

Multimodal Communicative Acts of Thailand's Private Hospital Website Promoting Medical Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Websites of private hospitals are significant channels for delivering the communicative acts in relation to information of hospitals' facilities and expertise to international medical tourists. However, studies that involved communicative acts have mainly focused on examining the language mode. It overlooked the multimodal perspective which hinder prospective international medical tourists from receiving the intended promotional messages. This study, therefore, aims to examine multimodal realisations of representative and commissive communicative acts in Thailand's private hospital website. Within Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) perspective, Halliday & Matthiessen's model of textual analysis (2004) and Daneš' classification of thematic patterns (1974) were utilised for language analysis, while Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework was adopted for visual analysis. Three webpages from a Thai private hospital website were analysed in relation to theme types and thematic progression for textual function in language analysis, and information value, saliency and framing elements for compositional function in visual analysis. Results based on the analysis of the communicative acts in the selected webpages aimed to inform and persuade prospective medical tourists. The multimodal communicative acts created a technologically established, sophisticated, reliable and caring representation of Samitivej Hospital through the high occurrence of unmarked themes, reiteration patterns, salient visuals and absence of framing. The findings provided communicative strategies to promote medical tourism to copywriters, website designers and medical tourism stakeholders in designing such websites.

Keywords: medical tourism promotion; systemic functional linguistics (SFL); multimodal communicative acts; textual metafunction; compositional metafunction

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INTRODUCTION

Medical tourism is considered a niche form of tourism (Mathijssen, 2019; Suess, Baloglu, & Busser, 2018) and recognised by medical tourism players as a potential area for economic diversification. Over the last decade, several Asian countries have achieved great success in the medical tourism industry, leading them to competitively positioning themselves as leaders of affordable and high-quality medical care (Ebrahim & Ganguli, 2019). The revenue associated with medical tourism for major medical services has led several countries to compete for a higher share in the billion-dollar medical tourism market, which is expected to reach USD 28 billion by 2024 (Saxena, 2020) and 272.70 billion by 2027 (Zion Market Research, 2021). However, at present, there is a pressing need for the medical tourism industry to increase their promotional activities online due to border restrictions and the decrease in revenue that almost all countries have experienced as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the pandemic, the medical tourism industry in Southeast Asia experienced rapid growth driven by the quality healthcare delivery services, competitive rates, and reputable medical expertise (The Asian Post, 2017). Among the popular destinations in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN for medical tourism are Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. According to Patients Beyond Borders, medical tourism produces a revenue of USD 40 billion with an increase of approximately 25 per cent annually, with most of the hospitals that visitors prefer to travel as being located in ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (Nee, 2018).

Malaysia once emerged as the third preferred medical tourism destination among the Southeast Asian nations after Singapore and Thailand (Devi Chandran et al., 2018) and thus, these different destinations are expected to have different ways of realising representative and commissive communicative acts. Thailand, which is one of the important players in international healthcare services, is regarded as the “medical hub of Asia” (NaRanong & NaRanong, 2011). Thailand has the first Asian hospital certified according to ISO 9001 and accredited by JCI, as well as the largest private hospital in Asia (Ushakov et al., 2019). It is interesting to examine Thailand’s websites as the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) (2019) claimed that Thailand’s healthcare services have long been perceived as superior to Malaysia’s and foreign patients often stated that they perceive the impression of better healthcare services offered by Thailand through online promotional activities, compared to those of Malaysia (The Star, 2018). Ebrahim and Ganguli (2019) pointed out that Thailand leads the medical tourism market in the region for minor elective procedures such as cosmetic surgery and sex change surgery.

Historically, Thailand medical tourism is much promoted overseas by independent high-profile private hospitals (e.g. Bumrungrad International Hospital, Samitivej Hospital). The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has also promoted Thai healthcare services actively by creating worldwide awareness through e-marketing and media campaigns to attract prospective international medical tourists (Wong & Musa, 2012). The popularity of online medical related information sources among international medical tourists has resulted in communicative acts on the Internet to be considered as a significant source for medical tourists to learn about medical tourism opportunities and other key information.

However, studies that involved communicative acts have predominantly focused on examining textual mode, and overlooked the multimodal perspective and the fact that the websites combine words, images and sounds into complex structures. Examining multimodal realisation is important to create awareness among copywriters and websites designers as language analysis is

no longer enough to study modern text patterns such as websites. Bloommaert (2011) stated that discourses have been fundamentally distorted by the new technologies such as Internet. One of the most significant aspects of online promotion through websites is that it does not only include text, but also collections of images, multimedia components, interactive elements, animated graphics, and audio (Würtz 2005). These complexities reinforce the notion that the creation and construction of interesting and resourceful webpages are indeed challenging. This means that medical tourism stakeholders should diversify their forms of communication and promotion through online marketing platforms (Norsiah Kadir & Sabri Nayan, 2021). Therefore, in order to explain the representational meaning, it is necessary to analyse this type of promotional texts from a multimodal perspective which has proven to provide suitable tools for the study of tourism discourse. The language and visual combination has turned into a marketing strategy which is crucial to create an attractive and desirable image of the place to be visited (Held 2004).

Thailand Medical News (2019) reported that Thailand has taken steps to improve their medical marketing as they believe that online medical marketing requires meticulous planning to ensure its effectiveness. Therefore, there is potential to tap in the study of how multimodal communicative acts of representative and commissive speech acts that emerge as a result of the combination of language and images in Thailand's private hospital website, conveyed medical tourism promotion to prospective international medical tourists. Specifically, the objectives of this study are twofold; the first is to analyse the way in which a private hospital website constructs its webpages using language and visuals to promote medical tourism. The second objective is to investigate how the multimodal communicative acts of representative and commissive speech acts are construed by the identified multimodal characteristics to promote medical tourism.

This study would help raise awareness among medical tourism providers, private hospital management or copywriters regarding the intricacies of medical tourism promotional websites that consist of not only text but also collections of images and other interactive elements. It is hoped that the findings and insights gained from this study can guide the stakeholders towards designing and producing a more effective marketing approach in promoting medical tourism through websites to attract medical tourists from around the world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATIVE ACTS

International promotion is critical for the survival and success of the medical tourism industry. In the areas of promotion and business, communicative acts play a significant role in promoting services and expertise and persuading prospective clients. Recently, investigation on promotional messages has become prevalent in the medical tourism industry and has been studied using a variety of approaches and different forms of media, including websites (Aghbolah et al., 2021; Wan Fatimah Solihah et al., 2021; Moghavvemi et al., 2017; Jun, 2015) and blogs (Viladrich & Faust, 2014). The studies mainly examined promotional strategies in delivering the multimodal communicative acts of representative and commissive on the medical tourism services and facilities to potential medical tourists.

Since the target of medical tourism market is international medical tourists, it is not surprising that online promotional materials such as websites have continued to grow, leading to a change in the customer base from local to international tourists. As a result, Thailand has changed its promotional approach to focus on medical tourism communication through its private hospitals'

websites. Several studies have investigated online medical tourism promotion in Thailand. Carreon et al. (2013) examined how private hospital websites in Thailand communicate with their potential medical tourists using the tools of social semiotics and corpus linguistics. They discovered that the websites used several strategies such as including interior images of the hospital building as well as a world map in the homepage to highlight the strategic position of the hospital. These strategies built social relationships, involve the audience, and engender trust with the goal of establishing credibility of the hospitals for international medical tourists. Meanwhile, James (2012) examined the impact of medical tourism on Thai private hospital management by exploring private hospital management views of issues involved in medical tourism and how these can be managed to provide a more effective understanding. Moghavvemi et al. (2017) in their study highlighted the need for private hospital managers to improve their hospitals' online presence and interactivity. This is supported by Wan Fatimah Solihah et al.'s (2021) who found that a coherent and intelligible website text is crucial to garner attention and restore the confidence of prospective international medical tourists to travel again especially after the outbreak of COVID-19.

Investigation and analysis of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was employed since SFL places the function of language as central in discourse analysis. Review of past literature showed studies that employed the SFL approach in examining discourse in terms of the use of textual metafunction involved media texts (Potter, 2016; Drid, 2019), marketing discourse (Abu Talib, 2014; Alyousef, 2016), academic writing (Abdul Ridha, 2014; Emilia, 2014; Alyousef, 2015; Noori, 2015; Gunawan & Aziza, 2017), textbooks (Jalilifar & Montazeri, 2017; McCabe, 1999), folktales (Patpong, 2013), tourism website (Stoian & Dejica, 2016), medical text (Kazemi, 2015; Rodriguez-Vergara, 2017; Alrajhi, 2020), and research articles (Alyousef & Alzahrani, 2020). These studies demonstrated that while SFL-based research in examining theme and thematic progression has given considerable attention to discourse used in tertiary education, media genre and the tourism industry, the area of medical tourism discourse remains understudied. A study by Wan Fatimah Solihah et al. (2021) focused on the communicative acts of medical tourism discourse through private hospital websites using SFL's textual metafunction. However, similar to other studies mentioned above, Wan Fatimah Solihah et al.'s focus was only on a single language mode, and it overlooked the multimodal perspective.

Therefore, in order to examine how representative and commissive acts are construed it is necessary to analyse medical tourism promotional text from a multimodal perspective. Multimodal analysis has been acknowledged to provide appropriate analytical tools for examining promotional discourse to create a reputable image of a destination (Stoian, 2018). Systemic Functional Theory (hereafter SFT) (Halliday, 1985, 1994; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2021; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), were chosen as a model for the analysis of this website. Both visual and verbal modes were analysed in detail, initially as separate modes, and subsequently together, as multimodal acts of promotion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

MULTIMODAL FRAMEWORK

The multimodal framework in this study adopted Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) language analysis framework and Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2021) framework for semiotic analysis. The analysis of the selected webpages began with textual followed by visual analysis guided by SFL metafunctions. Metafunctions are systemic clusters belonging to a group of semantic systems that

make meanings of a related kind. Halliday (1985) described metafunction as one of a small set of principles that is necessary to explain the organisation of the semantic system of language.

LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which was founded by the works of Halliday, is a “very useful descriptive and interpretive framework for viewing language as a meaning-making resource” (Eggins, 2004, p. 2). In this study, the language analysis was organised following Halliday’s proposal of metafunctions (1985, 1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) which looked at each function individually. These communicative functions include ideational (logical and experiential) which is concerned with how reality is developed in a discourse; interpersonal which is concerned with the grammatical choices that assist individuals to enact their different and complex interpersonal relations; and textual which relates to the communicative nature as well as internal structure of a text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). However, the metafunction scope of the present study is on textual analysis only which involved the types of themes and their thematic progression patterns. Textual metafunction is significant as it explains the organisation of the text clauses in such a way that it is effective and appropriate to the context, and simultaneously, succeeds in accomplishing the desired purpose (Eggins, 1994).

THEME AND RHEME

Halliday defined ‘theme’ as “the point of departure” for the message and thus, it falls within what is called ‘given’ information (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 93). This means that speakers usually start their messages with information that has already been mentioned in the text, or that is shared or believed to be of mutual knowledge among the participants of the interaction. For example, in the sentence, ‘Samitivej Hospital employed many experienced medical staff’, the theme is Samitivej Hospital. The rest of the sentence basically forms what is known as the rheme, which typically contains information that is unfamiliar or ‘new’.

TYPES OF THEME AND THEMATIC PROGRESSION

Halliday categorised theme into three types: topical, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Topical theme which is conflated with the subject or functions as the subject of the clause is called ‘unmarked’; in contrast, topical theme which is not the subject is referred to as ‘marked’ (Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Emilia, 2014). Textual theme refers to how clauses are connected and provide cohesion to the text. The purpose of textual theme is to serve as the ‘linking function’ to highlight the logical structure of a text which is particularly important in light of the significance given to argument, insight, criticism, discussion, and analysis in the text (Emilia, 2014). The interpersonal theme signal the viewpoint of the writer on the message (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 1996). Meanwhile, thematic progression was introduced by Daneš (1974) to refer to what he described as “the skeleton of the plot” (p.114). It refers to information flow patterns in a text and the way in which information is exchanged between the pairings of the theme and rheme (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). There are three main patterns for thematic progression: theme reiteration (constant theme), the zig-zag pattern (linear theme), and the multiple pattern (split rheme) (Eggins, 2004). Table 1 explains each analytical tools utilised throughout the language analysis to analyse the theme types and thematic progression patterns.

TABLE 1. Analytical tools based on Halliday & Matthiesen's (2004) and Daneš' (1974) model

Textual Metafunction	Analytical tools	Explanation
Theme types	Marked Topical Theme	Not the subject of the clause and can be in the form of circumstantial elements through: 1. Adverbial group 2. Prepositional phrase
	Unmarked Topical Theme	An element that occupies the point of departure position of the clause and is realised through: 1. Pronouns 2. Proper nouns 3. Noun phrase 4. Grammatical item "it" 5. Existential item "there" 6. Nominal group which 7. Embedded -wh clause 8. Embedded non-finite clause 9. Embedded 'that' clause
	Interpersonal Theme	Signal the viewpoint of the writer on the message through: 1. Modal/comments 2. Adjunct 3. Finite/verbal 4. Polarity 5. Yes/no interrogative 6. Vocatives 7. Personal names
	Textual Theme	Refers to how clauses are connected together and provides cohesion to the text through: 1. Structural conjunctions 2. Relatives 3. Conjunctive 4. Wh-relatives
Thematic progression	Reiteration pattern (constant Theme),	A similar theme is repeated in the themes of succeeding clauses. E.g: " <i>Samitivej's Critical Care Complex</i> is the result of a two-year meticulous effort by our surgeons. <i>It</i> offers 8 new operating rooms, 5 labor rooms". The use of " <i>It</i> " refers to the same theme.
	Zig-zag pattern (linear Theme)	The element that is introduced as a rheme in the first clause becomes the theme of the following clause E.g: " <i>The hospital</i> can also provide interpreters for other languages. But <i>this</i> will also be at the patient's additional expense". " <i>This</i> ", which is the theme of the second clause, refers to the act of providing interpreters for other languages which is the rheme of the first clause.
	Multiple pattern (split Rheme)	The theme of one clause introduces a number of different pieces of information in the rheme, each of which is taken up and made theme in the following clauses. E.g: "There are <i>three reasons</i> why <i>Samitivej</i> is an ideal destination for medical tourism", the <i>three elements</i> of the rheme can be split into themes in the following clauses.

The analytical tools from theme types and thematic progression patterns explained in Table 1 were used for conducting language analysis to answer part of the first objective; to analyse the way in which a private hospital website constructs its webpages using language and visuals to

promote medical tourism. Next section explains the visual tools. The identified language and visual analysis are used to examine how multimodal representative and commissive acts were construed by these multimodal characteristics in promoting medical tourism.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

In this study, the visual analysis was performed using Kress and van Leeuwen’s model of visual design (1996, 2006). Kress and van Leeuwen proposed a descriptive framework of multimodality in which visual metafunctions are assigned representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. Representational function analysis examines the represented participants, processes, and circumstances while interactive function considers the image act, social distance, perspective, angle, and modality markers. For compositional function, the analysis involves the examination of the information value, salience, and framing elements. In this study, the metafunction analysed for the selected webpages was compositional.

INFORMATION VALUE, SALIENCE AND FRAMING ELEMENTS

Compositional function presents “the way in which representations and communicative acts cohere into the kind of meaningful whole we call ‘text’” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 181). The representational and interactive meanings of a picture are related to each other through three interrelated systems: information value, salience and framing (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Table 2 explains the three analytical tools utilised throughout the visual analysis.

TABLE 2. Analytical tools based on Kress & van Leeuwen’s 1996 model

Analytical tools of Compositional Metafunction	Explanation
Information value	The way in which elements are arranged in a text: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Left and right The information value assigned to the left side is that of giving, in which case the viewer is assumed to be familiar with the information and to accept it as a point of departure for the message. The right side is reserved to new information, i.e., to something which is not known by the viewer or needs special attention. 2. Top and bottom The information placed in the upper section is presented as essential, visualising the ‘promise of the product’ and is considered ideal. In contrast, the one placed at the bottom is more specific and is of practical information, visualising the product itself and is called real. 3. Centre and margin The centre presents the nucleus of information, while the margins are similar and subservient to the centre.
Salience	Salient elements create a hierarchy of importance and present some of them as more important or attractive than others. Salience can be indicated by visual clues such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Size 2. sharpness of focus 3. tonal and colour contrast 4. placement in the visual field 5. perspective 6. specific cultural factors

Framing	The elements in a picture or page can be either connected and joined together or disconnected and marked off from each other. This is realised by framing, particularly by frame lines, discontinuity of shape or by empty space between the elements. Additionally, the connection can be further emphasised by vectors.
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Visual design, then, follows the same patterns of meaning as language. Thus, in the analysis of each webpage in this study, both language and visual analyses were performed in all three selected webpage for the readers to see the numerous meaning-making strategies used by the web designers and their copywriters. Figure 1 shows how the first stage (language analysis) and the second stage of analysis (visual analysis) was conducted in the study.

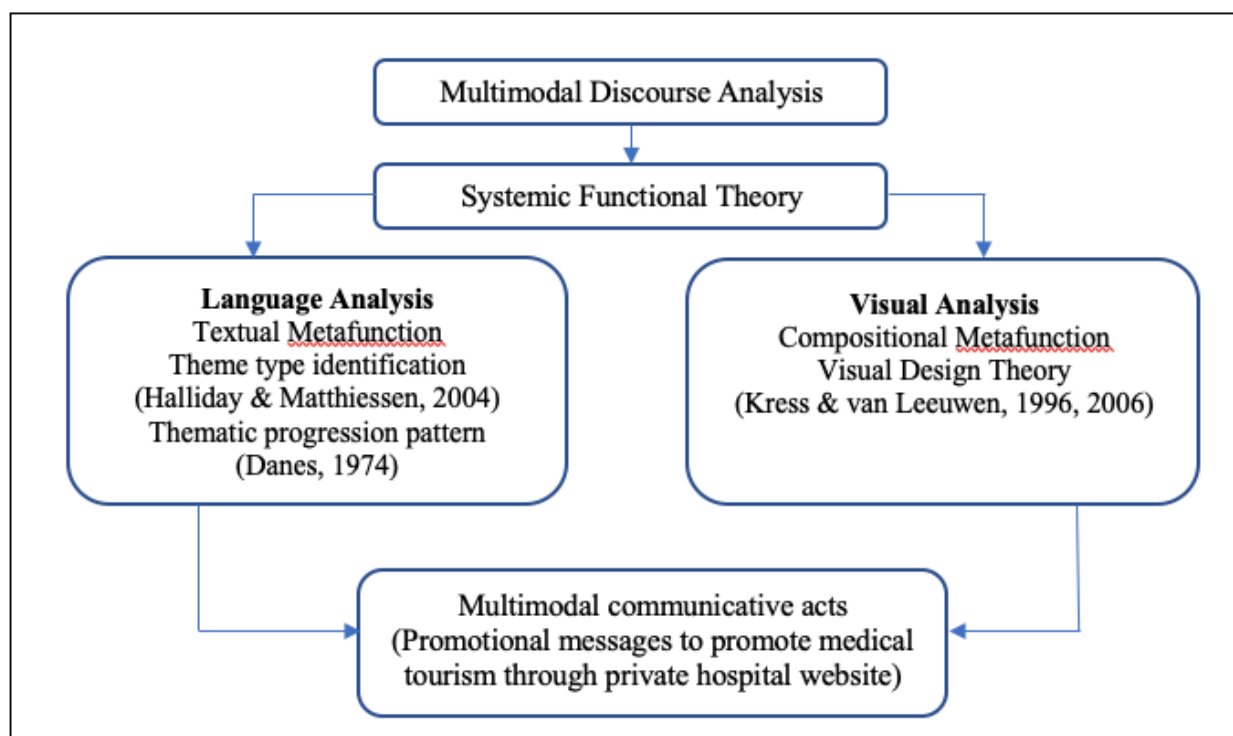


FIGURE 1. The theoretical framework

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study were gathered from a Thai private hospital website which was written in English since medical tourism is promoted to the international market. Samitivej Hospital from Thailand was selected as Thailand is known as a dominant player in medical tourism from the Southeast Asian countries while Samitivej Hospital is a private hospital that recorded a high number of international patients in Thailand. Besides, Samitivej Hospital is also a leading provider of medical care in Thailand that serves international tourists (Supakankunti & Herberholz, 2012) and is the list of the top ten hospitals in the world in 2019 for medical tourists (Medical Travel Quality Alliance, 2019).

DATA ANALYSIS

Two stages of analysis were performed in this study. The first stage was the language analysis that examined the textual function in relation to the theme types and thematic progression patterns. The text analysis was performed manually involving several steps: 1. divide the texts in the webpages into clauses. 2. identify language characteristics in the clause using textual metafunction (theme types and thematic progression patterns). The visual analysis, involved the following processes: 1. identify the most prominent visuals in the webpages based on the size and colour of the visuals. 2. analyse information value, salient element and framing element to examine the way in which representations and communicative acts cohere into the kind of meaningful whole text. Next, the identified language and visual characteristics were presented in Table 3, Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6. Finally, the multimodal realisations are explained under Findings and Discussion. The flow of the data analysis process is illustrated in Figure 2.

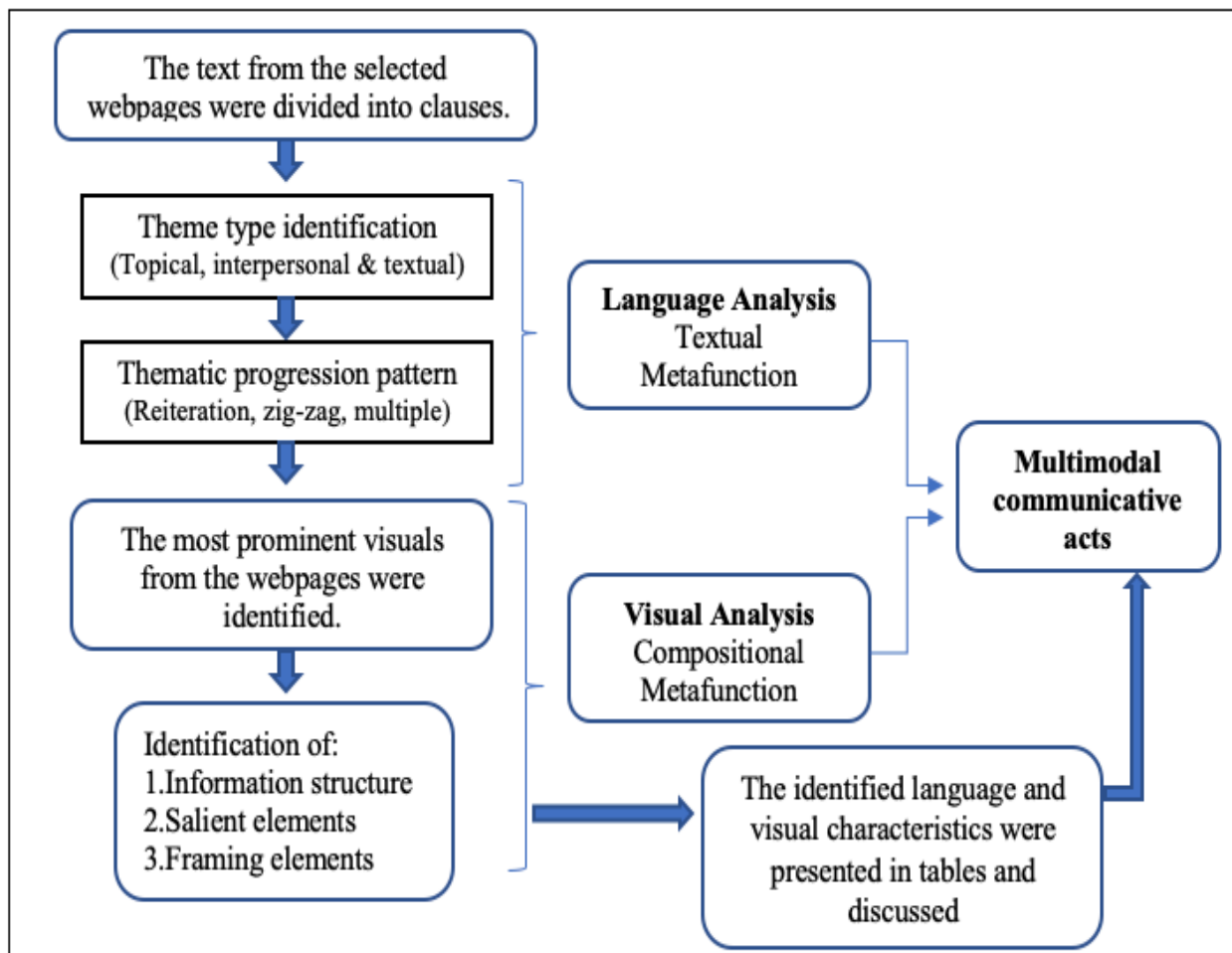


FIGURE 2. The data analysis process

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the theme and information structure analyses are presented based on how the textual and compositional functions of Samitivej Hospital are represented in each selected webpage. The language and visual analyses of the webpages are first presented separately and then discussed together in terms of how the textual and visual modes contribute to the multimodal communicative acts.

SAMITIVEJ HOSPITAL (T1)

LANGUAGE ANALYSIS - TEXTUAL FUNCTIONS

The textual analysis of the webpages selected from Samitivej Hospital's (T1) website is presented in Table 3. It illustrates the percentages based on the occurrence of each element, theme status and their thematic progression from the total of independent conjoinable clause complexes in the selected webpages, namely About Us (T1.1), Medical Tourism (T1.2) and Samitivej's New Critical Care Complex (T1.3).

TABLE 3. Theme types and thematic progression in the selected webpages of Samitivej Hospital's (T1) website

Theme Elements	Rheme	T1.1		T1.2		T1.3		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Theme Type									
Topical									
+ Unmarked		5/21	23.8%	5/21	23.8%	5/21	23.8%	15/21	71.4%
+ Marked		-	-	2/21	9.52%	-	-	2/21	9.52%
Interpersonal		1/21	4.76%	-	-	1/21	4.76%	2/21	9.52%
Textual		6/21	28.5%	5/21	23.8%	1/21	4.76%	12/21	57.1%
Thematic Progression									
Reiteration		3/21	14.2%	3/21	14.2%	3/21	14.2%	9/21	42.8%
Zig-zag		-	-	1/21	4.76%	1/21	4.76%	2/21	9.52%
Multiple		2/21	9.52%	1/21	4.76%	-	-	3/21	14.2%
New		1/21	4.76%	4/21	19%	-	-	5/21	23.8%

THEME TYPES

The themes found in the T1 text were mainly unmarked topical themes at 71.4% followed by textual themes at 57.1%. Meanwhile, marked theme and interpersonal theme shared the same percentage (9.52%). The findings on the theme types in T1 webpages together with the examples from the texts are presented in Table 4. The words or phrases in the theme position are italicised.

TABLE 4. Examples of clauses in T1 according to theme types

Theme Type in T1	Types
Unmarked topical theme	i. Proper nouns, e.g.: “ <i>Samitivej</i> remains a strong leader and Thailand’s most trusted healthcare provider.” ii. Pronoun, e.g.: “ <i>We</i> have a long history of offering international standard care to patients from all over the world”. iii. Grammatical item ‘it’, e.g.: “ <i>It</i> offers 8 new operating rooms”.
Marked topical theme	i. Prepositional phrase e.g.: “ <i>In 2009</i> , the number of foreign patients reached 1.4 million, more than 60 percent of whom flew to the country expressly for treatment.” e.g.: “ <i>To make sure that</i> all of our patients can effectively communicate with our doctors,”
Interpersonal theme	i. Modal adjuncts, e.g., “ <i>not simply</i> concerned with their physical health, ii. Finite in polarity element, e.g.: “ <i>Not only does</i> the Complex provide the best working environment for surgeons,”
Textual theme	i. Structural conjunctions, e.g., “ <i>Not only does</i> the Complex provide the best working environment for surgeons, but our eight new state-of-the-art surgical suites are fully equipped with the latest surgical technology.” ii. Conjunctive adjuncts e.g., “ <i>In addition</i> , the country’s long-standing tradition of warm hospitality, comprehensive infrastructure, beautiful scenery and rich cultural heritage make it particularly attractive.” e.g., “ <i>As the industry continues to grow</i> , <i>Samitivej</i> remains a strong leader and Thailand’s most trusted healthcare provider.” iii. Wh-relative, e.g., “ <i>and provide the best medical care possible to patients and their families that would care for patients holistically</i> ,”

Textual analysis revealed that the T1 webpages were composed of long texts and declarative clauses with thematic organisation mainly unmarked. The high occurrence of unmarked topical theme in T1 indicated that this was the most common method of introducing and describing information regarding T1 to prospective medical tourists. Readers’ attention were drawn to the facilities and expertise offered through the use of the hospital’s complete name such as “*Samitivej remains a strong leader and Thailand’s most trusted healthcare provider.*” The use of marked themes in T1, although in limited number, promoted medical tourism by convincing the prospective international medical tourists of the hospital’s commitment by highlighting their

priority in taking care of the medical tourists' needs, "**To make sure that all of our patients can effectively communicate with our doctors...**". Marked themes were also used to describe the strength of the private hospital through the hospital's location and history and at the same time create an established and prestigious image of the private hospital to the readers through texts such as "**In 2009, the number of foreign patients reached 1.4 million**".

Meanwhile, the use of interpersonal themes in the T1 texts was aimed at presenting the writer's perspective which was achieved through modal adjuncts, "**not simply concerned with their physical health**", and through the finite to present contrast in the polarity element, "**not only does the complex provide the best working environment for surgeons**". However, the use of interpersonal themes scored the lowest percentage among the types of themes identified in the T1 texts. This could be due to the nature of the promotional text (Alrajhi, 2020) which shared the attributes of objectivity and impersonal traits that scientific texts are often known for (Halliday & Webster, 2004).

Interestingly, in the selected webpages of Samitivej Hospital's website, the use of textual themes dominated the texts. In these examples, the textual themes via the use of conjunctions were used to relate the clauses describing the private hospital to its context in terms of the current medical tourism market and the conditions of the services offered by the hospital. For example, "**Not only does the Complex provide the best working environment for surgeons, but our eight new state-of-the-art surgical suites are fully equipped with the latest surgical technology**", "**In addition, the country's long-standing tradition of warm hospitality, comprehensive infrastructure, beautiful scenery and rich cultural heritage make it particularly attractive**", "**As the industry continues to grow, Samitivej remains a strong leader and Thailand's most trusted healthcare provider**". These clauses were well connected to each other and provided cohesion to the text. The textual theme is particularly important in structuring the texts because the theme operates at the sentence or clause complex level (Gerot & Wignell, 1994).

THEMATIC PROGRESSION

In terms of thematic progression pattern, the reiteration pattern was the most common thematic progression pattern found in the T1 webpages at 42.8%. The reiteration theme pattern was extensively used where cohesion was achieved through repetition of an identical theme in the clauses. For example, the complete name of the hospital was repeated, or changed to the "*it*" pronoun, contributing to a cohesive text. This facilitates readers' comprehension in following the flow of information presented on the website. Meanwhile, new thematic pattern, which were ranked second in the T1 texts at 23.8%, were employed to introduce new themes such as the country, the medical tourism industry and the hospital. The promotional message revealed some established patterns as the clauses did not stop at certain sentences because of the frequent use of new themes. This writing strategy plays a significant role in linking the clauses with the intent of guiding reader's comprehension of the message. This is important as readers' comprehension of the message would lead to a positive outcome for the hospital such as having more medical tourists seeking treatment at the hospital. The third highly ranked thematic pattern was the multiple thematic progression pattern at 14.2%, which was then followed by the zig-zag patterns at 9.52%, which cumulatively explained the flow of the promotional messages. The zig-zag and multiple theme patterns were employed in the webpages to provide cohesion by building on the rhemes, thus producing a cumulative progression smooth progression of the message delivered in the

webpages. Examples of the thematic progression patterns found in Samitivej’s webpages are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Examples of thematic progression in Samitivej webpage

THEME	Thematic Pattern	RHEME
T1i: Samitivej Hospital	T1i + R1i	R1i: has come a long way
T1ii: since its	T1ii + R1ii	R1ii: establishment date in 1979
T2: when it	T2 + R2	R2: was co-founded by the late Khun Bancha Lamsam of Kasikorn Bank and M.R. Bajairisan Jumbala, M.D.
T3i: Their vision	T3i + R3i	R3i: was to gather the best doctors and nurses together,
T3ii: <i>Their vision</i>	T3ii + R3ii	R3ii: supply them with advanced healthcare technology,
T3iii: and	T3iii + R3iii	R3iii: provide the best medical care possible to patients and their families.
T4i: They	T4i + R4i	R4i: envisioned a hospital
T4ii: that	T4ii + R4ii	R8: would care for patients holistically,
T4iii: not simply	T4iii + R4iii	R9: concerned with their physical health,
T4iv: but	T4iv + R4iv	R10: their emotional health as well.
T5: It	T5 + R5	R5: is fitting indeed
T6: that	T6 + R6	R6: M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, a former Prime Minister and a much revered scholar, named the hospital

Cohesion was achieved in the T1 texts using a high number of textual themes which are important in structuring the texts because the theme operates at the sentence or clause complex level (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). Results from the thematic progression revealed that the flow of message in all the webpages was primarily to draw the attention of prospective medical tourists. The thematic progression was established through several combinations of thematic patterns which were identified to be organised in a clear pattern to explain the flow of the representative and commissive acts delivered in the texts. In brief, it was observed that the findings of this study in relation to thematic organisation showed some commonality with Alrajhi’s (2020) and Stoian and Dejica’s (2016) studies in that the unmarked topical theme and theme reiteration were dominantly used for the purpose of producing a sense of cohesiveness in the text. Although Stoian and Dejica (2016) and Alrajhi (2020) reported that thematic progression was lacking in their studies, the findings in this study differed as a clear thematic progression existed, demonstrating the presence of interconnectedness of ideas in the T1 texts.

VISUAL ANALYSIS - COMPOSITIONAL FUNCTION

The most prominent visual in T1.1, T1.2 and T1.3 are identified and presented in Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5, respectively. The analytical tools (see Table 2) proposed in Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Design Theory were used to analyse the visuals. Occurrences of each compositional element, namely information value, salient elements and framing elements were identified in the visuals.

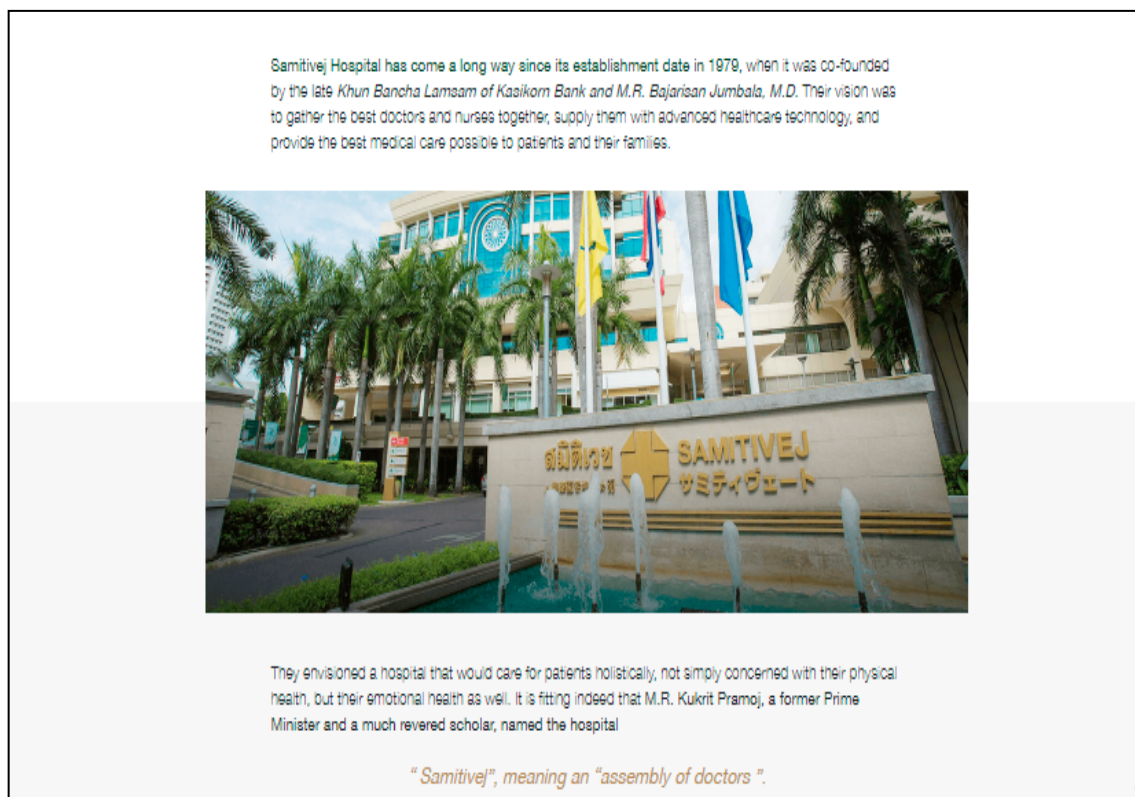


FIGURE 3. Webpage on About Us (T1.1)



FIGURE 4. Webpage on Medical Tourism (T1.2)



FIGURE 5. Webpage on Samitivej's New Critical Care Complex (T1.3)

The identified compositional characteristics of the selected visuals in the T1 webpages are summarised in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Compositional analysis of visuals in T1

Visual characteristics		T1.1	T1.2	T1.3
Information Value	Left & Right	-	-	-
	Top & Bottom	-	-	-
	Centre & Margin	/	/	/
Salience		The gate with the hospital's name on it; the hospital building in white contrast	The bed and window in white contrast and in middle position	The medical staffs (surgeons)
Framing		No framing. The entrance of the hospital and the buildings appear seamlessly connected to each other in introducing the hospital to the audience, generating a welcoming presence.	No framing. The facilities or elements in the room are connected to each other in showing the infrastructure on offer to establish Samitivej as a comfortable and caring hospital.	No framing. The medical staffs and the ambience of the room, and equipment are connected to the message of 'the new generation of technological advances'.

The visuals presented parts of the hospital buildings and its environment in T1.1, the room facilities in T1.2 and several medical staff in an operation theatre in T1.3. As previously stated, compositional meaning is concerned with the organisation of the elements within an image and involved characteristics such as information value, salient and framing elements. For information value, the placement of elements in the selected webpages were mainly the central-margin position. Very limited position focused on the left-right high-low position since the aim of these multimodal texts is to promote medical tourism; therefore, the purpose is to enhance the hospital facilities and services rather than to signal of low spirits or of unfavourable social status. The visuals were organised in the central position as the centre presents the nucleus of information.

The parts were made salient by its size and colour. Certain elements such as the surgeons who were working together in T1.3 were presented in a greater size compared to other elements in the theatre room. It created vector (action and communication between participants) through mutual commitment of performing an operation to a patient assisted by the latest surgical technology. The importance of the surgeons was not only highlighted through its size but also the colour. Specific colours evoke certain attitudes and manage to convey mood more precisely than any other colours. The surgeons were made prominent in the faded blue and were contrasted to the shocking blue background. As blue is associated with security (Guijarro & Pinar, 2008), the visual contribute to the overall effect of calmness, serenity and security that portrayed the teamwork, expertise and credibility of the surgeons to 'increase patients' safety and well-being'.

The use of human figures in the visuals was rather uncommon as the copywriters used more images of landmarks rather than images of medical tourists. However, several images of the hospital surgeons were presented in the visual of T1.3 to lend the visuals a piece of reality. Framing is another aspect of the compositional metafunction. In T1.1, T1.2 and T1.3, there were no frames.

The absence of framing indicates the dynamic of hospital's ambience and facilities which are connected to the global, sophisticated and amicable image of the hospital through the message of 'the new generation of technological advances', 'care for patients holistically' and 'the best doctors and nurses'. Overall, the visuals in all the selected webpages were consistent with the representative and commissive acts conveyed by the texts.

MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATIVE ACTS OF SELECTED WEBPAGES FROM A THAI PRIVATE HOSPITAL WEBSITE (SAMITIVEJ HOSPITAL)

In this study, the findings showed that the identified verbal and visual characteristics in Samitivej Hospital conveyed certain multimodal communicative acts to the prospective medical tourists. Based on the identified multimodal characteristics, it was revealed that the communicative acts aimed to inform and persuade prospective medical tourists through different communicative strategies.

The readers were informed not only on the promotion of the private hospital's background, services and facilities, but also on the country's medical tourism industry show example here. The textual messages were well-developed as they were mainly elaborated by adding adjacent details such as prepositional phrase in marked theme, e.g.; '**to make sure that all of our patients can effectively communicate with our doctors**' and structural conjunctions in textual theme, e.g.; '**not only does the Complex provide the best working environment for surgeons, but our eight new state-of-the-art surgical suites are fully equipped with the latest surgical technology**'. These prepositional phrase and structural conjunctions develop the promotional messages by providing extensive information on the details of the facilities and services offered by Samitivej Hospital to the audience. Apart from linguistic, visual messages were also informative as they were mainly constructed on a complex basis since they contained many elements in each frame. For an instance, several images of medical staff (surgeons), surrounded by modern surgical equipment in T1.3 provide some information on ambience that prospective medical tourists will experience for operation procedures.

Persuasive elements in the webpages were interspersed by impersonal and objective communicative acts. Since interpersonal themes present the author's perspective, the minimal use of interpersonal themes in the texts contributed to the objectivity and impersonal qualities within the selected webpages of the Thai private hospital website studied. However, the use of interpersonal themes in the text can also serve as a persuasive strategy. For example, the text "*They envisioned a hospital that **would** care for patients holistically, not **simply** concerned with their physical health*" convinced the readers to choose the services offered by this hospital as they know that they will be safe and receive their deserving treatment. Instructional and practical details such as are essential elements in the description of a private hospital and, for this reason, they were largely presented as the main information for a clearer message in the Thai private hospital website. Meanwhile, indirect persuasion was mainly concealed through the use of visuals that attracted the senses, created certain mood and motivation and appeared to be impressive on its own, given its size and placement. The visual message presented was persuasive as the use of centre-margin organisation made the visuals more focused on delivering its message. As the aim of these multimodal texts is to promote medical tourism, very limited use of the left-right or high-low position was identified. The focus was not on these positions as the purpose is to emphasise the hospital's facilities and services rather than to signal low spirits or unfavourable social status. In short, the visuals attracted the senses while the texts supplied the factual information, and both

modes were utilised in combination to deliver effective communicative acts to the potential medical tourists.

With the growth of medical tourism in Thailand that has led to a change in the customer base from local to international (Carreon et al., 2013), the relationship between the hospital and prospective medical tourists was established throughout the webpages. Phrases such as “*international citizen*”, “*a number of foreign patients*”, “*travellers from eligible countries*” in the theme position which directly and individually addressed the medical tourists were frequently used in the webpages of the Thai private hospital website. This strategy draws the prospective medical tourists’ attention and creates a communicative immediacy. The direct appellation through the use of the first personal pronoun “*you*” in the text also makes them feel important. Apart from that channelling the medical tourists’ attention to the communicative acts, results from the thematic progression revealed that the flow of message in the website was primarily to also draw the prospective medical tourists’ attention towards the message flow. Since the thematic progression was established through several combinations of thematic patterns, the thematic pattern was therefore identified as one that is clearly organised. This is characterised by the interconnectedness of ideas in the texts and this is crucial so that the promotional messages can reach the targeted audience. Table 7 summarises the language and visual realisations of the multimodal communicative acts in each selected webpage of Samitivej Hospital website.

TABLE 7. Multimodal communicative acts in T1.1, T1.2 and T1.3

Webpages of Samitivej Hospital	Multimodal communicative acts
T1.1	The hospital was portrayed as a caring hospital by offering holistic services that ‘ <i>care for patients’ physical and emotional health</i> ’. The image of the exterior hospital building gives readers a glimpse of its physical structures. The entrance of the hospital and the building appear seamlessly connected to each other in introducing the hospital to the audience, generating a welcoming presence. Its main entrance resembles that of a hotel. The fountains and palm trees that surround the hospital suggest the serenity from the nature which contributes to the emotional health the medical tourists will experience if they choose Samitivej Hospital. The prospective medical tourists were also convinced to receive treatment from ‘ <i>the best doctors and nurses</i> ’ and ‘ <i>advanced healthcare technology</i> ’ at Samitivej Hospital.
T1.2	Medical tourism in Thailand was portrayed as a ‘ <i>medical tourism hub in Asia</i> ’. The language realisations support this tagline promotion through ‘ <i>standards of technology, globally trained medical professionals, and competitive costs</i> ’. The visual portrayed comprehensive infrastructure of the hospital that cater for the medical tourism hub in Asia through the image of a hospital room with complete facilities. The elements in the room were connected to each other in showing the infrastructure on offer to describe Samitivej as an established and modern hospital. Interestingly, apart from the infrastructure, the medical tourism promotion was also highlighted through ‘ <i>the country’s long-standing tradition of warm hospitality and beautiful scenery and rich cultural heritage</i> ’.
T1.3	The multimodal communicative acts of great expertise and technological advances in Thailand’s medical tourism were successfully portrayed in the selected webpages through language and visual realisations. The visual included images of three surgeons playing respective role in the operation theatre. Focused, committed and reliable, they were assisted by ‘ <i>state-of-the-art surgical suites and latest surgical technology</i> ’ to increase patients’ safety and well-being.

To summarise, the visual and verbal modes utilised in the webpages were combined to convey information and create a technological established, sophisticated, reliable and caring image of Samitivej Hospital to the prospective medical tourists. This can be demonstrated through the strategy of promoting both medical and tourism needs. For tourism needs, Thailand's medical tourism was promoted through the country's long standing tradition of warm hospitality and beautiful scenery and rich cultural heritage. These attributes added cultural values to the promotion of medical tourism in Thailand as a medical hub in Asia. Beyond that, the multimodal communicative acts in all selected webpages were mainly centred on associating Thailand's medical tourism with significant investment in cutting-edge medical technology which is crucial to improve the international medical tourists' experience. Thailand has been driven to shift its focus from being known just as a global leader in cosmetic surgery and treatment as well as wellness and traditional medicines to having high quality and reliable medical skills and cutting-edge medical technologies to achieve a sustainable medical tourism sector and support the overall economy in the long term.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the modes complemented each other since the visuals illustrated what the text conveyed. The analyses demonstrated that Thailand portrays a positive image of the medical tourism industry through the promotional messages conveyed in their private hospital website; in the case of Samitivej Hospital, this is achieved through the use high occurrence of unmarked themes, reiteration patterns, salient visuals and absence of framing in the selected webpages.

The findings suggest that thematic organisation is instrumental in the composition of a message as a whole in online promotional materials, and in this instance, in promoting medical tourism. Appropriate theme choices and thematic progression patterns play a significant role that provides a natural flow to the text and also lead to a well-constructed text. This study has shown that different thematic choices can lead to different messages where some can be more informative, coherent, cohesive, and structured than others. Meanwhile, the use of visuals attracted the senses, created certain mood and motivation and appeared to be impressive on its own. Such details can contribute to the general decision related to website production since appropriate thematic organisation in the text, supported by salient visual selection can influence promotion of users' perception and understanding of a website. This study has proven that multimodal discourse analysis provided appropriate analytical tools through SFL for examining online medical tourism promotional discourse to create a reliable image of a private hospital through its multimodal communicative acts. This is important, particularly at the present time when the confidence to travel among many has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the availability of vaccines and mass vaccination in many countries, borders have started opening again. In this respect, a website text composition that effectively delivers communicative acts to prospective medical tourists can be one of the ways to restore their confidence to travel again and to get treatment from a private hospital.

This study has contributed to the literature on medical tourism discourse, specifically on multimodal communicative acts. The findings also revealed that in producing promotional texts, emphasis should be given not only to writing the patterns of theme and rheme in language analysis, but also to the construction of information structure in visual analysis. This study is not without its limitations since it had only examined the website of one private hospital from Thailand, and therefore, the findings are not representative of the country. It is therefore suggested that a large-

scale study involving several hospital websites from more than one country is conducted so as to offer better insights and understanding in this area. More studies on promotional genre, particularly in relation to websites promoting medical tourism, should also be conducted. Research on medical tourism websites may involve other landmarks such as other governmental agencies or the hotel industry as these tend to support the promotion of medical tourism. Such research can help identify whether the current findings can be extended to these areas or are limited to private hospital websites only. Additionally, apart from textual metafunction, the interpersonal and experiential metafunctions can also be examined to produce a more inclusive and comprehensive view of how language and images are employed online to promote medical tourism.

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