

Discovering the Brand of Asia's World City: A Discourse Analysis of Hong Kong Tourist Mobile Apps

Amy Suen¹⁺ and Andy Fung²

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Abstract. This paper presents a study of tourist mobile apps by examining how Hong Kong is promoted as Asia's World City to tourists worldwide. Asia World City discourse can be reflected in mobile apps developed by the Hong Kong Tourism Board which aim to provide tourists with the latest travel information so as to enhance travel experience. Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design and Martin and White's appraisal theory were adopted to analyze the photographs and language of the apps. The findings show that the heavy use of hyperbolic language and fascinating visual images in tourist mobile apps not only serve to enhance tourists' travelling experience but also construct Hong Kong as Asia's World City with "vibrant living culture featuring a unique blend of East and West".

Keywords: Discourse, Multimodality, Culture, Branding.

1. Background

Hong Kong has positioned itself as the "Asia World's City" since 1999 after the return of sovereignty to China. The aim of the positioning is to emphasise the core strengths of Hong Kong i.e. tourism, trade, financial services, and logistics and professional services which could reflect the city's unique position in the world. As a key industry in Hong Kong, tourism promotes other sectors such as retail, business services and catering. It has been one of the greatest engines of foreign exchange for decades and contributed hugely to the social and economic development of Hong Kong.

According to the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) Statistical Review 2010, visitor arrivals to Hong Kong have reached a historic high, at around 36 million, and more than half of these visitors bring smartphones. Together with the advancement of Wi-Fi technology in Hong Kong which could provide tourists easy access to the Internet, mobile tourism has become a new trend in Hong Kong. With a view to capitalising this trend, the HKTB has designed tourist mobile apps in May, 2011 which aims at enabling visitors to find tourist information and location easily and also promoting events, activities, and retail and dining outlets in Hong Kong. Given the importance of tourism in Hong Kong and popularity of smartphones, tourist mobile apps could play a significant role in promoting Hong Kong as a favourable destination. This paper examines how the destination brand "Hong Kong – Asia's World City" is presented in the mobile apps so as to emphasise the "vibrant and cosmopolitan lifestyle", "cultural fusion and diversity", and various destination strengths of Hong Kong such as dining, shopping, signature attractions, culture and heritage, etc.

Tourist mobile apps are a new form of tourism discourse. Previous studies of travel guide apps mainly focus on the technical perspective. For example, Kjeldskov et al. examine the usability and challenges associated with mobile guides while others focus on the use of information sources during travel planning. A recent study conducted by Kenteris et al. discusses the design and implementation of tourist mobile apps. The results suggest that the design of travel guide apps can be categorised into online and offline modes. In the online mode, tourists could make use of the Internet to obtain personalised information through accessing mobile web portals while the offline travel guide apps are pre-installed with defined content and cannot be customised in accordance with user preferences. None of these research studies have been conducted to analyse tourist mobile apps from a linguistic perspective. Although mobile apps research studies are becoming popular, discourse analyses of tourism texts are mainly conducted in the area of travel guidebooks and websites rather than tourist apps. Bhattacharya investigates both the text and photographs of a guidebook to

⁺ Corresponding author. Tel.: +852 2766 7529.
E-mail address: amy.oy.suen@polyu.edu.hk.

India from a semiotic perspective. The findings indicate that the primary function of the guidebook serves to mediate tourists' experiences by reinforcing both the images of India and relationships with indigenous inhabitants. Travel guidebooks are also examined by Laderman. He explores popular guidebooks of Vietnam and found that all of them reflect the Cold War theme of anti-Communism. Similar to travel guidebook, we think that tourist mobile apps could serve to enhance tourist experience and reflect the theme of Hong Kong.

In addition to guidebooks, tourism websites are also of interest to researchers. Fürsich and Robins investigates whether travel and tourism fit into agendas of nationalist constructions in the official travel websites of African countries. Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger look into Lithuanian tourism websites and show how official governmental websites capitalize on the process of identity construction to promote their communities to potential tourists. Building on Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger, Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger examine destination identity in tourism official websites on how to turn potential visitors into tourists. These studies examine tourism discourse in "classical medium types" but do not explore the new form of communication, tourist mobile apps. Since tourist mobile apps are gaining importance in the tourism industry, we think that apps could be a new research direction, not only in the tourism industry but also in linguistic studies. Based on the review, this paper examines the multimodal features of tourist mobile apps with a focus on exploring how Hong Kong is presented as the Asia World's City through the analysis of the visual images and language used in the tourist mobile apps designed by the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

2. Methodology

Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design was adopted to examine how visual images promote Hong Kong as Asia's World City in tourist mobile apps. Kress and van Leeuwen explore visual images by applying Halliday's metafunctions i.e. the representational, interactive and compositional metafunctions. Representational meanings are about the representation of the world. They are revealed through narrative and conceptual images. Interactive meanings refer to the social relationship between the participants. Contact, distance, point of view and modality contribute to the realization of interactive meanings. Compositional meanings are the relations of the representational and interactive meanings of an image to each other. They are realised through the interrelated systems of information value, framing and salience. The language of the tourist mobile apps was examined by using appraisal analysis. Appraisal analysis is an approach to examine how language is used to evaluate and construct interpersonal relationships so as to explore how different genres may conventionally use different evaluative strategies. It helps researchers to evaluate attitudinal meaning of texts in a systematic way.

We conducted appraisal analysis to examine the different attitudes used on the texts of tourist mobile apps through lexico-grammatical choices. "Attitude" is "concerned with our feelings" which includes "emotional reactions, judgments of behaviour and the evaluation of things". "Graduation" refers to the grading of phenomena where feelings are intensified and categories blurred. "Engagement" is about "sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions".

Two travel guide apps, Hong Kong 720 ° and Discover Hong Kong AR, were explored. Both apps were released in 2011 by the Hong Kong Tourism Board. The features of Hong Kong 720 ° include 720 ° virtual tour, video, tourism sites, locations of users own position through Global Positioning System (GPS), Google maps and Cantonese pronunciation guide. Discover Hong Kong AR offers detailed information on attractions, retail outlets and dining establishments with the Augmented Reality (AR) technology. AR technology enables tourists to find their ways through the camera of their smartphones. The screen of the smartphone shows the points of interest (attractions, shops and restaurants) in visitors' vicinity in the real-time and from real-world views. Visitors can tap the indicators on the screen to obtain more detailed information.

3. Examples of Analysis

Photographs in tourist mobile apps are powerful resources for tourism destination promotion. We adopted Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design to analyse how the photographs present Hong Kong as Asia's Word City with vibrant and cosmopolitan lifestyle, and cultural fusion and diversity.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen, images could be “narrative” or “conceptual”. Narrative images are defined by the presence of a “vector” that connects participants in the images while conceptual images do not have vector and participants are grouped together to present a concept of what they represent. Tourist mobile apps employ narrative images to convey the cultural experience of Buddhist worship in Hong Kong. For example, the thick coiled incense on the ceiling and altar in Figure 1 show the setting of the Man Mo temple. The temple is for the worship of the literature god and martial god. Figure 1 is a narrative image in which the worshipper (Actor) is placing incense sticks into the censor (Goal). The action, as shown by the arrow, presents the traditional Chinese practice of incense burning as a sacrificial offering to deities. Traditional Chinese culture is also reflected by the qipao of the human participant in Figure 1, which is the traditional Chinese dress for women. Figure 2 is another example showing the activities of the worshippers in Che Kung temple. The Che Kung temple was established to honor a military commander in the Southern Song Dynasty.

The worshipping activity of the idol is formed by the vector, as indicated by the arrow, which connects the limb of the human participant and the wheel of fortune. The limb of the human participant shows the action of spinning the fan-bladed wheel of fortune. The action illustrates the custom of local people in lunar new year in which worshippers visit the Che Kung temple and turn the wheel of fortune so as to ensure good luck in the coming year.



Fig. 1: Man Mo Temple



Fig. 2: Che Kung Temple

“Tourism promotion is based on glamour”. Tourist mobile apps show heavy use of positive appreciation which is in line with the promotional nature of the apps in which the sightseeing places are promoted as positive entities. Expressing attitude in the form of appreciation implies that tourist mobile apps try to shift the evaluation of feelings from a personal orientation to an institutional one which makes the evaluation sounds more like basing on real facts rather than personal feelings. Positive appreciation constructs a favourable image of Hong Kong to tourists who are new to the city. Using positive words is a key feature of promotional language. Such language shows the subject in question from a favourable point of view. Within the realm of appreciation, positive reaction for the aesthetic evaluation of the quality is found. For example,

- This crescent-shaped stretch of sand is one of the beautiful beaches in Hong Kong.
- Lamma features great beaches between two villages on either side of the island.
- North of the bridge on Tsing Yi provides excellent views...

The above examples show the description of the beaches in Hong Kong and Tsing Ma Bridge with the use of positive reaction based on the notion of quality “crescent-shaped stretch of sand”, “beautiful”, “great” and “excellent” to portray a favourable destination image to tourists. In addition to positive reaction of quality, positive reaction of “impact” is used. Impact is to do with attention and the emotional impact it has on people. Choices of impact persuade and trigger tourists’ feelings to things and are related to emotion.

For example,

- ...and fun way to travel from the Ocean Park’s Waterfront to the excitement at the Summit.
- ...a glass bottom to give passengers an astonishing bird’s view!

These examples evoke tourists’ positive feeling to the Ocean Park and the view that tourists could see from the cable car. The use of words like “fun”, “excitement” and “astonishing” would grab tourists’ feeling and evoke involvement in the vibrant experience of Hong Kong.

4. Conclusion

The above analysis shows some features of the discourse of tourist mobile apps. We think that tourist mobile apps are a new form of tourist discourse. These apps promote Hong Kong as a favourable destination through the visual images and language.

5. References

- [1] Brand Hong Kong. Brand Overview. (2013). [Online]. Available: <http://www.brandhk.gov.hk/en>.
- [2] Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. The Four Key Industries and Other Selected Industries. (2013). [Online]. Available: <http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/home/>
- [3] G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- [4] T. Lam and C. H.C. Hsu. Predicting behavioral intention of choosing a travel destination. *Tourism Management*. 2004, **27**(4): 589-599.
- [5] Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB). *A Statistical Review of Hong Kong Tourism 2010*, HKTB, Hong Kong, 2011.
- [6] Hong Kong Tourism Board. Hong Kong Tourism Board Partner Net. (2011). [Online]. Available: http://partnet.hktb.com/pnweb/jsp/doc/HKTB_listDoc.jsp?charset=&doc_id=137819
- [7] Hong Kong Tourism Board. Research & Statistics. (2013). [Online]. Available: <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/index.jsp>
- [8] J. Kjeldskov, C. Grahm, S. Pedell, F. Vetere, S. Howard, S. Balbo, and J. Davies. Evaluating the Usability of a Mobile Guide: the Influence of Location, Participants and Resources. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 2005, **24**: 51-65.
- [9] D. Snepenger and M. Snepenger. Information Search by Pleasure Travelers. In: *VNR'S Encyclopedia of Hospitality and Tourism*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold 1993, pp. 830-835.
- [10] D. Fodness and B. Murray (1997). Tourist Information Search. *Annals of Tourism Research* **24**(3): 503-523.
- [11] B. Pan and D. R. Fesenmaier. Online information search and vacation planning process. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 1997, **33**(3): 809-832.
- [12] M. Kenteris, D. Gavalas and D. Economou. An innovative mobile electronic tourist guide application, *PersUbiquit Comput*. 2009, **13**:103-118.
- [13] D. Bhattacharya. Mediating India: An analysis of a guidebook. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 1997, **24**: 371-389.
- [14] S. Laderman. Shaping memory of the past: Discourse in travel guidebooks for Vietnam. *Mass Communication and Society*, 2002, **3**(1): 87-110.
- [15] F. Baider, M. Burger and D. Goutsos. Introduction. In: F. Baider, M. Burger, and D. Goutsos, (eds.) *La Communication Touristique: Approches Discursives de l'Identité et de l'Altérité*. *Discursive Approaches to Identity and Otherness*. Paris: L'Harmattan. 2005, pp. 27-43.
- [16] E. Fürsich and M.B. Robins. Visiting Africa: Constructions of nation and identity on travel websites. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 2004, **39**: 133-152.
- [17] R.W. Hallett and J. Kaplan-Weinger. The construction of independence: A multimodal discourse analysis of Lithuanian tourism websites. In: F. Baider, M. Burger, and D. Goutsos (eds.) *La Communication Touristique: Approches Discursives de l'identité et de l'altérité/Tourist Communication: Discursive Approaches to Identity and Otherness*: Paris: L'Harmattan. 2004, pp. 215-234.
- [18] R.W. Hallett and J. Kaplan-Weinger. *Official Tourism Websites: A Discourse Analysis Perspective*. UK: Channel View Publications, 2010.
- [19] I. Seidel, M. Gartner, M. Pottler, H. Berger, M. Dittenbach and D. Merkl. Itchy Feet: A 3D E-Tourism Environment. In Sharda, N. (Ed.) *Tourism Informatics. Visual Travel Recommender Systems, Social Communities, and User Interface Design*: Information Science Reference. 2010, pp. 209-242.
- [20] G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- [21] M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan. *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-semiotic Perspective* (2nd Eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

- [22] J. R. Martin and P. R. R. White. *The Language of Evaluation. Appraisal in English*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- [23] W. C. Hunter. A typology of photographic representations for tourism: Depictions of groomed spaces. *Tourism Management*. 2008, **29**, 354-365.
- [24] G. M. S. Dann. *The Language of Tourism: a Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Wallingford, Oxon, UK: CAB International, 1996.
- [25] J. R. Martin. Beyond Exchange: APPRAISAL Systems in English. In: S. Hunston and G. Thompson (eds.) *Evaluation in Text*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 142-175.
- [26] G. Cook. *The Discourse of Advertising*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- [27] A. Wernick. *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression*. London: Sage, 1991.