure 2.a, Figure 2.b exemplifies nature with its fascinating wildlife. Ecotourism, as a sign of meaning-making, is like an equation with two components: the first element, viewed in Figure 2.a, is a human being, and the second element in the equation is our environment. So, the second module is built upon a complementary relation between its two parts and this adds significance to the structure of the layout. In Ideational terms, the image viewed in Figure 2.b shows a non-transactional narrative process of a lion (an actor) who contacts his viewers through an indirect vector (eye contact). In Figure 2.a, participants look directly at the viewers, and this contrasts with the lion in Figure 2.b, which looks indirectly at the webpage's visitors. This sharp antithesis explicates the TIES message again "it is your responsibility to keep the environment with its wildlife".

Some interpersonal and textual aspects are realized through the use of gaze, perspective, and modality. The lion (reactor) in the image does not look directly at the webpage's visitors as it aspires to express anger and fear of human beings' destructive actions. However, the image is presented with high modality by using sharp, bright, and illuminated colors. Moreover, using detailed background raises the truthfulness and naturalness of the depicted elements. Typographically, the question "What Is Ecotourism?" is emphasized by utilizing bright white that contrasts with a dark, natural, dense background. What gives a sense of involvement and responsibility is the horizontal angle used to view this image. Here, the lion, despite its fear, hopes to communicate with his fellow human beings. Compositionally, what is general and ideal is placed at the top of the image so that writing mode appears at the top. It sounds like TIES' producers want to lead visitors to gather more details about the concept of ecotourism itself, and that's why writing mode appears at the top.

4.3. The Design of the Third and Fourth Modules of the TIES Layout

The third module in the TIES layout design is divided into two complementary blocks: the first part summarizes information about how to be a member of TIES society, while the second part emphasizes some information about TIES. The two blocks are systematically arranged, and if anyone tries to reverse the order, it will cause confusion and misunderstanding. The salient phrase "Become a Member Today" is typographically focused on as it is written with extremely big upper-case letters. The subtitle, on the other hand, is viewed as small, and it is written in italics in contrast to the angular style of the main title. Moreover, the subtitle utilizes lowercase letters that stand in sharp contrast to the capitalization employed in the main title. Besides, the mixture between action and sensitive verbs "Engage", "Empower", and "Inspire" explicates the core meaning of ecotourism.

From a textual perspective, the phrase "Become a Member Today" is located at the top of the image because it is the "desired" and the "ideal" action. At the bottom of the image, there are two hyperlinks that take the viewer to other related pages for more details, and this raises the salience and the value of the image. The use of curved circles and rectangles reflects the curvy environment with all its elements. Representationally, the circle and the rectangle are viewed as "actors" in a classificational process as they give more details to the viewers about what is mentioned before, for example, "Join Us", "Brand Recognition", "Support Ecotourism", "Connect and Exchange", "Professional Membership", and "Student Membership". Moreover, the classification process here raises the conceptual metaphor "Ecotourism is a Brand", and this triggers more and more meanings related to the sign "ecotourism". This conceptual blending also alludes to the commercial role of the TIES homepage.

Figure 3
The Design of the Third Module of the TIES Homepage
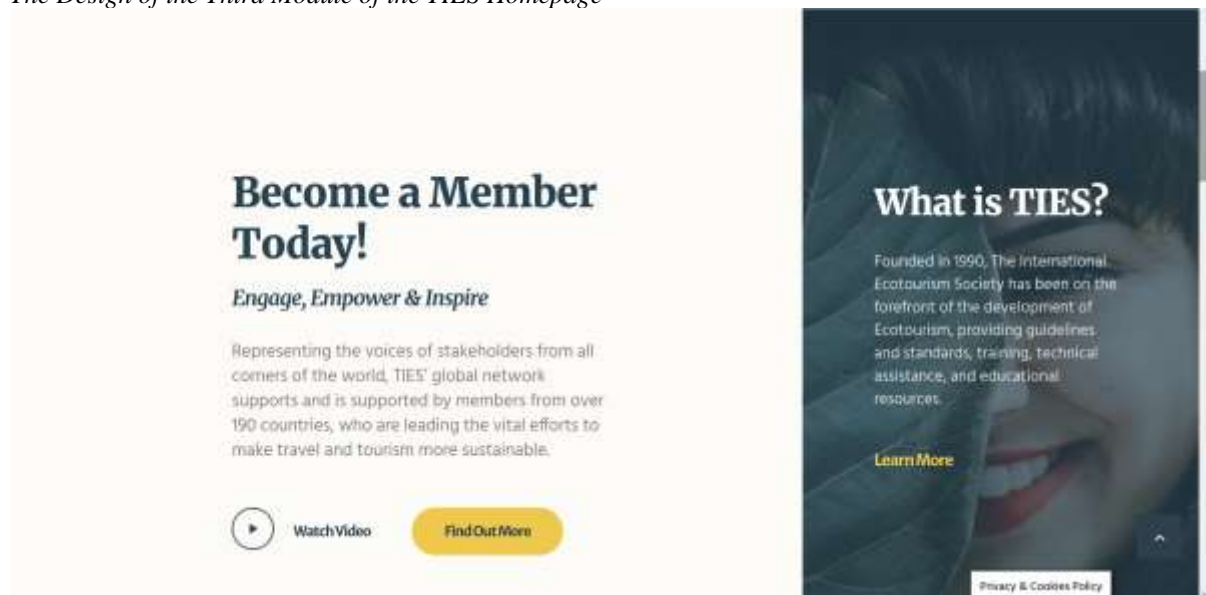
Concerning the right part of the image, it is an amalgamation of visual and verbal semiotic modes. Both types of signs are complementary. The ideational features of this part are viewed in the background photo of a smiley, young female who looks directly at the viewers, so a vector emanates. This non-transactional action process relates the viewer to the layout's producers. Interpersonally, the smiley female is depicted from a close shot, and this motivates intimate relationships with the viewers. What intensifies this relation is the direct gaze, which reflects deep involvement. Moreover, the image is depicted from an eye-sight angle, and this denotes equality and love between the environment and human beings.

Framing, as one aspect of textual meaning, is clear in this image as there is an imaginative separation between nature and human beings, and this means that "it is impossible for human beings to live alone in the environment and vice versa". The half part of the female's face is depicted on the right part of the image, so the message becomes clearer "it is you who can help the environment". Employing the typographical mode adds more density and significance. The title "What Is TIES?" is written in bold with the word "TIES" more significantly. This emphasis inspires viewers to read more about TIES. Besides, using the sharp, illuminated, and bright white to form the previously mentioned question contrasts with the dense, dark background. This opposition motivates the viewer to read more about TIES.

The last module in the homepage's design is located at the bottom of the screen, and it is divided into two parts. On the left is the organization's logo, and on the right, some verbal information is located horizontally to encourage the viewer to attach to the website. Some of this information is mentioned

before on the top module, like "About Us" and the rest, like "Resources", "News", and "Media", is new. These bottoms are represented through using a bold font that enthralls the viewers and attracts their attention. Again, using the curvy rectangle "Subscribe" adds salience and encourages viewers to be a part of TIES society. Likewise, the first module's design is repeated here, and this is another kind of salience. Employing angular shapes like the green circle and the grey rectangle alludes to the advancement of technology, which threatens the ecological system with all its components.

Figure 4
The Bottom Module in the TIES Homepage
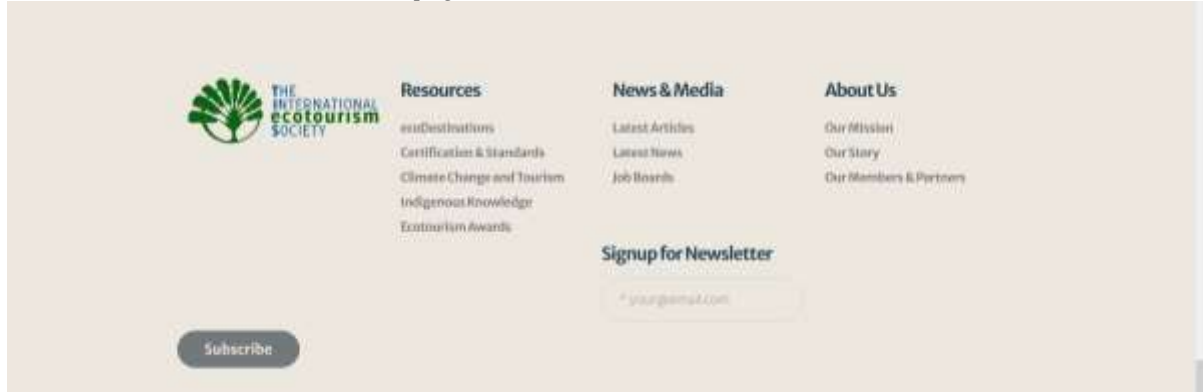
5. Discussion

Based on the theoretical frameworks of genre analysis (Batman, 2015), Layout analysis (Bezemer & Kress, 2015), and image analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the paper principally scrutinizes how the integrated composition of the TIES homepage, featuring its micro units and modules, contributes to the realization of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings associated with the sign "ecotourism" conveyed through the organization's official webpage. Thereupon, the paper seeks to address a primary inquiry: What nuanced multi-modal elements characterize ecotourism, and how does the TIES homepage connect environmental and touristic meanings through these elements? In order to answer the above-mentioned question, this paper presents a multi-modal visual social semiotic analysis of the TIES homepage, which is a discursive multi-modal artifact constructed upon the interplay of different semiotic resources.

The findings of the research show, as in Salama's (2022) investigation of the sign of Covid 19 on the official webpage of WHO, that the TIES homepage's design succeeds in performing three niches: (i) representing the essence of ecotourism and explicating its primary concerns, (ii) creating a mutual relationship between TIES producers, visitors, and viewers and (iii) forming coherence between various semiotic modes. The reciprocity of the three modes, writing, image, and color, has epitomized the TIES' interest in motivating and communicating the sign "ecotourism". For example, the ideals of ecotourism are reflected through the use of shapes (circles and triangles), arrows, colors (the green circles and the blue letters), and writing.

Besides, this deep multi-modal semiotic analysis of the TIES design explicates the ideational, interpersonal, and textual features of ecotourism as a semiotic sign at the genre and mode levels. Ideationally, ecotourism is represented directly through the use of variant figures: the green circle in the logo, which is placed on the left side of the page, and the green tree that complements the symbolic meaning of the logo "you are a part of the environment, so you have to conserve it". This symbolic meaning is affirmed in the second and the third modules by employing non-transactional narrative processes of young males and females in Figure 2.a, the lion in 2.b, and the smiling woman in Figure 3.

Representationally, ecotourism is viewed horizontally, whether on the image level or writing level, and this reflects the main principle of ecotourism, which is involvement and complementation between humans and their environment. Moreover, a sense of equality between TIES viewers and producers has

been ensured. From a textual perspective, ecotourism is depicted as being salient through the use of various interpersonal modes such as high modality, sharp and illuminated colors, dense background, capitalization, color's contrast, and the use of arrows and hyperlinks that relate the primary screen to other related pages for more details. In this sense, the research aligns with Kong (2018) by illustrating that the layout composition of the homepages usually employs various but interconnected modes, considering interpersonal, ideational, and textual meanings.

The integration between the four linear and staged modules reflects the professionality and the efficacy of the TIES layout design and presents the homepage as a discursive, multi-modal digital genre or practice that is completely different from the printed one. In conclusion, the integrated vertical design of the TIES layout succeeds in showing its homepage as an attractive and compelling brand that promotes the ideals of ecotourism. This denotes that TIES has effectively used its online platform to promote and communicate its commitment to ecotourism principles.

Pishghadam et al. (2021) posit the idea that different combinations of various sensory modalities can simultaneously apprehend variant levels of attention and comprehension. Basically, all objects, including webpages, have emotional features that are perceived through our sensory channels (Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2017). Consequently, the identity of an object or a concept is significantly affected by the resulting emotions, shaping how we perceive, interpret, and attribute meaning to personal experiences. Analyzing TIES from an emotioncy point of view discloses that the synthesis of diverse communication modes produces multiple sensory experiences and, at the same time, triggers many allocated cognitive scenarios, such as environmental conservation and earth preservation.

The intensification of this cognitive engagement is boosted by the efficient use of dense and bright colors in all figures, communicating specific emotions and meanings. The employment of green color in Figures 1, 3, and 2.a, for example, conveys feelings of serenity, peace, and harmony between tourists/visitors and the environment. These results align with Kim's (2005) perspective that human emotions are often heavily subservient to visual stimuli and that colors, as a significant visual information resource, influence people's understanding.

Due to the limited availability of studies on the multi-modal linguistic analysis of websites and homepages, further research in this area is compulsory. Furthermore, an extended investigation of official websites belonging to both profit and non-profit organizations associated with ecotourism is essential in order to highlight the differences between them. This will promote a further comprehension of the interrelated integration of different units, which collectively formulate the layout of these webpages that promote the ideals of ecotourism. Ivenz and Blanka (2022) assume that there is a close interconnection between language and culture, believing that these two aspects exert mutual influence. Subsequently, another area for investigation involves examining ecotourism homepages from a multi-modal cultural lens. This involves investigating the potential impact of cultural differences on the structure and design of the layout on both mode level and genre level. Ultimately, an exploration of homepages associated with ecotourism or eco-friendly organizations is imperative. This examination should utilize a sensory-based model, aiming to consider how the use of various sensory modalities contributes to the formulation of indirect sensory experiences related to the concept of ecotourism.

Disclosure Statement

The author claims no conflict of interest.

Funding

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