Representations of China on YouTube:

A Visual Semiotic Analysis of Organic Placemaking Videos

Master's thesis 30 credits

Author: Marcus Gerber

Supervisor: Mia Larson

Abstract

Understanding how China is represented on international social media, such as YouTube, is potentially important for the success of China as a tourist destination. However, a study of how China is represented on YouTube by its independent users has not been done. Given the unique circumstances of how Chinese people are largely banned from using YouTube, it is a site of destination placemaking and discourse that is largely dominated by international visitors and residents. This disparity in power to represent the destination organically is potentially problematic, and thus a social semiotic analysis is done in the following study to illuminate some of the dominant modes, metafunctions, and ideologies of placemaking found in such placemaking practices. Identifying these conventions of representation allowed for eight modes found to common to a placemaking genre of expat performers. Of the 23 videos that had over 10,000 views that were returned from the YouTube search query of "How is China", the vast majority were made by expats. Analyzing the semantics and syntax of the videos lead to an interpretation of the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions of they performed placemaking. This interpretation of these multimodal documents should allow for greater insight into the process of how China is represented and co-constructed on YouTube.

Keywords: China, Visual Semiotics, Multimodality, Placemaking, Tourism Studies

`

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for the Department of Service Management at Lund University, and my professors there. They have been patient with me and have thankfully have given me guidance and time to work on this thesis, and to explore this topic of great personal interest to me. I hope to continue using this knowledge and these skills further in personal and professional projects in the future.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Destination marketing is a central focus of research for tourism studies, including the development of many theoretical concepts to understand how destinations are represented and perceived. Much of this interest has focused around how destination marketing organizations can influence destination image with marketing efforts, such as creating and disseminating brands for destinations (Pike, 2002). The literature has often referred to these advertising efforts as being place making practices (Lew, 2017). However, it has been suggested that DMOs are unable to control the overall representations or perceptions of a destination, but instead could only hope to influence them (Gartner, 1986). Therefore, studies have also analyzed place making that is practiced not by DMOs, but instead by other actors and factors such as tourists and their social media content (Lew, 2017; Munar, 2011). This exploratory study continues the research of how to conceptualize and understand place making practices on social media that do not involve the place making practices of destination marketing organizations.

Place making is a multidisciplinary concept with meanings that differ between between disciplines. Lew (2017) performed a literature review on the concept and its varying definitions, and concluded that the concept could primarily be found in tourism studies in reference to intangible place making, as opposed to the tangible place making conceptualizations that were more commonly used in other disciplines such as urban design. This intangible type of place making in tourism studies was primarily referring to what Lew categorized as "mental images" (p. 456). Under this classification were listed studies that focused upon the influence myths, social media, word of mouth reputation, destination image, news, branding, and more. This is

consistent with Gertner and Kotler's (2002, p. 251) definition of destination image as being "the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about place. Images represent a simplification of a larger number of associations and pieces of information connected to a place".

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argued that Western academia has been historically biased towards language (p.1), and thus suggested a multimodal and social semiotic approach for interpreting documents. More generally they argued that "there has been, in Western culture, a distinct preference for monomodality" (p.1), but that this was problematic as post-industrial communication was increasingly being practiced by the creation and consumption of multimodal content. In response to the perceived shortcomings of an over-reliance on language from linguistics, and on monomodality more generally, Hodge and Kress (1988) developed the study of multimodality. This approach to communication gave priority to other semiotic systems than just language and emphasized that practices of meaning making were fundamentally social practices that always existed within a social context. Furthermore, social semiotics suggests these social contexts can be analyzed by looking at the artifacts of their communicative, social practices. Therefore, Hodge and Kress (1985) developed the method and approach of multimodal discourse analysis for understanding multimodal documents and the social contexts from which they emerged.

The approach and theory of multimodal discourse analysis has been applied to the placemaking performed by Thurlow and Jakowski (2014) who analyzed how the Instagram documents created by tourists at a tourist destination had constructed and remediated the place with their social media content. However, other studies of how tourists perform placemaking with their social media content, have been done specifically in regard to placemaking, but without the use semiotic tools for analysis and interpretation (Baka, 2015, Everett, 2012). Lew (2017) conceptualized these

placemaking studies as belonging to the categories of intangible placemaking, as well as organic placemaking (see Tables 1 & 2). Lew considered organic placemaking to be "often associated with bottom-up, local initiatives that evolve in an incremental manner and are often driven through individual agency" (Lew, 2017, 450), and thus Lew (2017) found the tourist usage of social media to be typically comprised of individuals performing organic placemaking.

Lew (2017) performed a comprehensive literature review on how the term place making had been used within the domain of tourism studies, and suggested that studies of the representations of places, such as those of tourism social media could be called intangible placemaking. Intangible placemaking was categorized by Lew as being primarily responsible for shaping the mental images of these tourist destinations, whereas tangible placemaking was categorized as being responsible for the physical design of places. Also, tourist created content (Munar, 2011) was conceptualized as being an example of organic placemaking, as opposed to planned placemaking, since it was not created by larger institutions, such as destination marketing organizations, and thus was generally considered to be more authentic (Lew, 2017, p. 451). Lew's categories of placemaking are represented as existing on separate tourism placemaking continuums, and while these continuums produce distinct and descriptive categorizations, this study aims to interpret how they can be unified and explained by the theory of social semiotics and implemented by performing a case study of social media placemaking using the method of visual semiotic analysis.

Placemaking China on YouTube

The branding and image construction of China has been traditionally studied as an issue of soft power and tourism promotion that is influenced primarily by the

government (Hollinshead & Hou, 2012; Rong, 2017), and thus what Lew (2017) would likely identify as planned, intangible placemaking. However, the advent of social media and YouTube, has allowed for an unprecedented number of semiotic resources for organic placemaking agents to represent and construct the meaning of China as a destination. By analyzing the visual semiotics of the most viewed videos that result from a YouTube, search query of "how is China", patterns can be found in how YouTubers are practicing the place making discourse of China as a travel destination. Using the semiotic resources that the design of YouTube affords, these YouTubers have gained large enough audiences to suggest that they have a considerable influence and power over the representation of China as a potential travel destination to international audiences. The videos in the data sample had combined view counts of well over one million views, and some of the YouTube channels that produced the videos have hundreds of thousands of subscribers in their community. It can be said that this is a truly global, multimodal place making process that has not yet been studied despite its massive influence on the destination image of China.

YouTube is the social media site of a multimodal discourse that is globally constructing modern, social practices. One of the social realities that this discourse effects is of how places are represented and perceived by people around the world. This social performance of placemaking is not only practiced in language or image, but ensembles of multiple semiotic modes. Therefore, this study aims to examine how these most viewed video contribute to destination discourses by performing a visual semiotic analysis of the intangible placemaking of China on YouTube. Intangible placemaking, as it has been conceptualized as including the influencing of mental images (Lew, 2017), is essentially concerned with signs and meaning making according to social semiotics. The discipline of social semiotics is concerned with how people make meanings (van Leeuwen, 2005), and thus placemaking interpreted as making meanings of places is a social practice that could well be described by a social

semiotic interpretation. In his book, *The Discourse of YouTube: Multimodal Text in a Global Context,* Benson (2017) used the method of multimodal discourse analysis to conceptualize the central modalities that empower and constrain users of YouTube to construct meaning. However, this book focused primarily in its application of interaction between YouTube commenters and the primary authors of video pages. Whereas, this study limits its focus to uncovering the many complexities in the design choices of these authors within these multimodal documents.

Post-industrial communications, Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001) argued, are almost entirely multimodal, as written texts are always embedded within and interacting with other semiotic modes. Thus, the meaning making process of social media sites such as YouTube are unable to be understood without examining how multiple modes dynamically interact (Androutsopoulos, 2013). Therefore, this study conceptualizes multimodal placemaking on YouTube as a site of multiple modes interacting to practice the place making of China's destination image. In addition to identifying the most salient modes of placemaking in the videos, this study attempts to interpret from these modes larger metafunctions of the modes and texts as a whole, which then can be interpreted as expressing certain dominant ideologies and logonomic systems. Using Halliday's (1994) three metafunctions from functional systemic linguistics: the ideational, textual, and interpersonal, the study aims to illuminate how these semiotic resources function as modes of placemaking. Interpreting tourism placemaking in terms of these metafunctions is believed to be a novel theoretical contribution of this study.

Research Questions

Research Question: How is China represented on YouTube by texts of organic placemaking?

Research Question #2: What are the most salient visual modes of representing China in these documents?

Research Question #3: Can any genres be identified in the placemaking discourse of China on YouTube?

Literature Review

This section will seek to contextualize prominent literature related to the main themes of this semiotic analysis, including relevant concepts from semiotics, destination marketing, multimodality, and discourse studies. These concepts will then be used to later inform the methods for answering the research questions of visual semiotic analysis.

Semiotics

In order to prepare the reader for the dense terminology of neologisms from the Semiotics tradition that this analysis borrows, a quick overview of founding theories of Semiotics will be presented, including also an overview of social semiotics and a brief mention of a concept from functional systemic linguistics that is used importantly in the study.

Foundational Semiotic Concepts

This study takes a semiotic approach and thus its most central unit of analysis is that of the sign. It was Ferdinand de Saussure who pioneered this object of study in his *Course on General Linguistics* in which he conceptualized the sign as being made of two parts: the signifier and the signified (Chandler, 2018). This examination of the component parts of the sign, suggested that objects or concepts that are signifieds can be signified by any arbitrary signifier that might fit within a larger linguistic structure of opposing signs. In other words, hot as a concept only makes sense as an opposite of

cold. Derrida and other post-structuralists rejected this binary opposition as being a necessary explanation or description of how signs represent reality. However, while Saussure's study of signs was highly influential it was also widely rejected in time in favor of more complex and dynamic understanding of the sign and the social relationships from which they are created, such as those conceptualizations of social semiotics that Hodge and Kress (1988) suggested.

Hodge and Kress (1988) did not entirely reject Saussure's ideas, but were highly critical of his work and instead favored among the foundational thinkers, the semiotician Charles Sanders Peirces' triadic model of the sign, and the three types of signs: iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs were possible to distinguish he suggested. *Iconic* being a sign that is similar in appearance to that which it is signifying, *indexical* being a sign that is causally related to or pointing to another sign, and finally the symbolic which is a sign that signifies an otherwise unrelated concept. In this sense a symbolic sign is totally arbitrary and conventional in its signifying relationship with the referent. Nonetheless, Hodge and Kress (1988) define social semiotics in opposition to Saussure's semiotics, borrowing from his original framing of the binary possibilities. Their conceptualization of the binaries that Saussure conceptualized can
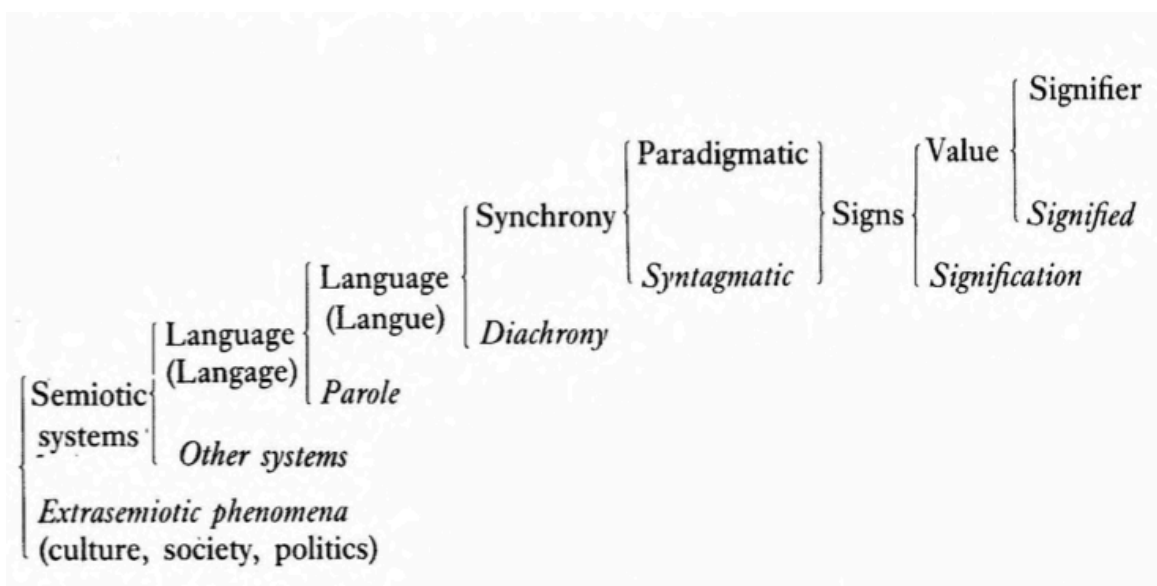
Diagram 1. Hodge & kress' (1988) depiction of the opposing domains of semiotics that Saussure conceptualized.

be seen in in Diagram 1. While Saussure emphasized studies of synchronic language, or language as it exist in a moment of time, Hodge and Kress suggest that social semiotics should instead be focused primarily with diachronic analyses of *Parole,* or the "the study of changes in the system over time" (Hodge & Kress, 1988; p. 18) as opposed to exclusively on language structures.

Saussure's binary oppositions and definitions is useful for understanding many subsequent semiotic theories. One distinction is between syntagmatic relations and paradigmatic relations between signs (Rose, 2017; p. 78). Syntagmatic sign relations are sequentially related to one another, while paradigmatic relations are based on the semantic meanings of each sign in opposition to another. A useful tool developed from these distinctions is that of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic commutation tests. A syntagmatic commutation test involves testing how reordering the signs in a sequence or system could effect the meaning, whereas a syntagmatic commutation test is testing how replacing one sign with another would effect the meaning of the system in question (Chandler, 2017; p. 103).

Post-structuralist Semiotics

While there have been numerous post-structuralist traditions that have defined themselves largely in opposition to Saussure's structures, it is the critique and subsequent approach that Hodge and Kress (1988) developed that this study borrows most heavily from. In this book, they themselves borrow concepts from several past traditions, including the idea of metafunctions from sociolinguist Michael Halliday who created the study of Systemic Functional Linguistics. This linguistic approach is actually highly compatible and aligned in its aims with social semiotics. Describing it in Saussure's terminology, they take a diachronic approach to signs and suggest that

"systemic functional theory assumes a very intimate relationship of continual feedback between instance and system: thus the system may change the system (Halliday, 2003; p. 7). Social semiotics and its diachronic approach to semiotic systems, such as language, shares this dynamic perspective on language as continuously changing.

Social semiotics is also largely interested in what is exterior to the texts, and how the social relations that co-produced a text are evident in the texts (Hodge & Kress, 1988; p. 3). Such codes of larger social relations and contexts can conventionalize certain dominant ideologies where one group is dominating another. Similarly, these dominant ideologies prescribe and proscribe who is allowed to talk and create meaning, which are called logonomic rules and roles. These logonomic systems can be seen by what codes are unmarked and seemingly transparent and natural and those that are marked and thus abnormal (Chandler, 2017; p. 110). These codes and metafunctions of systems that constrain productions and interpretations of texts are what are of ultimate interest in social semiotics, and in this study.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse is, as Benson (2017) argues, interactive by nature and this is based on the foundational assumptions of the traditions of social semiotics and discourse analysis from which it emerged. Therefore, to contextualize multimodal discourse analysis it is important to also discuss discourse analysis and social semiotics. An influential discourse analysis theorist, Potter (1997) suggested that discourse analysis "emphasizes the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse". Discourse has been considered by foundational thinkers of discourse analysis, such as Foucault to be "the way in which a particular set of linguistic categories relating to an object and the ways of depicting it frame the way we comprehend that object" (Bryman, 2012). Potter and Wetherell

(1994) emphasized that discourse analysis was concerned with identifying how resources are used to construct discourse, and also of the interpretative repertoires, which are the "detailed procedures through which versions are constructed and made to look factual" (1994, p. 49). It is this meaning making practice that is suggested to be what placemaking is doing.

In addition to a general understanding of discourse and discourse analysis, are the assumptions of multimodal discourse analysis, which emphasize the ways different semiotic resources are used to meaningfully construct social practices and social realities (Gee, 2012). While interpretive repertoires have been a key feature of traditional discourse analysis studies, a similar idea has been understood more in terms of semiotic ensembles in social semiotics (Kress, 2010). These interpretative repertoires are the templates of genres and rhetoric that are repeatedly used to justify certain social constructions that are so common that they often go unnoticed and unchallenged, and thus it is the job of discourse analysts to uncover these (Potter and Wetherell, 1994). Analyzing how these interpretative repertoires, or semiotic ensembles, frame objects of interest is a core feature of discourse analysis. As Kress (2003) explains, "framing parcels up the conceptual world […] It marks off, but in doing so it establishes, at the same time, the elements which may be joined. 'Without framing, no meaning', we might say" (p. 123-4). Therefore, the semiotic ensembles and framing of semiotic resources are central objects of study while analyzing the documents selected for this case study.

A focus on how the use of semiotic resources make meaning in discourses makes this a topic for the study of semiotics, which is the study of signs and meaning making. These multimodal, insights relate strongly to the discourse on place making that values the meaning construction of places. However, despite this relevance there is very little of the place making literature that has taken a social semiotics perspective or an approach of multimodal discourse analysis. Therefore, it is argued in this paper that

multimodal discourse analysis could be used for tourism studies such as those where it was argued the values and mental images of a destination are constructed by the performances of either the tourists or other stakeholders (Baka, 2017; Altinay et al, 2016).

An example of a tourism study that could be easily be extended by an approach of discourse analysis would be Baka's (2017) article that studied how the UGC of tourists used social media sites as valuing devices, allowing them to perform place making of the destinations online, and in the process shaping the ways that other tourists would perceive and understand the destinations. This, perspective is entirely consistent with a multimodal discourse perspective that would emphasize that this is all happening within and to a discourse of participants interacting through different modes, as in this case with contributing pictures and written Tripadvisor reviews. Also, concepts such as the tourist gaze which can be interpreted as visual modalities of symbolic interaction (2012), could also be analyzed multimodally as also embodying spatial meaning, as gaze is a concept found to be implicated in social relations via facial expressions (van Leeuwen, 2005). Thus, this study aims to use a multimodal discourse analysis of YouTube users who are engaged in the social construction and place making of the destination images via the visual modality. All of its modalities have their own affordances for what signs can be used to make meanings of the destination.

Multimodal Discourse on YouTube

In this case study, visual semiotic analysis is used to interpret how YouTube documents construct the meaning making social practices that created them, as well as how those documents construct the meaning of China as a place for travel. This place making process is described by Lew (2017) as intangible place making which consists of mental images, such as mindscapes and storyscapes. Lew (2017) conceptualizes this

type of intangible place making of mindscapes and storyscapes as including branding, marketing, history, myths, legends, reputations, stories, and other so called mental images. However, this study departs from a perspective that these storyscapes and mindscapes are not best understood as mental images, but instead primarily as artifacts of multimodal discourse and communication.

Discourse is considered by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001: 21) as the "socially situated forms of knowledge about (aspects of) reality that are realized in various semiotic modes of expression". Therefore, in this interpretation the YouTube documents are considered as semiotic modes of expression that communicate a certain ways of knowing and meaning making. While the term *mental image*s might be a useful heuristic to help categorize these so-called intangible elements and examples of place making, this study includes the visual mode of situated knowledge as being only one of many significant modes of communication (Cazden et al, 1996). Thus, the documents are social situated artifacts that communicate visual signs via multiple modes of expression.

In his book *The Discourse of YouTube: Multimodal Text in a Global Context,* Benson (2017) presents a literature review of both past research in multimodal discourse analysis, as well as of YouTube studies, and ultimately synthesizes new approaches to studying YouTube that are taken from these past frameworks of discourse analysis. Benson (2017) summarizes that most of the past research on YouTube had been done in the disciplines and studies of information and technology, media and communication, but that none had yet analyzed the site in terms of multimodal discourse. Therefore, Benson (2017) proposed and outlined a way of conceptualizing YouTube as a series of multimodal texts which would enable researchers to apply a wealth of perspectives and insights from past discourse analysis research on written texts.

The Tourism Place Making Continuum

Destination marketing is The tourism place making continuum as conceptualized by Lew (2017), as seen in Table 1, uses the terminological distinction of *place-making* and *placemaking* to distinguish between the top-down approaches and bottom-up approaches to place making.

Table 1. The tourism place making continuum.

	Place-makings	Mixed place makings	Placemakings
Driver of change	Individuals, local groups, human agency	Collaborative, NGOs/NPOs	Government, developers, socio-political structure
Symbolism	Local or traditional	*Glocalization*	Cosmopolitan, modern, or global
Process of change	Bottom-up, organic and incremental, minor placemaking[1], unintentional worldmaking[2]	Co-management, co-creation, public participation	Top-down, master planned, hyper-neoliberal placemaking[a], intentional worldmaking[b]
Tourists	Alternative tourists	Specialty tourists	Mass tourists
Ownership and accessibility	Local owners, effort to visit, inaccessible	Locals and outsiders	Outsider owners, easy to visit, accessible
Security	Risk, uncertainty, surprise, escape	Different	Safe, known, predictable, familiar
Sought experiences	Novelty, exotic, unique, individual	Interesting	Recreation, leisure, common, mass
Social space	Back region	Back and front regions	Front region
Authenticity	Objective authenticity, real, sense of place, vernacular	Constructed authenticity, staged	Inauthentic, contrived, fantasy, *disneyfication*, simulacra, placelessness
Transformation	Slow change, path dependent	Moderate change, path divergent	Rapid change, high efficiency, path creation
Development stage (TALC)	Discovery, exploration	Involvement, development	Consolidation
Capacity	Small/low capacity	Medium capacity	Large/high capacity
Guiding	Unguided, tourism incognita	Self-guided	Guided, tourism cognita
Market orientation	Local directed, craft tourism	Regional and national directed	International directed, industrial tourism
Experience	Existential, experimental	Experiential	Recreational, diversionary
Semiotics	Sight/site/place involvement, recognition, and orientation, self-constructed and personal narratives	Mixed semiotics and engagement, place naming	Marker involvement, brand or theme oriented, sight sacralization, socially constructed, metanarratives
Fame	Unknown, unimportant	Regional importance	Famous, important

⟵━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━⟶

For the sake of clarity, an added adjective will always be used in this thesis to clarify which type of place making is being referred to. In between these two extremes, there also exist mixtures of both kinds of place making. However, this basic dichotomy between extreme forms serves as a useful organizing heuristic that allows for particular studies, places, and practices of place making to be described and compared within a coherent theoretical framework.

The distinction between the two types of place-making and place making is an academic abstractions from tourism studies that is intended to reflect the values and distinctions that tourists regularly make between tourist destinations in ordinary language. For example, the organic type of place-making refers to the places that are made incrementally, often without tourism development specifically in mind. These

places are generally considered by tourists to be authentic, local, and unique, appealing to the adventurous who want unguided exploration. Research finds that tourists visiting these places generally feel as if they are discovering a back-stage region that has not been designed for tourists, but instead has grown organically from the individuals and communities living there (Lew, 2017 & Maccannell, 1973). On the other hand, there are destinations that have been made by DMOs and developers who carefully construct the brand and design of a place that guide a target demographic of mass tourists to interpret the destination a certain way. which often gives the impression of being relatively inauthentic, as they are overtly front-stage regions built for display. However, Bosman and Dredge (2011) argue that the ideal tourist destinations result from a mixture of both organic place-making and planned place making.

The second place making dichotomy that Lew (2017) outlined was between the tangible forms of place making and the intangible forms is visualized in Table 2.

Table 2. Tangibility scale and tools of place making.

Tangible Physical design (landscapes and builtscapes)	Mixed People practices (ethnoscapes and peoplescapes)	Intangible Mental image (mindscapes and storyscapes)
Street furniture	Festivals and special events	Branding, marketing, advertising and public relations
Sidewalk, street width and pavement	Street life and local dress	History and heritage: famous people and events
Building architecture, height and facades	Type of shops and products for sale	Myths: fairy tales, legends, fiction novels
Plants and greenery	Foods and drinks	Social media
Building color, art and signage themes	Aural (sound) and olfactory sensations (smell)	Word of mouth reputation
Bikeways and parking	Shop advertisements	Movie and entertainment tourism
Open space: parks and plazas	Formal and informal entertainment	News stories
Public art and monuments		

An example of planned place-making was mentioned above, where governments might be involved in designing urban spaces to be more attractive to tourists or residents, but this physical type of place making can also be performed organically as the development of homes and communities are privately and not done for the purpose of mass tourism. However, tangible place making is not the primary focus of this study, but is necessary to mention for contextualizing the term and its various uses within

tourism studies. Once again, examples of tangible place making include the physical design elements of landscapes and urban areas. Whereas, examples of intangible place making involve the mental images, mindscapes, and storyscapes that are constructed about a place. Furthermore, it is an increasing share of the intangible type of place making that is being performed on social media, both by individual users (Munar, 2011; Baka; 2014), as well as by destination marketing organizations (Pike, Murdy, & Lings,). It is between these two types of intangible place making that the place making practices of expat youtubers and their multimodal communications can most likely be labeled.

Answering how expat communication on social media should be categorized on Lew's (2017) tourism place making continuum requires further description of the features of both types of place making. To reiterate and expand on organic place-making, this is performed primarily by local individuals who have agency in how they perform their place-making. Research on organic place-making has increasingly focused on examples from social media UGC with both mono modal studies (Baka, 2014), as well as multimodal studies (Thurlow & Jakowski, 2014). Baka (2014) uses the language of performativity and interprets the use of TripAdvisor as a valuing device that allows users to perform and construct multiple identities of places.

While Baka (2014) did not analyze this place-making process in terms of discourse, Thurlow & Jakowski (2014) did just that, analyzing how tourists use multiple modes of communication to perform their mental imaginations and actively shape the reality of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. In this study, Thurlow and Jakowski (2017) focused primarily on the verbal and gestural modalities of communication of tourist pictures on Instagram of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and the ways in which this communication was an act of place making. The researchers presented this process in terms of how tourists mediate and remediate the representations of these destinations and thus are constantly engaged in shaping and making these destinations with their

social media performances. The analyses of these intangible types of place-making generally depart from a weak or strong social constructionist perspective that seemingly value the physical construction of a place equally as the material construction of it, suggesting that without learned interpretations, material realities of a place would have no particular meaning or value.

The Tourist Gaze and Destination Image

Lew (2017) discussed how tourist performances of place making on social media had not yet been adequately studied or conceptualized. However, examples of such research do exist, albeit often without using the terminology of place making. For example, Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) studied how tourists sharing videos online created mental pleasure and narrative transportation by sharing and consuming travel videos, which mediated their tourist gaze positively. John Urry (1990) coined this influential term the tourist gaze, which describes the ways in which the expectations and perceptions of tourists transform the places that they visit, as they expect the destinations to perform for them in certain ways. Urry and Larsen (2011) later revisited this pillar concept in tourism studies to address how this gaze was being shaped increasingly by not only tangible elements, but also mediated representations online.

Beside the tourist gaze, another foundational concept from tourism studies that could be similarly categorized as belonging to visual modalities of communication is that of destination image. Considerable research has been done in destination marketing research about how this destination image can be influenced by destination marketing organizations, often analyzing their place making efforts to change and improve these attitudes and beliefs about destinations (Gertner & Kotler, 2002;

Nadeau et al, 2008). Munar (2011), however, found that the social media usage of tourists rarely engaged in the destination branding elements that the destination marketing organizations are generally concerned with planning and constructing. Such results suggest that greater focus be placed on the social media content that Lew (2017) would label as organic, and the influence that they have on destination image and discourse.

Destination branding efforts had been generally considered to be major influences of destination image (Pike, 2015), but Munar's (2011) findings that tourist created content rarely reflected or referenced these destinations brands suggested a lack of hegemony on the destination discourse. Instead, they depicted a different destination image that was perhaps even more powerful in influencing destination image. This conceptualization of tourist created content was developed as an extension of the research of Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent (2007) who distinguished user generated content (UGC) from user created content (UCC) with UCC having more complexity and creativity to its construction than the reductionistic generation of UGC. Thus, tourist created content (TCC) was more a more applicable term to describe what Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) found to be social media content that often involved the construction of complex narratives that reflected and created rich mental experiences and representations. UCC could also be argued to be a more descriptive term from a social semiotic perspective, as from this perspective all communicative actions are considered to be deliberate and designed with specific intentions (Kress, 2010).

Now that a review of both the specific terminology of this study and of foundational concepts and theories, the study itself and how it was theoretically constructed and practically conducted can be presented.

Methodology

The previous chapter framed the conceptualization of intangible place making on social media as being potentially enriched by a social semiotic analysis. Thus, the purpose of this methodology section outlines how just such an analysis could be performed more generally, and then the specific application of this research method for this case study is detailed. This methodology chapter will be organized by first looking at the fundamental, research paradigm of this multimodal approach, followed by a section that detail the research design of performing this visual semiotic analysis. The penultimate section covers the data collection and analysis for this study. Finally, a section on the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, as well as research limitations will be presented to demonstrate epistemic integrity and reflexivity.

Research Paradigm

To understand this case of intangible place making on YouTube, this qualitative research study departs mainly from the social semiotic tradition. This method of document analysis is both a specific method, as well as a more general theoretical approach that includes specific ontological and epistemic assumptions (Jorgensen & Philliips, 2002). The basis of this social semiotic approach to visual analysis is generally an ontological and epistemological paradigm of social constructionism (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007: Lemke, 2017). However, in contrast to structuralist semiotic approaches, social semiotics is not as socially deterministic (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Therefore, the documents and modes in this study will be interpreted as constructing, and as being constructed by local social practices that are specifically related to them.

This social semiotic approach to visual analysis emphasizes the role that social practices have in creating meaning (Chandler, 2017). Thus, social semiotics includes tools for analyzing how social practices co-produce documents, such as discourse multimodal discourse analysis that allows for an interpretation of greater agency over a more dynamic social practices and meaning making than structural semiotics. Hodge and Kress (1988) described the process of meaning making and interpretation as that of semiology, and developed this conceptualization as being a dynamic process that is not necessarily governed by pre-existing social structure or cultural codes. Therefore, this study adopts the social semiotic tools of multimodal discourse analysis that Hodge and Kress (1988) pioneered in the study of these documents.

This means that the place making performances described in the documents are interpreted as being local, social practices of meaning making that do not necessarily reflect or construct universal structures, causes, or effects. This interpretation of the limits of this epistemological research is in line with the ontological position of social constructionism, which Jewitt et al (2016) explained as being "associated with the genre approach that began in the 1980s, [which] views texts as representing socialized discourse conventions" (p. 74). They continue to explain that this:

> "social semiotic analysis involves intensive engagement with artefacts. It views artefacts as a semiotic material residue of a sign maker's interests mediated through the environment the sign was made in. It sets out to examine the social world as it is represented in artefacts." (Jewitt et al, 2016, pg. 74).

Finally, Jewitt et al (2016) summarize this connection of social constructionism to the limited methods chosen in this study by saying that despite interviews being beneficial, "access to information about the process of producing the artefact is not a prerequisite for a social semiotic analysis. Indeed frequently texts are analysed without having interviewed or observed the text maker" (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2016, p. 74). Therefore, this research paradigm is understood to afford the chosen qualitative research method.

Research Design

In further detail, the specific modes afforded by the medium express meaning via different modules within the social artifacts that comprise YouTube pages. It is Benson's (2017) method of breaking down the web page for analysis, which is inspired by Kress (2010), that is used in this research design. Ten distinct YouTube pages, and the signs on them that are authored by the video creators, are the documents that are researched and analyzed in this study. Each of these ten pages are what Benson (2017) refers to as the video pages of YouTube, or in other words the webpages where the videos are viewable. Each video page, however, does not only contain the video itself, but also a great deal of other signs separated into different modules.

Benson (2017) describes the design layout of video pages on the website as each consisting of a video module, which the video creator controls and authors. This author, or video creator, also has control over distributing written content on the title module, the description box module, the profile name module, and finally the author can also author meaning with the profile picture module. However, the rest of the modules are basically beyond, direct control of the video creator, and are instead controlled by advertisers, the platform itself, the audience, and other authors. By analyzing the signs authored in these different modules by the video creators on these documents, the practice of how meaning and place are made within a particular genre is discussed.

Data Collection

Before beginning the data analysis, filtering which video pages to analyze was necessary. Therefore, a data collection protocol was established which was implemented by using both search filters provided by the search function of the

YouTube website, as well as manual filtering done by the researcher to further select the specifically relevant video pages that were relevant to the research question. Before using the search function of YouTube, cookies and cache were cleared and researcher checked that no account were logged into YouTube, which might alter the search results that the algorithm recommended. Then, in the search bar module of the main YouTube page, the search query of "How is China?" was entered and then run. This produced a list of results of at least 100 videos. Nowhere was it possible, as a user, to see how many results were found in total by the website, so it was not possible for the researcher to see how many such, relevant videos existed on YouTube.

Next, the *view count* filter of YouTube was added to display the most viewed video first at the top and then in descending, ordinal order according to view count from there. These search results were then manually checked to see if these were videos created by independent YouTube video creators, or not. Only the channels with a clear, independent video creator were selected, and channels where it was unclear which individual, or individuals, were speaking and creating the content were omitted. Videos from traditional media sources, such as news websites, Destination Marketing Organizations, or from channels run by groups without credits to detail who was involved, were omitted because these did not exemplify the organic type of placemaking that was of interest in this study. Then it was only the search results for "How is China?" that had had over a minimum of 10,000 views that were selected as the sample for this study. This search query was in English and thus did not reveal the full amount of videos on YouTube about this topic, but this is a limitation that was intended, as certain meaningful place making implications can be discussed about this particular interest community which communicates in this language with similar languages of interpretative repertoires as well.

There was a perhaps somewhat reductionistic assumption that there was a causal relationship between the most viewed videos as having the most influence in regard to the destination discourse and thus the most relevant to study. This was, however, based on studies of influence that focused primarily on the effect of such influencer content, and defined levels of social media influence in largely quantitative terms of reach within social networks, such as YouTube (Dijck, 2013). Also, it was considered to be a random way to select videos about this topic that were produced by this interest community. The final search results and video page selections were done on Nov 1st, 2019, so that a synchronic snapshot of how the genre had diachronically evolved to this point could be created. From this analysis, how China has been represented on YouTube should be able to interpreted.

Data Analysis

To assist in the analysis and become familiarized with the content within the documents, an initial stage of Erickson (1986) is careful to remind those doing discourse analysis that "transcription is shaped by transcriber's analytical and rhetorical interests. It does not precede analysis – it is part of it" (p. 150). At best the transcription and the proceeding analysis could hope to, as Ochs (1979) put it "through a re-configuration of modes the researcher gives meaning to the world, drawing attention to some elements and backgrounding others" (p.61), and thus the process of translation, or transduction (Kress, 1997) from the original modes of the content to as it is represented in the study is chosen and designed to make meaning that is relevant to answering the research question. Furthermore, semioticians should be reflexive and humble about its interpretation of the signs to avoid taking the position of an "elite interpreter" (Chandler, 2017; p. 208) who understands and sees the truths that others can not.

A method that was found to be most beneficial for the beginning stage of analyzing the visual modes of meaning making in these documents was that of adding all the videos to one timeline in a video editing application, and then adding fields for describing the semiotic resources found in each of the primary modalities that were interest in this study. After several viewings the videos were sped up by twice the speed to save time in repeated viewings and analyses. This resulted in a holistic experience of analyzing how the multiple modes were used differently between videos, and with how they interacted together within each video.

After this initial stage, coding each shot with the salient visual codes was performed. Then, deeper generalities about the patterns between the modes were revealed by further analyses and levels of abstractions, which were interpreted with the theories of social semiotics as being different strata of semiosis. The order of these strata of semiotic resources in social semiotics were conceptualized as being signs<ensembles<modes<metafunctions<genre<discourse<logonomic systems<ideologies based on the researcher's notes of prominent texts and theorists in the field of social semiotics and multimodality (Kress, 1997; 2003; 2010, Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2005). After considerable exploration and experimentation, strata were identified to contextualize the genre of expatriate placemaking on YouTube about China as a destination, and its distinguishing patterns of semiosis. Identifying the metafunctions of the modes, the dominant ideologies coded in the texts, and the logonomic systems which would govern the social semiotic production and reception of these texts was the ultimate level of analysis that would allow for a genre to be identified and defined.

Role of the researcher, Ethical Considerations, and Research limitations

The researcher in this study has been a member of this interpretive community for almost a decade and this necessarily influences the interpretations of the texts

presented in this study. This should aid the interpreter in recognizing the many intertextual references and conventions that exist within the visual signs of the texts. The goal is not to reach an impartial analysis, but instead to justify and demonstrate how a particular interpretation was reached. This text is in dialogue with those that are are being studied and remakes them through the act of interpretation and representation. As Jewitt, Bezemer, and O'Halloran (2016) explained about the production and interpretation of signs:

> "Both the producer and the remaker of a sign are shaped by their social, cultural, political and technological environments (which in our global digital world can, of course, be multiple). Recognizing the agency of the sign maker and their (implicit or explicit) intentionality is central to a social semiotic approach"

In other words this reflexivity of subjectivity in interpretation is particularly essential for any social semiotic analysis, such as the one in this study. Therefore, the language chosen to describe the findings and conclusions of this study are not framed with authoritative rhetoric as being representations of absolute truth despite the efforts made to ensure impartiality.

Although the researcher was potentially biased towards certain interpretations of the community, Kress (2010) articulates how this could also be of benefit in studying the genre in question, as he reflects on how

> "the more pronounced the cultural differences, the greater are the differences in the resources of representation and in the practices of their use. This means that in theorizing and writing about communication, I can talk with some confidence about the few cultures that I know reasonably well. Where my knowledge becomes vague or more general, I can only talk vaguely and generally" (Kress, 2010, p. 8).

Warschauer & Grimes (2007) explain also how not only is being a member of a culture valuable in interpreting documents produced from its discourses, but also that

being in the specific audience of the content is preferable "authorship involves not only writing for an audience but also, in essence, joining an audience by entering into a community of practice and acquiring its norms of discourse competence" and that "an audience is thus not only a set of meaning-making interpreters but also rather socialized members of a discourse community" (2007, p.4). Therefore, the fact that the researcher in this case is both author and interpreter and member of the interpretive community means that there is a potential advantage for interpreting and identifying how meaning is made in this genre of discourse.

Similar to other studies of public discourse documents and individuals, permission or forms of consent were regrettably not obtained. However, Koh (2016) explained that in their case "the authors did not consider it necessary to seek consent from the tutors or tutorial companies because the tutorial advertisements are 'essentially everyday texts seen everywhere in Hong Kong'" (p. 197). Similar logic was applied in this study, as the fact that the videos were produced and distributed to YouTube by the content creators themselves made the researcher believe that the ethical considerations of analyzing them were fewer and less severe, as opposed to if the documents had not demonstrated clear agency in the public distribution of the documents.

With this background of how

Findings and Analysis

The findings section will demonstrate the analysis of identifying and interpreting eight distinct modes involved in the semiotic placemaking of these videos. Halliday's (1994) three metafunctions were used as a basis for systematically analyzing the texts and identifying their modes of semiosis. The identification of these modes as being particularly salient was based on a close reading of these and other texts that belong to this discourse community. Within this data sample the videos were analyzed in the order of their chronological syntax to maximize coherence of the expressed interpretation. The eight modes were then divided between three acts that could be found in the generic narrative structures of these videos. To be clear, "generic" was not intended to be used pejoratively in this analysis, but instead was used to refer to how tokens of these modes could be seen as belonging to a certain type of video.

Generic Visual Modes of First Narrative Act

The beginning of these videos share generic modes of how the video producers introduce themselves, the topic, and the video. Halliday (1994) outlined three metafunctions that each mode necessarily shared, and these modes of introduction found in the first narrative act serve all three. At the beginning they introduce themselves thus serving the interpersonal metafunction, introduce the topic thus serving the ideational metafunction, and introduce the video thurs serving the textual metafunction. These modes are explained in further detail below.

Mode 1: Attentive and Positive Greeting

The majority of the videos in this data sample contain a mode of introducing the video by displaying attention to the audience and a positive affect with their facial

Figure 1: First shots of the videos where designers give a personal introduction with positive affect.

expression and gestures. While, each does not give a full smile the expression is always more affectively positive than neutral or negative. See below tokens of when this mode of introduction was used.

Each of these are images from the first shots of videos from the data sample. Furthermore, they share many similar modes of communication, but their gesture in each will be analyzed first. Gestures shared by each of these shots is that each of them look at the camera attentively, and to varying degrees express a positive

affect with their facial and bodily expressions. The similarity in the beginning of each of these videos suggests that they could be categorized as belonging to a shared genre.

Mode 2: Close and Central Framing

Another salient and meaningful mode of semiosis that can be seen in *Figure 1* is that the producers design the framing with themselves at the center of the shots. This means that the focus of attention is unmistakably themselves. Hasan (1996; p. 41-42) categorized 'focus' as being one of three obligatory elements of generic advertisement structure, the other two being 'capture' and 'justification'. Cheong et al (2004, p. 165) then later adopted this generic structure and modified 'focus' to be 'Locus of Attention', and classified as the lead visual component in advertisements. As Theo van Leeuwen (2005) also suggested, this framing is so semiotically significant because it gives salience to what is important and meaningful in an image. With a quick commutation test, or substitution of signs, it can be understood how the central framing of the presenters is significant.

A brief paradigmatic commutation test of this sign of central framing of the presenter, reveals that when replacing either the framing of them with another object of attention entirely or when moving them out of the center and to the side, then they are no longer explicitly the focus. Instead another person or object might become the center of attention or share equal attention, and this would suggest a lesser role for them in the production and presentation of the topic and meaning of the video. This quick imagining of what other meaning would arise by another framing of them, or focusing on something else entirely, helps demonstrate how this mode is a component common to a shared genre.

Generic Modes of Branded Beginnings

The following two modes are found in the beginning and functions as a further way of introducing the video, but they also by connecting the video intertextually to other videos that they have made. Further functions and significations are detailed below.

Mode 3: Branded Introduction Sequence

In *Figure 3,* the sequence of shots from a branded introduction type of sequence that is found in videos by several of the video producers. Other videos from the sample, such as the videos by Laowhy86, DennisBunnik Travels, Lauren Without Fear, and The Nomadic Professor also have similar sequences that follow them introducing themselves in the beginning.

Figure 2: Shots from Serpentza's branded introduction sequence in the video "Is China Really Safe?"

Such introduction sequences serve to code two potential meanings. One is an intertextual reference to other videos that they have produced. This sequence being placed at the beginning of each of their videos frames each of them in an intertextual relation with the other. This textual metafunction of this mode gives the particular video context within the other texts of the producer's YouTube channel. Secondly, the sequence also functions as an intertextual code by often demonstrating some of the

most used shots from their videos. These brief shots act as metonymic symbols for what can be seen being signified throughout videos on their channel. Finally, these sequences intratextually function syntagmatically by generally preceding the next mode, which is that of displaying a brand logo or name of theirs.

Mode 4: Brand Logo or Name

Each of the shots below contain a brand logo that contains the name of their channel. The variety in modal complexity of these logos and signs of their brand are large, but nonetheless each shot shares this symbol of their channel and personal brand as it is sometimes called in social media marketing (Plume, Dwivedi, & Slade, 2017). Other variations can be seen in the shots below in Figure 3:
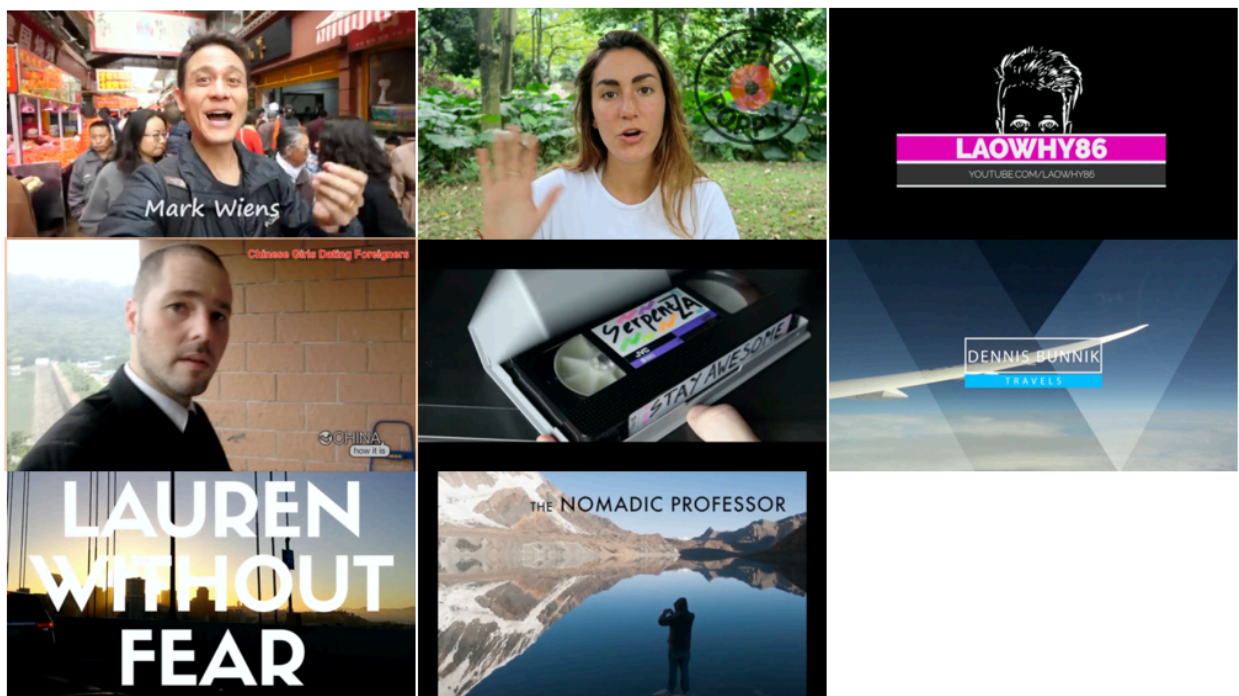

Figure 3. Concluding Shot of Branded Introduction Sequence

These logo or brand name signs can be interpreted as symbolic of their professionalism as YouTube producers. Within this code of professionalism, as Stuart Hall (1978) referred these signs, there are many other connotations and codes that can be positively inferred about their character and content, such as dedication, seriousness, and skilled production to name just a few. Hall (1978) referred to a similar 'professional code' in a semiotic analysis of how television news broadcasts were constructed. In the context of television news production, Hall argues that, "the particular choice of presentational occasions and formats, the selection of personnel, the choice of images, the staging" encode "such apparently neutral-technical questions as visual quality, news and presentational values, televisual quality, professionalism and so on" (Hall, 1980; p. 136).

The Central Act of A Generic Placemaking Narrative

The majority of the generic video's duration is found in the central act, and in this act the following modes are interpreted to be particularly salient and significant for the genres as they will be defined. These modes are found to serve the three primary metafunctions of placemaking.

Mode 5: Walking and Talking in Authentic Locations

Perhaps the most distinct and salient semiotic resource shared throughout many of the videos is that they include the producers traversing everyday locations. This visual mode serves the interpersonal metafunction by suggesting that these are not tourists who only visit staged tourist locations (Maccannel, 1973), but instead are

travelers who see the real, authentic China. A small sample of shots can be seen below in Figure 4.
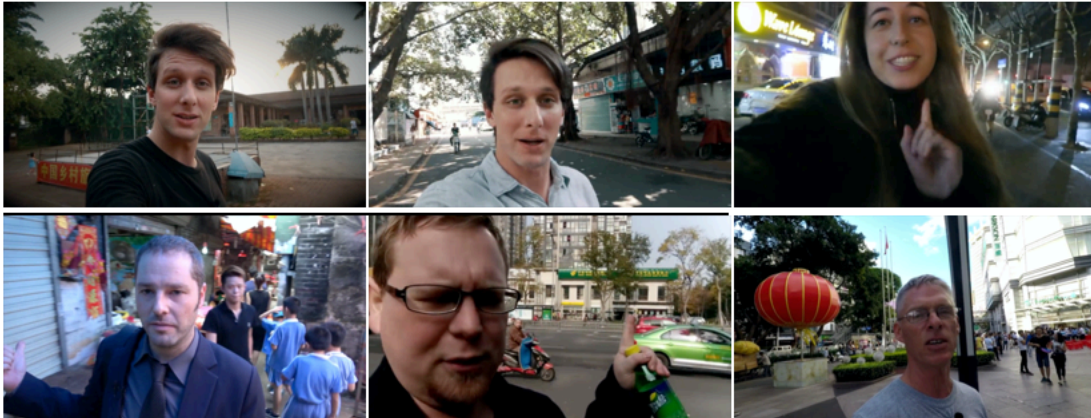

Figure 4. Shots of performers walking and talking in everyday, authentic locales

These shots are from three different videos by three different channels, but this mode is present throughout nearly each of the videos in the data sampled. The exceptions were videos that would likely not belong to a shared genre that is emerging from the findings and analysis, which is that of the organic expat placemaking genre. For the ideational metafunction, this mode establishes the signified objects that are denoted in the videos. For the textual metafunction, it is often is a central framing device of where they are when they are talking, acting as the stage for their performance and narration. Finally, this mode serves the interpersonal metafunction by showing the authentic and the close proximity of their relationship to the local place and people. This final metafunction of the mode particularly allows them to assert a dominant ideology in which they are particularly capable to take the role of mediating the place for the audience.

Mode 5: Pointing at place

As the expat performers walk through the everyday locations, they often point at things that they pass. Examples of this mode can be seen below in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Expats pointing at everyday locations

These semiotic acts of pointing at things once again serve all three metafunctions. Ideationally, them pointing points out the object of focus. Secondly, this mode functions textually by giving greater context to how they as a sign are interacting with the other signs in the shot. Finally, the mode functions interpersonally by affording them the role of presenter, intermediary, or director and designer of this representational process of placemaking. This gesture of suggests that they have the are placemaking agents who are confident to exert a dominant ideology in their placemaking performances and representations. Encoded in this sign is the dominant ideology that gives them the logonomic role of powerful placemaking agents.

Mode 6: Point of View (POV) Shots of Place

Similar to the previous mode of pointing at the place, this mode functions as an indexical sign, in Peirce's terminology, as the POV angle suggests that the shot being seen is from the perspective of the producer. Compared with a stable shot of an environment, which gives a seemingly more objective perspective, this mode

symbolizes and highlights the subjective ontology of the signifying shot. Examples of this generic shot can be seen below in Figure 6.
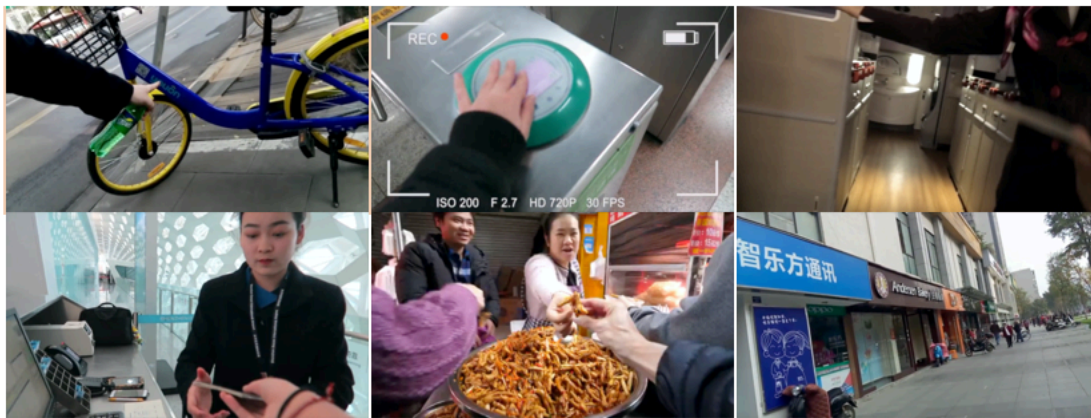

Figure 6. Shots from a POV angle

The POV perspective functions similarly to the gestural mode of pointing at things, as both index a marked, subjective perspective. The POV mode can code the ideational metafunction of how the experience and logic of the narrative situation is being perceived. Intratextually, this shot is often syntagmatically preceded or proceeded by the previously mentioned mode of them walking and talking about the local locale surrounding them. Interpersonally, this perspective and the frequent shakiness of it, remind the audience that the producer is in control of this signification process and it is their interpretation and perspective through which the place is being made. In other words, this mode positions them as having power over both the place signified and the audience who are only reinterpreting the producer's representation.

The Final Act

In the final act of the narratives, the generic structure of the videos contains two more salient modes: the intertextual signoff, as well as the request for interaction and support.

Mode 7: The Intertextual Signoff

The intertextual signoff can take multiple signifying forms. One can be the usage of a brand logo again to frame the ending of the video, another can be an intertextually familiar hand gesture signifying a goodbye, or another can be a written text saying making an intertextual reference to other videos by them. These signs are shown below in Figure 7.
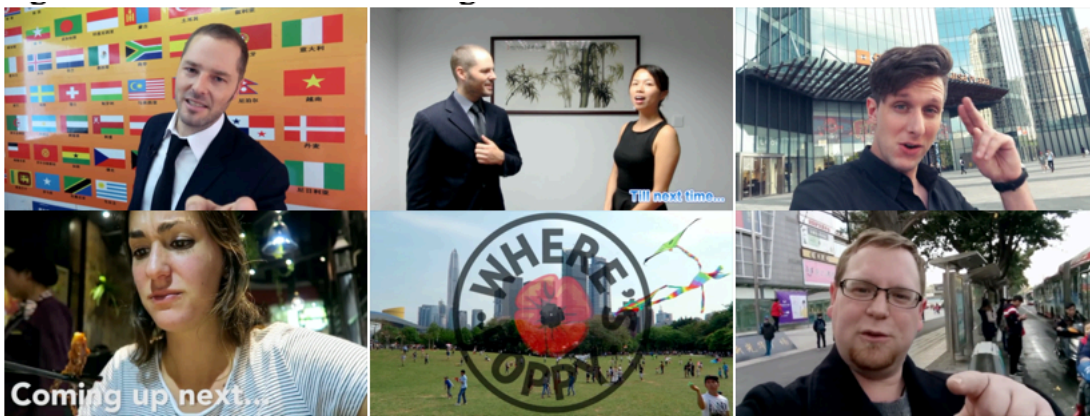

Figure 7. Various forms of the Intertextual Signoff

This mode of ending the video with a coded reference to other videos by the producer will mostly be seen and understood as such by members of the community that follows these presenters. Some forms of this mode are more explicitly referencing other videos in the channel than others, such as the logos and the text overlays that reference something more that is to come after the end of the video.

Mode 8: Request for Interaction and Support

The request for support can be seen in shots where the audience are being encouraged to become a Patreon members, as well as demonstrations of other encouraged modes of interaction. These shots can be seen in Figure 8.
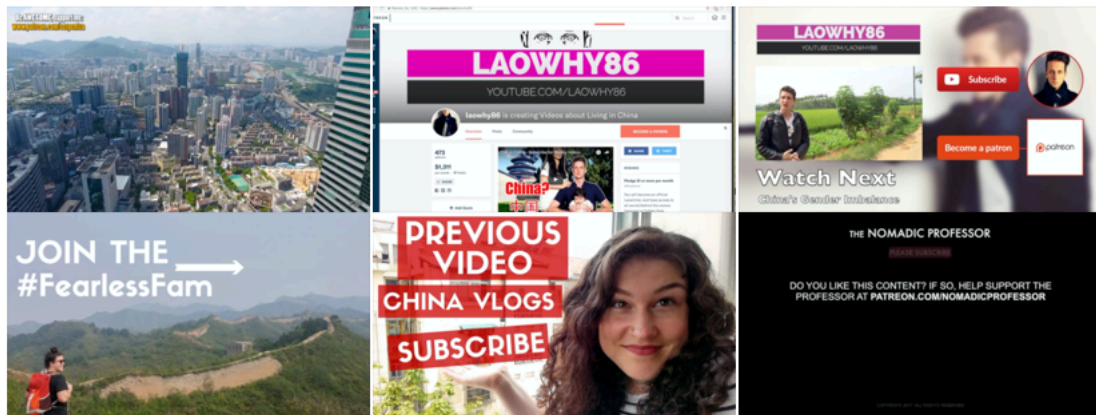

Figure 8. Requested Modes of Interaction and Support from Audience.

This final mode is particularly demonstrative of the material and social conditions from which these videos are produced. The video producers and the videos themselves are only parts of larger social communities that share, empower, and co-produce these texts, and this mode functions to make this interpersonal, intertextual, and ideational reality explicit. Furthermore, these shots, or clauses, often take on an imperative tone where the audience is told to join or support the primary text producer.

Discussion and Summary

Placemaking Modes and Metafunctions

By analyzing how each of the modes have functioned within these texts it has been possible to find certain similarities in their metafunctions and meaning. These multimodal texts have been designed in such a way that a coherence between modes is able to seen and understood by the audience of interpreters. The modes have then been decoded based upon an interpretation of how the salient signs in the text serve the three metafunctions that Halliday (1994) proposed as being necessary for the identification of a mode. Each of these modes communicate textually, ideationally, and interpersonally. Furthermore, these modes interact to construct and signify the place of China, and thus are modes of placemaking on YouTube. However, the production and performance of placemaking in this context is found to be a multimodal process that does not emerge from one mode, but instead from eight particularly salient modes that all interact within a visually coherent narrative. By interpreting how the texts function multimodally within an ideational, textual, and interpersonal discourse community, it can be seen that there is a placemaking community and social co-production of these placemaking artefacts.

The ideational metafunctioning of these texts can collectively be seen as generically signifying certain objects of the place, such as everyday scenes. These denotations of the environment in which the videos are located also carry with them ideational connotations, as everyday streets are interpreted as being constructed in opposition to famous tourist locations that might be typically found in tourist videos of visiting China. These local locales are understood as being codes for authentic places that demonstrate a closer relationship between the performer and the location. The

43

modes with which these performers interact with and demonstrate their proximity with the location also signify their role as placemaking agents and semioticians who capable of interpreting its semiotic systems.

The textual metafunction was found in the selected modes to be referring both intratextually and intertextually to other semiotic resources in the process of semiotic placemaking. The modes were seen functioning intratextually to make the narrative of ideational and interpersonal representations coherent. Intratextual functions of the modes were that they gave syntagmatic coherence to the placemaking process being represented within the visual narratives. By demonstrating that one act, or one mode, was functioning in relation to the rest of the functions and modes, the texts became coherent placemaking resources that functioned effectively to create an impression of truth as Kress and Hodge (1988) defined modality.

Finally, the interpersonal metafunctioning of the modes can be decoded in part thanks to a familiarity with the semiotic systems of this discourse community. These texts could be decoded as positioning the performers as intermediaries between the place and those gazing in the audience at it from abroad. The semiotic modes selected in this semiotic analysis of these texts show certain interpersonal positions for the audience and the performer and the place. Also, some modes of these more than others code the larger social processes that are behind the production and consumption of these texts. Modes of branding, talking to and interacting with the camera, and requests for support can all be interpreted as social placemaking performances that reveal the co-production of the place through the co-production of these texts.

Genres of organic placemaking

This study illuminated one genre in particular that was responsible for intangible, organic placemaking on YouTube, and that was the expat placemaking genre. This genre could be defined by the choices of what were chosen to represent and what were chosen not to be represented. Instead of typical touristic symbols of China, such as the Great Wall, or the Terra-cotta warriors, the most viewed videos on the YouTube medium that were in English contained shots of the performers interacting with everyday local people in ordinary street scenes. Saussure or other structuralists such as Levi Strauss might have interpreted this oppositional definition of the expats as being dyadically opposed to tourists, and perhaps to locals as well. While this interpretation would have been based on an axiomatic structure of how signifiers related to signifieds, Kress and Hodge (1988) might also have agreed in this oppositional defintion, albeit with a lesser emphasis on the dyadic structure of the signs themselves. Instead, they would likely emphasize how such oppositional codes of a non-tourist role, were functioning as ideological metasigns of social identity.

Besides looking at the producers of these texts, or primary placemaking agents, it is equally important to look at the larger community that is coded to be participating in these texts. The intangible, organic placemaking of this expat genre likely looks quite different in other social contexts. Changing just one semiotic system, such as the language, would likely have a major impact on the how expat placemaking was being done in China for a variety of social and material reasons. Furthermore, the syntagmatic and paradigmatic affordances of the YouTube medium allowed for particular intertextual and interpersonal interactions between video producers and their audiences. Changing any of these social practices or conditions would have likely made the genre largely unrecognizable, as well as the place itself, both of which would likely have been unintelligible and unrecognizable by the same discourse community that was interpreted as co-producing the placemaking artefacts in this data sample.

While many institutions and actors are involved in place making and "co-producing tourism places" (Lew, 2017: 448), one previously unstudied group of stakeholders in this placemaking practice was that of the expatriates living at those destinations. The findings and analysis of this data sample, however, could ideally give some insight into how this placemaking performance functions. Recent studies have identified expat writing as a distinct genre of travel writing that is often intended for an audience of potential tourists who might be interested in visiting the expat's adopted country of residence (Zummo, 2018; Ilyas, 2018). However, this expat genre of placemaking had not yet been identified as such in terms of either semiotics or placemaking. These empirical findings should serve to broaden the knowledge on organic placemaking in tourism studies. Having applied social semiotic theory to find this new genre, greater insight into the social co-production, as well as the metafunctions and ideologies of various placemaking and semiotics have been illuminated.

The analysis of expat created content and its relation to destination discourse is a continuation of previous research which has studied how the expat role is or is not similar to that of the tourist. Ilyas (2018) looked at how expat writing was able to be identified as a distinct genre that is closely related to other genres of travel writing. Similarly, Zummo (2018) examined the blogs of expats living in different countries, and found that they often targeted their writing towards potential tourists who might be researching potential travels to the adopted homeland of the expatriates. By offering knowledge about the place, Zummo suggests that these expatriates perform the role of tour guides and create content that resembles travel guides. These exploratory studies have connected the content creation of expats with tourist industries, but these connections have only begun to consider their implications in regard to the many applicable concepts from tourism studies.

The similarities found with the genre of expat placemaking on YouTube established particular modes of what could be called expat created content, or ECC. This would be referencing Munar's (2011) TCC as mentioned previously in the literature review. Both of these avenues of inquiry about ECC and TCC are answers to the calls on tourism researchers made by Lew (2017) to expand the research done on organic placemaking on social media.

Dominant Ideologies and Logonomic systems

The Logonomic systems found by the analysis of the modes and metafunctions of these place making documents suggest that within the genre of organic place making on social media there exist many different identities and roles each with their own unique modal strategies for gaining legitimacy for their placemaking performances. Wider social contexts and implications of these texts were found by looking at the signs and how they functioned. Within any given social media the variations between interpretive communities is potentially infinite. Therefore, in a semiotic reality, producers of messages rely on recipients for them to function as intended. This requires recipients to have knowledge of a set of messages on another level, messages that provide specific information about how to read the message. This higher level-control mechanism is called a logonomic system (Hodge & Kress, 1988: 4). Such logonomic systems could be seen in the texts analyzed here as legitimizing certain placemaking agents and texts over others, as it is not just a result of the singular producer of the videos that the texts were among the most viewed videos about this topic.

Within the YouTube discourse community it appears that foreigners are dominant and it is their ideologies, interpretations, and significations that represent China on this medium in this semiotic system. The seeming social effect of this

dominant ideology is that its logonomic systems legitimate those who are foreigners, and those understand how to create high modality placemaking texts. On the contrary, those who do not have these semiotic resources or the knowledge and skills of how to construct and combine these resources into coherent texts are excluded from having power in the placemaking discourse on YouTube. Furthermore, the larger social context of governmental systems that exclude mainland Chinese people from using YouTube only exacerbate the current appearance of reality that China is being defined and constructed by those who are not Chinese, and this is almost necessarily to the marginalization of Chinese ideologies. Ultimately, much can be inferred about the broader social context of these texts by a close analysis and reading of these multimodal documents and how they can be seen as functioning.

Interestingly from a tourism perspective, these placemaking texts and their assertion of a dominant ideology that functions to create a community and semiotic place in China for foreigners, could be a positive contribution to tourism placemaking. After all, audiences on YouTube are likely to be comprised of international tourists, or foreigners in China, rather than domestic tourists. This community and its interpretation and signification of China in their own ideological image is perhaps beneficial in giving tourists and expat foreigners a sense of understanding and belonging, but simultaneously it likely marginalizes the local ideology and perhaps signifies negative interpretations and aspects of China meaning that potential tourists would be less likely to have a positive image and desire to visit or move the country. This social media space for organic placemaking could have an overall negative effect on desire to visit China compared to when it was more planned placemaking that was influencing perspectives. It could be assumed though that a greater capacity to participate in this discourse might give Chinese people a great voice and power in representing themselves and the ideological signification of their country positively, and that this too would have a positive influence on destination image.

Further Research

Future studies could explore a wider and and more extensive range of modalities, metafunctions, and ideologies in these very same texts, or in similar texts and genres. Such analyses could also look at the verbal communication said by performers in the videos. Additionally, greater insight into the YouTube medium itself and its semiotic affordances could fruitfully be analyzed, as Benson (2017) attempted to establish a framework for doing. Such analyses would still, however, need to choose certain layers of meaning to be analyzed and interpreted as particularly meaningful or salient in the YouTube artefacts. Benson outlined the semiotic systems present in any given YouTube video page, including the computer programming language, the layout of the website, and the comments from the audience. However, no one single study could likely take into consideration of layers of meaning making. It would still be crucial that the interpreter was reflexive about limitations that any semiotic analysis would necessarily include. Nonetheless, further semiotic analyses of the documents and other mixed methods of better understanding the audience reception and interpretation of these placemaking documents would further deepen a well supported interpretation and understanding of how China is being represented on YouTube.

Conclusion

This analysis began by reviewing the past literature on tourism placemaking, semiotics, and multimodality. By establishing an empirical knowledge gap that existed about the representation of China on YouTube, and a potential research gap of how

visual modes of organic placemaking function, this semiotic analysis intended to reveal broader contexts and implications of a discourse community on YouTube.

This study aimed to identify salient modes of communication for constructing China on YouTube. By analyzing the most viewed videos on YouTube about how China is, it has been possible to illuminate certain patterns in how china is constructed semiotically in the discourse of English speakers on YouTube. Along with prominent modes of address such as informal and direct interaction that was common throughout the genres, it was also found that there were certain modes, metafunctions, and ideologies that dominated the placemaking discourse on YouTube within this English speaking audience. Also, at the site of production a great deal of generic regularity was found in the placemaking artefacts of what were interpreted to be expats as opposed to tourists or locals.

Within the logonomic systems and dominant ideologies of this YouTube discourse about China there existed certain rules about who could speak about white in which ways. There were no locals, no local Chinese people who made the top most viewed selection of videos, and this means that it is in the signs of significations and representations of the international community that controls the dominant ideology from which China will be valued as a Destination and as a place more broadly. The reasons for which there were no locals, or local place making on YouTube is not entirely clear. The reason could be largely in part due to the fact that YouTube is banned and blocked in China meaning that local Chinese people cannot say for you access the site to produce or consume content there. Also, or in addition, it could mean that expats have greater modality in their place making power by having skills to encode their texts with the conventions of designing multimodal semiotic resources. In the end it would not be so surprising that a polarity between those outside China and those within China were maintained by the dominant ideology found in the physical material places that the medium was accessible.

After analyzing the corpus of these texts and their shared representational modalities of China, an interpretation of their semiotic placemaking modes, functions, logonomic systems, and ideologies have been identified. By recognizing how these semiotic discourses represent China multimodally on YouTube, hopefully insight has been gained about the characteristics of the genre, community, and medium of YouTube as they exist today in 2019. No doubt these genres and texts will continue to change and evolve over time as cultural tastes and ideologies evolve, but also as realities of tourism and international relations change. Nonetheless a synchronic analysis of how this placemaking has been co-produced diachronically should help future researchers perform diachronic studies of a similar type as they may be able to reference this study and its findings to get a better understanding of how, who, and what was involved in place making by individual users, on YouTube, at this point in time.

References

Adami, E. (2015). What's in a Click? A Social Semiotic Framework for the Multimodal Analysis of Website Interactivity, *Visual Communication*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp.133–153.

Androutsopoulos, J. (2010). Localizing the Global on the Participatory Web, *The Handbook of Language and Globalization*, pp.201–231.

Baka, V. (2015). Understanding Valuing Devices in Tourism through "Place-Making," *Valuation Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp.149–180.

Bamberg, M. G. W., Fina, A. D. & Schiffrin, D. (2011). Discourse and Identity, Cambridge University Press.

Benson, P. (2017). The Discourse of Youtube: Multimodal Text in a Global Context, Routledge.

Bezemer, Jeff. Multimodality. Taylor and Francis, 2015.

Bohl, C. C. (2002). Place Making: Developing Town Centers, Main Streets, and Urban Villages, Urban Land Institute.

Bosman, C., & Dredge, D. (2011). Histories of place making in the Gold Coast City: The neoliberal norm, the State story and the community narrative, (33), 1–16.

Bou-Franch, Patricia, et al. "Social Interaction in YouTube Text-Based Polylogues: A Study of Coherence." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2012, pp. 501–521.

Burgess, Jean, and Joshua Green (2009) "Online Video and Participatory Culture." Polity Press.

Burn, Andrew. (2014) "The kineikonic mode:Towards a multimodal approach to moving image media." *National Centre for Research Methods.*

Bryman, A. (2012). Social Research Methods , Oxford University Press.

Mosebo, Thomas. (2009) "Jean Burgess & Joshua Green: YouTube – Online Video and Participatory Culture." *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*, vol. 25, no. 47, p. 3.

Cazden Courtney, Cope, Bill, Fairclough, Norman, Gee, Jim (1996) "A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures" Harvard Educational Review; 66, 1; Research Library pg. 60

Chandler, D. (2018). Semiotics: The basics. Routledge.

Chen, Ching-Fu, and Sambath Phou. (2013) "A Closer Look at Destination: Image, Personality, Relationship and Loyalty." *Tourism Management*, vol. 36, pp. 269–278.

Dijck, José van. (2013). The Culture of Connectivity: a Critical History of Social Media, New York: Oxford University Press.

Deely, John N. Umberto Eco & Semiotics: the Postmodern Dawn in Philosophy. Legas, 2016.

Deledalle, Gérard. Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy of Signs: Essays in Comparative Semiotics." Indiana University Press, 2000.

Eco, Umberto. Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language. Macmillan, 1997.

Everett, S. (2012). Production Places or Consumption Spaces? The Place-Making Agency of Food Tourism in Ireland and Scotland, *Tourism Geographies*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp.535–554.

Fina, A. D., Schiffrin, D. & Bamberg, M. (2006). Discourse and Identity, Cambridge University Press.

Florida, R. (2002). Rise of the Creative Class, Basic Books.

Gee, J. P. (2012). Discourse Versus Discourse, *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*.

Goffman, Erving. (1956) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday.

Maccannell, Dean. (1973) "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 79, no. 3, pp. 589–603.

Halliday, M. A. K., and Jonathan Webster. Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday. On Language and Linguistics. Continuum, 2003.

Hodge, Bob, and Gunther R. Kress. Social Semiotics. Cornell Univ. Press, 1991.

Hunter, D. (2013). Amateur Media: Social, Cultural and Legal Perspectives, Routledge.

Ilyas, M. (2018). Expatriate Experience and the Fictional World of Diaspora, *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp.106–123.

Jaworski, A. & Coupland, N. (2006). The Discourse Reader, Routledge.

Jaworski, A. & Pritchard A. (2005) Discourse, Communication, and Tourism, Channel View Publications.

Keskitalo, E. Carina H., and Hannelene Schilar. (2016) "Co-Constructing 'Northern' Tourism Representations among Tourism Companies, DMOs and Tourists. An Example from Jukkasjärvi, Sweden." *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 406–422.

Kozinets, Robert V. (2015) "Netnography." *The International Encyclopedia of Digital Communication and Society*, 2015, pp. 1–8.

Kress, G. R. & Leeuwen, T. V. (2001). Multimodal Discourse: the Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication, Hodder Education.

Kress, G. R. & Leeuwen, T. van. (1990). Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design, Routledge.

Kress, G. R. (2009) Multimodality: Exploring Contemporary Methods of Communication. Routledge.

Lew, A. A. (2017). Tourism Planning and Place Making: Place-Making or Place making?, *Tourism Geographies*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp.448–466.

Linden, henrik & linden, sara. (2017). Fans and Fan Cultures: Tourism, Consumerism and Social Media, London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Marwick, Alice E. 2013. Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity and Branding in the Social Media Age. *Yale University Press.* New Haven, CT.

Maze, J. R. (2016) "Social Constructionism, Deconstructionism and Some Requirements of Discourse.*"*Realism and Psychology, Ritzer, George. *Introduction to Sociology.* SAGE

Meethan, Kevin, et al. (2006) "*Tourism Consumption and Representation: Narratives of Place and Self."* Cabi Publishing.

Mosebo, Thomas. (2009) "Jean Burgess & Joshua Green: YouTube – Online Video and Participatory Culture." *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*, vol. 25, no. 47, p. 3.

Munar, A. M. (2011). Tourist-Created Content: Rethinking Destination Branding, *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp.291–305.

Myers, G., Woolgar, S., Potter, J., Wetherell, M. & Latour, B. (1988). Writing about Writing about Scientific Writing: Books on the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge, *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 39, no. 4, p.465.

Parker, I. (1998). Social Constructionism, Discourse, and Realism, SAGE Publications.

Pike, Steven (2002). "Destination image analysis: A review of 142 papers from 1973-2000".Tourism Management. 23 (5).

Pike, S., Murdy, S. & Lings, I. (2010). Visitor Relationship Orientation of Destination Marketing Organizations, *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp.443–453.

Potter, J. (2012). Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction, SAGE.

Silva, Tiago Da Costa (2019) "Logic of Design Process: Invention and Discovery in the Light of the Semiotics of Charles s. Peirce.*" Transaction,* 2019.

Schneekloth H., & Shibley, R. G. (1995). Placemaking: The art and practice of building communities. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Thurlow, C. & Jaworski, A. (2014). 'Two Hundred Ninety-Four': Remediation and Multimodal Performance in Tourist Place making, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp.459–494.

Rakić, T. & Chambers, D. (2012). Rethinking the Consumption of Places, *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 39, no. 3, pp.1612–1633.

Rose, Gillian, (2016). Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials. London: SAGE Publications.

Wetherell, Margaret, et al. (2001) Discourse Theory and Practice: a Reader. SAGE, 2001.

Zummo, M. L. (2018). On the Discursive Self-Construction of Expats, Behavior and Values, *Scripta Manent*, [e-journal] vol. 12 , no. 1, Available Online: http://scriptamanent.sdutsj.edus.si/ScriptaManent/article/view/235.

Videos Analyzed

Mark Wiens. "Extreme Chinese Street Food - JACUZZI CHICKEN and Market
    Tour in Kunming! | Yunnan, China Day 4" Online video clip. *YouTube.*
    YouTube, Dec. 27, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?
    v=3w6UuOARJxs

Steff Hoffer. "China From Above." Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Oct. 30,
    2016. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1e68fqMkME

Where's Poppy. "China is NOT what I Expected." Online video clip. *YouTube.*
    YouTube, May. 4, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=sxJ9TBMoAL4

Where's Poppy. "I Can't Believe This is Beijing, China!" Online video clip. *YouTube.*
    YouTube, Sep 8, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=wVzutYO5cPU&t=29s

Where's Poppy. "How Safe is China Really???" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube,
Jan 5, 2018. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7TJOmqOmaE

Laowhy86. "What I Wish I Knew Before I Moved to China." Online video clip.
    YouTube. YouTube, Sept. 1, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=2KtqJdHyvEY&t=48s

Laowhy86. "How Did Living in China Change My View of the USA?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Feb. 10, 2018. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILYHORrxb1E

Laowhy86. "Why China is NOT the Safest Country in the World!" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Nov. 18, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9didXNTx9E

Laowhy86. "How Old is China?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Oct. 14, 2016. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1nqM0Tkbew

Laowhy86. "Is China Rich or Poor?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Dec. 16, 2016. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olVbmfQAOXU

byKaja. "Is China actually safe?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Jun. 13, 2018. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTtVR3w7VXo

Serpentza. "Is China Really Safe?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Jul. 22, 2016. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gJ0nfQ9dEU

Serpentza. "China, How It Is - Chinese Girls Dating Foreigners ep.1 - Moon" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Jul. 24, 2013. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gK0XACBFbAY

Serpentza. "The Beautiful CHAOS That is Chinese Shipping." Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Apr. 13, 2018. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAJS9B4UpAY

Serpentza. "Is China really MODERN or stuck in the DARK AGES?" Online video

        clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Sept. 15, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/

watch?v=cdYQaxBXwQQ

Serpentza. "You WON'T BELIVE this is CHINA!" Online video clip. *YouTube.*

        YouTube, Aug. 9, 2019. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?

v=7qgOwaVOb9Y

Serpentza. "China, How it is - Chinese Girls Dating Foreigners ep. 2 - Vivi." Online

        video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Aug. 4, 2013. Web. https://www.youtube.com/

watch?v=FuYrix6aLkg

Serpentza. "Is China Gay Friendly?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Apr. 22,

        2016. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1t7fQl-zmnU

Serpentza. "China, How it is - Chinese Girls Dating Foreigners ep.3 - Maggie."

        Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Aug. 22, 2013. Web. https://

www.youtube.com/watch?v=16xSuYgXdgU

Serpentza. "China, How it is - China Visa Shake-up." Online video clip. *YouTube.*

        YouTube, Apr. 30, 2016. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?

v=TnI_v2OMYyU

Serpentza. "China, How it is - Chinese Language Defined." Online video clip.

        YouTube. YouTube, Aug. 24, 2013. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?

v=YoFNnefZ3Lk

Serpentza. "China, How it is - China Visa How to." Online video clip. *YouTube.*
YouTube, Mar. 3, 2015. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YysklITpppI

DennisBunnik Travels. "China Eastern 789-9 Business Class - How Good is China's
Best?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Jun. 19, 2019. Web. https://
www.youtube.com/watch?v=YysklITpppI

Lauren Without Fear. "WHAT IS CHINA REALLY LIKE?" Online video clip.
YouTube. YouTube, May. 25, 2016. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=_Ecisodid2Y

Lauren Without Fear. "IS CHINA SAFE?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube,
Mar. 16, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sR5WwP_xKE

Syifa Adriana. "Is China Safe?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Jul. 8, 2017.
Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUozAbu9e0k

Austin in China. "Are Expats Too Comfortable in China? Being an Expat in China -
American Living in China for 5 Years" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube,
Dec. 6, 2016. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWDRp4h7NUs

The Nomadic Professor. "CHINA: How much of China is really China?" Online
video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube, Oct. 30, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=k9KMcCeow_I

Gweilo60. "Is CHINA SAFE for foreigners?" Online video clip. *YouTube.* YouTube,

Oct. 8, 2017. Web. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPROFqk9q7c