

## Multimodal Moves in the "About Us" Section of Malaysian Private Hospitals' Websites

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### ABSTRACT

The "About Us" sections of private hospital websites are essential for establishing credibility, highlighting unique offerings, and building trust with potential local and international patients. These sections are crucial in promoting private hospitals and contributing to the growth of the medical tourism industry. However, limited research has explored the effectiveness of this promotional channel, particularly from a multimodal perspective. Limited prior studies have examined the generic structure of this section by integrating multimodal discourse analysis. This study employs a multimodal move analysis framework to examine the "About Us" sections of 41 Malaysian private hospital websites, with "move" as distinct strategies or steps that collectively develop rhetorical strategies to fulfill specific communicative purposes. The methodology includes two phases: verbal move analysis, guided by Swales' genre analysis framework, to identify rhetorical moves expressed through text, and visual move analysis, based on Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar Theory, to explore representational, interactive, and compositional meanings of visual elements. The findings reveal how verbal and visual elements interact to achieve cohesive communicative goals. Verbal components emphasize credibility, professionalism, and technological advancements, while visuals such as images, diagrams, and banners evoke trust, engagement, and emotional resonance. Moves like "Establishing Credentials" and "Indicating Value of the Hospital" are achieved through a combination of text and visuals, creating cohesive representations. This study provides insights into how private hospitals can leverage multimodal strategies to promote their services and attract international medical tourists and collaborators effectively.

**Keywords:** Medical tourism industry; private hospitals websites; "About Us" section; multimodal genre analysis; rhetorical moves

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## INTRODUCTION

Private hospitals in countries like Malaysia are striving to surpass their competitors in the healthcare market while supporting the development of the medical tourism industry. To achieve this, they frequently employ various marketing strategies and maintain a presence on multiple communicative platforms, including Internet webpages (Kadir & Nayan, 2021; Moghavvemi et al., 2017; Salimi A., 2021; Wan Fatimah Solihah et al., 2022). As Tan (2010, p. 93) observes, these webpages generate "a multitude of intertextual possibilities by assembling texts from various modes and discourses (e.g., verbiage, image, sound, activity) that are then represented in multiple relations to one another." One of the Internet webpages which has been often used by these private hospitals to cast a very pleasant picture of their hospitals is the "About Us" section. In this section, besides presenting some factual and objective information like the number of beds, personnel, admissions, specialties, geographical location, etc., the private hospitals have opportunities to offer eye-catching information to persuade possible healthcare seekers to choose their hospitals rather than their competitors.

Alongside the deliberate choice of content for these sections, private hospitals can utilize semiotic resources beyond language, particularly visuals, to further promote their services. This is especially significant within the medical tourism industry, a rapidly growing global sector where healthcare providers compete to attract international patients by showcasing superior quality of care, cutting-edge technology, and patient-centered services. Private hospitals, as key players in this industry, rely heavily on their websites to highlight their unique offerings and establish trust with prospective patients. Wan Fatimah Solihah et al. (2024) found that private hospitals strategically emphasize high-quality healthcare services, advanced medical technologies, and international accreditation to appeal to medical tourists. Their study further revealed that digital platforms are utilized to convey these attributes through clear, targeted messaging, aligning with the expectations of global healthcare seekers.

One genre study on the "About Us" sections of private hospital websites (Salimi A. et al., 2021) focused on analyzing the verbal constituent elements, demonstrating how these web-mediated texts attract prospective healthcare seekers. This aligns with prior research, such as Smith and Jones (2018), which highlighted the importance of strategic verbal messaging in building trust and credibility in medical tourism promotion. Similarly, Lestari and Ekawati (2023) emphasized the use of rhetorical strategies, including narrative and descriptive elements, to effectively craft persuasive online promotional materials. Despite Salimi A. et al.'s (2021) valuable insights into verbal elements, their study notably did not examine multimodal resources, an omission that limits a comprehensive understanding of how "About Us" sections function as persuasive tools. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue, the integration of text, visuals, and design is essential for shaping user perceptions and enhancing engagement. Supporting this, Würtz (2005) highlights that one of the most significant aspects of online promotion through websites is the use of collections of images, multimedia components, interactive elements, animated graphics, and audio, all of which play a critical role in shaping user engagement.

Building on this gap, the present paper explores how non-verbal resources such as images, diagrams, and graphics are used to complement or even substitute verbal elements to structure the "About Us" sections of Malaysian private hospital websites. Malaysia's prominence in the medical tourism industry makes this focus particularly relevant, as the country's healthcare providers must effectively communicate their value propositions to a global audience. By examining the interplay of verbal and visual elements, the study demonstrates how multimodality supports the growth of

medical tourism through effective digital communication strategies. Drawing on the ‘multimodal genre analysis’ movement (Hiippala, 2014; Tardy & Swales, 2014), this research contributes to broader discourse analysis by extending the focus beyond lexico-grammatical resources to include semiotic resources such as visuals and their interaction with other interdiscursive elements. As Kress (2000, p. 337) observes, "it is now no longer possible to understand language and its uses without understanding the effect of all modes of communication that are copresent in any text." This study, therefore, addresses the research question: How are the internal structures of the "About Us" sections of Malaysian private hospital websites realized through the interplay of verbal and visual semiotic resources? By analyzing this question, the study not only advances theoretical understandings of multimodality but also offers practical insights for the healthcare industry in crafting effective promotional strategies.

## **RHETORICAL MOVES AND STRATEGIES**

Rhetorical moves and strategies are central to understanding how texts achieve their communicative goals within specific genres. Swales’ (2004) genre analysis framework provides a foundational approach for identifying rhetorical moves, defined as functional units of discourse that serve specific communicative purposes. These moves are further broken down into steps or strategies, detailing how each move is realized linguistically. Bhatia (1993, 2004) extended this framework, emphasizing the significance of promotional genres, where rhetorical strategies are used to persuade and influence target audiences. In promotional texts, rhetorical moves such as "Establishing Credentials," "Promoting Services," and "Engaging the Audience" are often employed to establish credibility and connect with the audience (Kwan, 2006). The application of rhetorical moves in web-mediated genres, such as the "About Us" sections of private hospital websites, involves adapting these traditional strategies to a digital context. Digital environments demand the integration of multimodal resources—verbal and visual elements—to enhance the effectiveness of rhetorical strategies. For instance, moves like "Indicating Value of the Hospital" are not only realized through verbal descriptions but are also supported by visuals such as images of state-of-the-art facilities or smiling medical staff, which evoke emotional engagement and trust (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

## **MULTIMODALITY**

Multimodality, grounded in Halliday’s (1978) social semiotic theory, views meaning making as a process involving multiple semiotic modes rather than privileging linguistic modes alone (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O’Halloran, 2016; Kress, 2012; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2005). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p. 20) define multimodality as "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which the modes are combined." Semiotic modes include language, gesture, posture, color, image, sound, typography, and layout, among others. These modes work in tandem to construct meaning, often emphasizing modes based on the communicative context (Iedema, 2003).

Previous studies have explored multimodality in various digital promotional contexts. For instance, Djonov and Zhao (2014) investigated how hyperlinks and typography in websites guide user navigation and create a seamless browsing experience, emphasizing the role of visual

hierarchy in crafting persuasive messages. In the healthcare context, Haider and Yasmin (2021) examined hospitals' use of visual and linguistic resources in online materials to promote technological advancements and patient-centered care, thereby enhancing credibility and appeal.

However, despite these contributions, existing research has predominantly focused on tourism or general healthcare websites without closely examining the specific promotional strategies employed in the "About Us" sections of private hospitals' websites. Furthermore, while multimodality has been extensively discussed in terms of individual modes (e.g., images or hyperlinks), there remains a gap in understanding how these modes interact to create cohesive and persuasive messages in the healthcare domain. Additionally, there is limited research addressing how multimodal strategies are adapted for culturally diverse audiences in promotional genres. While Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) visual grammar framework provides a foundational approach to analyze multimodal communication, its application to hospital promotional discourse reveals certain limitations. The framework emphasizes the interaction of semiotic modes such as image, color, and composition, but does not fully address the unique demands of digital environments, particularly in the healthcare sector. For example, hospital websites, especially their "About Us" sections, rely on specific multimodal strategies that extend beyond the scope of traditional visual grammar. The strategic use of hyperlinks and interactive elements is critical for guiding user navigation and structuring information hierarchically, yet these features are not explicitly addressed in Kress and van Leeuwen's model. Hyperlinks, for instance, serve not only as navigational tools but also as a mode of persuasion, directing users to specific content that reinforces the hospital's credibility and appeal (Djonov & Zhao, 2014).

Additionally, hospital promotional discourse often employs emotionally charged imagery, such as smiling healthcare providers or patients in recovery, to evoke trust and compassion. While Kress and van Leeuwen's model recognizes the representational and interpersonal functions of images, it does not delve into how such imagery specifically caters to the healthcare context, where emotions and perceptions of reliability play a crucial role (Haider & Yasmin, 2021). Similarly, the use of color in hospital websites often reflects industry-specific conventions, such as the dominance of blue tones to symbolize trust, professionalism, and calmness, an aspect that requires contextual adaptation of the visual grammar framework.

In the "About Us" sections of private hospitals' websites, multimodality manifests through the arrangement of semiotic resources such as language, visual representations, sound, hyperlink, color, webpage layout, and typography. These resources combine to convey key messages and enhance the promotional appeal of private hospitals. Drawing on these scholarly insights, this study critically engages with and adapts Kress and van Leeuwen's framework to account for multimodal features unique to hospital websites. By addressing the aforementioned gaps, the study not only enhances the applicability of visual grammar to digital healthcare discourse but also provides insights into how hospitals strategically use multimodality to build trust and establish their brand identity.

## METHODOLOGY

### DATA COLLECTION

The study focused on the "About Us" sections of Malaysian private hospitals' websites to examine the use of multimodal resources in achieving communicative goals. Forty-one hospitals were selected based on their active involvement in medical tourism, as identified through the "Health Tourism" section on the official website of the Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia (APHM) (<http://www.hospitals-malaysia.org>). This section provided a comprehensive list of hospitals engaged in the sector. For analysis, the section most representative of the "About Us" content for each hospital was identified. In cases with overlapping content, the section introducing the organization's mission and services was prioritized. Equivalent sections with similar communicative intent were analyzed when an explicit "About Us" section was unavailable. Screenshots of the selected sections were systematically organized for multimodal analysis, focusing on the interplay of text, visuals, and hypertextual features. The multimodal analysis emphasized depth over quantity, consistent with approaches by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and O'Halloran (2011), which stress detailed examinations to understand the interaction of semiotic modes. This method enabled a nuanced understanding of how private hospitals utilize multimodal resources to engage audiences in the medical tourism context. Table 1 outlines the selected "About Us" sections, detailing their titles, visuals, and employed hypertextual features.

TABLE 1. Visual and Hypertextual Features of the "About Us" Section of Malaysian Private Hospitals' Websites

"About Us" Sections (N=41)								
With Title ****	Without Title ****	With Visual		Without Visual ****	With Link		Without Link	
		One Visual	> One Visual		One Webpage	> One Webpage	One Webpage	> One Webpage
(N=39) entitled: About (N=4) About [Name of Hospital] (N=1) About Us (N=33) Corporate profile (N=1)	(N=2)	(N=9)	(N=27)	(N=5)	(N=7)	(N=25)	(N=9)	****

Once the 41 "About Us" sections were collected, the verbal and visual components were analyzed to identify generic moves and strategies (steps) based on their communicative functions (Swales, 2004). The verbal move analysis was guided by Swales' (2004, p. 229) concept of a move as "better seen as flexible in terms of its linguistic realisation. At one extreme, it can be realised by a clause: at the other by several sentences. It is a functional, not a formal unit." This definition allowed for a detailed examination of how textual elements serve specific communicative purposes within the "About Us" sections. For the visual move analysis, various approaches from multimodal genre studies were considered to attribute discourse functions to visual elements within a move structure. Previous research has treated visual representations as moves (Labrador & Ramón, 2015; Suen, 2013), steps (Izquierdo & Pérez Blanco, 2020; Parkinson et al., 2017), or as both moves and steps, where visuals can carry multiple functions depending on their semiotic resources (Kithulgoda, 2023). In this study, the visual move analysis incorporated Kress and van Leeuwen's

(1996, 2006) Visual Grammar Theory, focusing on the three metafunctions—Representational, Interactive, and Compositional—to understand how visual elements achieve various communicative functions and align with rhetorical moves. The analysis emphasized the ‘represented participants’, such as people, places, and objects, to explore their role in accomplishing specific discourse purposes.

- **Representational Meaning** - Visual components, such as images of facilities, medical equipment, and professional staff, were analyzed for their ability to depict the hospital’s services and achievements, aligning with moves like ‘Promoting Services and Technology’ and ‘Establishing Credibility’. For instance, an image of a robotic surgical system directly supports the promotion of advanced medical technologies.
- **Interactive Meaning** - This function examined how visuals engage the viewer to build trust and relatability, complementing moves such as ‘Engaging the Audience’ and ‘Establishing Credibility’. Visuals like smiling healthcare staff or eye contact in photographs foster an emotional connection, while low-angle shots of buildings convey authority and professionalism.
- **Compositional Meaning** - The arrangement of visual elements, including layout, salience, and framing, was analyzed to determine how visuals guide the viewer’s focus and enhance coherence, supporting moves such as ‘Encouraging Action’. For example, strategically placed visuals with clear focal points, such as a prominent call-to-action button next to an image of a professional consultation, create a seamless and persuasive user experience.

Visual components from the constituent webpages of the "About Us" sections, regardless of their type (e.g., videos, text depicted as images), format (static or dynamic), or color scheme (black and white or colorful), were analyzed for how they substitute, complement, or reinforce verbal moves and strategies. By integrating Kress and van Leeuwen’s metafunctions, the analysis demonstrated how verbal and visual elements interact cohesively to achieve the communicative goals of the "About Us" sections, enhancing their rhetorical and promotional impact. For example, Figure 1 illustrates the ‘Establishing Credentials’ move, where visual elements such as images of awards or accreditation ceremonies prominently feature people as the represented participants. These individuals, typically hospital leaders, healthcare professionals, or award recipients, serve to embody the hospital’s expertise and achievements, aligning with the Representational Meaning by depicting real-life accomplishments and authority figures. The presence of people in these images also contributes to the Interactive Meaning, as their expressions, body language, or positioning (e.g., direct gaze or handshake gestures) engage the viewer and foster trust. Furthermore, the Compositional Meaning ensures that these visuals are framed and positioned prominently, emphasizing their importance and guiding the viewer’s attention to key aspects of credibility and professionalism. This cohesive integration of verbal and visual elements strengthens the rhetorical goal of establishing trustworthiness and authority in the "About Us" sections.



Awarded full 4 years accreditation by Malaysian Society for Quality in Health Hospital Accreditation

FIGURE 1. Visual Move Analysis: Establishing Credentials

### MULTIMODAL MOVE ANALYSIS

The multimodal move analysis employed in this study is structured into four interconnected phases, designed to comprehensively examine the verbal and visual elements of the "About Us" sections of Malaysian private hospitals' websites. The procedure begins with verbal move analysis, where the textual content is analyzed using Swales' (2004) framework to identify rhetorical moves and strategies/steps that fulfill specific communicative purposes. This is followed by the visual move analysis, guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) Visual Grammar Theory, which examines how visual elements such as images, graphics, and layout contribute to these purposes. The integration of these two phases forms the basis for the multimodal moves, showcasing how verbal and visual elements interact to create cohesive and persuasive communication strategies. Finally, the findings from the multimodal moves are synthesized to identify the rhetorical strategies and communicative purposes of the "About Us" sections, providing a comprehensive understanding of how private hospitals utilize multimodal resources to promote their technological advancements and support medical tourism. Figure 2 illustrates the systematic and holistic analysis of the multimodal nature of these sections.

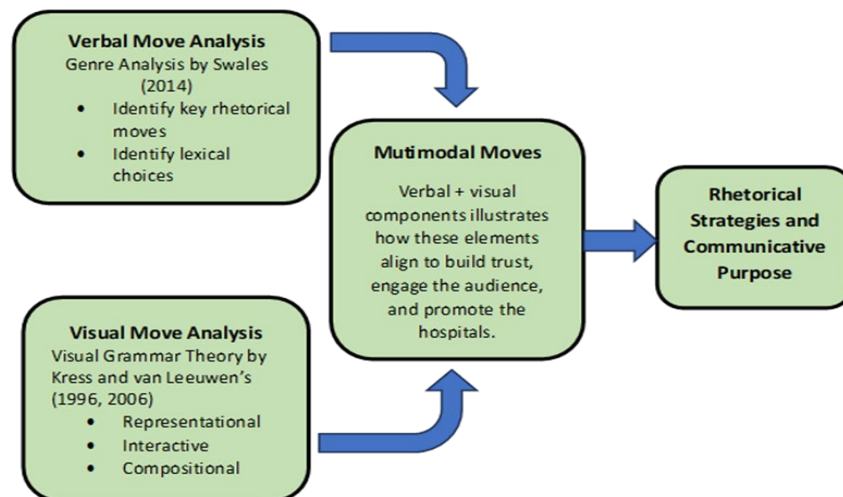


FIGURE 2. Multimodal Move Analysis Framework

#### VERBAL MOVE ANALYSIS

The verbal move analysis examines the textual components of the "About Us" sections, guided by Swales' (2004) genre analysis framework. Swales' (2004) genre analysis framework provides a structured approach for examining the rhetorical organization of texts, identifying functional moves and strategies that fulfill specific communicative purposes. Its flexibility allows for adaptation across genres, including promotional and web-mediated texts, making it suitable for analyzing the "About Us" sections of hospital websites (Bhatia, 1993; Kwan, 2006). By focusing on the purpose-driven nature of communication, this framework effectively captures how hospitals structure their messaging to establish credibility, promote services, and engage audiences, aligning with their goals in medical tourism.

In this framework, a move is conceptualized as a functional unit of discourse that serves distinct communicative purposes within a text. Each move is further broken down into steps that articulate the strategies used to achieve rhetorical objectives. In the context of private hospital websites, the verbal analysis identifies key rhetorical moves, including: Establishing Credibility, where hospitals emphasize accreditations, awards, and years of expertise to build trust; Promoting Services and Technology, which involves describing advanced medical facilities, specialized treatments, and innovative technologies; Engaging the Audience, achieved through inclusive language, emotive expressions, and testimonials that foster connection and relatability; and Encouraging Action, using calls-to-action such as "Contact us today" or "Schedule an appointment" to prompt engagement. Furthermore, the analysis delves into linguistic features such as lexical choices, sentence structures, and the promotional tone, highlighting how hospitals construct compelling narratives to attract medical tourists and appeal to a global audience.

#### VISUAL MOVE ANALYSIS

The visual move analysis draws on Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) Visual Grammar Theory, which examines how images, graphics, and layout contribute to meaning making in communication. This analysis focuses on the role of visuals in complementing and reinforcing the communicative goals established by the verbal elements. Visual moves are categorized into three metafunctions: Representational Meaning (Ideational), which explores what the visuals depict, such as high-tech medical equipment, welcoming staff, or state-of-the-art facilities, to visually convey innovation and care; Interactive Meaning (Interpersonal), which analyzes how visuals engage the viewer, such as through eye contact in staff photos or low-angle shots of buildings that convey authority and trust; and Compositional Meaning (Textual), which studies the arrangement of visuals, including salience, framing, and layout, to guide the viewer's focus and emphasize key messages. By examining these elements, the visual move analysis reveals how hospitals strategically use imagery, icons, and design features to amplify the persuasive impact of their "About Us" sections. Figure 3 illustrates the three metafunctions and the corresponding analytical tools used to examine the visuals on private hospital websites, providing insights into how each function contributes to the analysis.



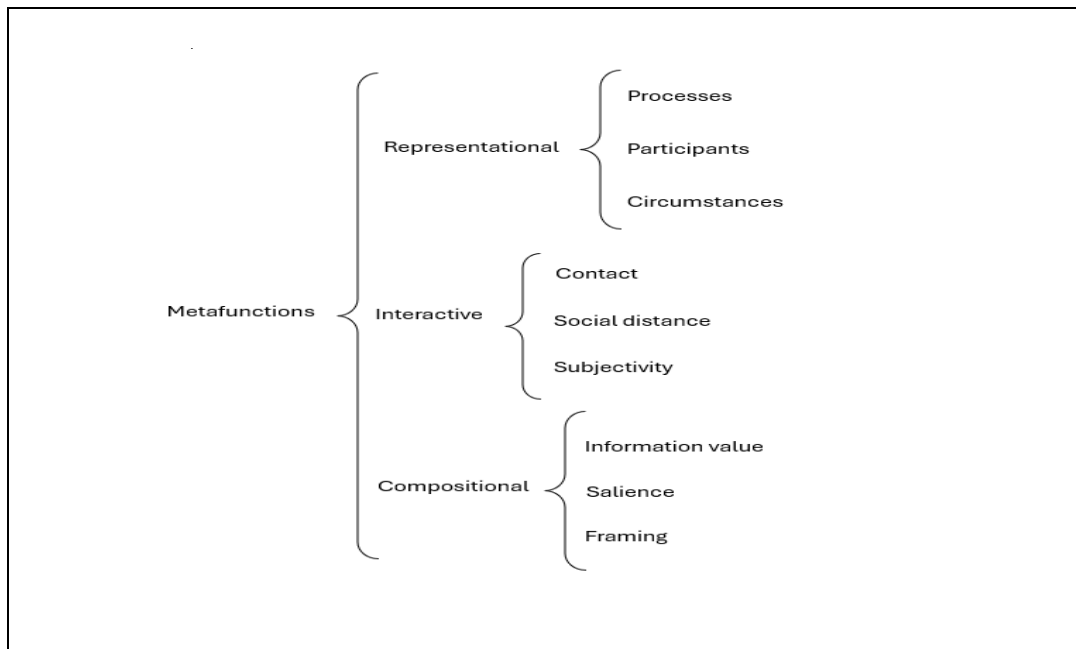


FIGURE 3. Visual Grammar Theory

### RHETORICAL STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATIVE PURPOSE

The identified multimodal moves culminate in the development of rhetorical strategies that fulfill the communicative purposes of the "About Us" sections. These strategies include building credibility by establishing the hospital's authority and expertise through a combination of textual descriptions and visual elements, such as logos, certifications, and awards. Promoting technology and services is another key strategy, where hospitals highlight their advanced facilities and specialized treatments to attract medical tourists through persuasive language and supporting visuals, including images of medical devices or testimonials. Engaging the audience involves fostering a sense of connection by using relatable language, emotive appeals, and visuals featuring smiling staff or satisfied patients. Additionally, encouraging interaction is achieved through clear calls-to-action and interactive elements like hyperlinks or contact forms. The integration of these strategies ensures that the "About Us" sections are not only informative but also compelling and persuasive, effectively supporting the hospitals' goals in the competitive medical tourism industry. The integration of Swales' verbal move analysis and Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar provides a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical structures and strategies used in the "About Us" sections. This approach highlights how private hospitals leverage their multimodal resources, both linguistic and visual resources, to build credibility and trust, to effectively promote their technological facilities, and to engage international audience. By emphasizing the importance of multimodal communication, the study highlights its relevance in enhancing digital promotional strategies for medical tourism.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study, as presented in Table 2, focus on the rhetorical structure and strategies employed in the "About Us" sections of Malaysian private hospitals' websites. The analysis identifies how verbal and visual elements contribute to the communicative purposes of these sections. The table provides a clear categorization of the moves and their realization through multimodal resources, emphasizing the integration and distinct roles of textual and visual elements in achieving promotional goals.

The findings highlight the variability in how different rhetorical moves are realized, with some moves relying primarily on text, while others effectively combining text and visuals. Visual elements, such as images of facilities or accreditation symbols, often work in conjunction with verbal descriptions to reinforce credibility and professionalism. Table 2 captures the nuanced use of these multimodal strategies, providing a detailed account of how hospitals craft their "About Us" sections to address key communicative objectives and resonate with a global audience, particularly within the competitive medical tourism sector.

TABLE 2. Verbal and Visual Expression of Moves and Strategies in the Websites  
 (Adapted from Salimi A. et al., 2021)

Move/Strategy	Semiotic resources	
	Verbal	Visual
<b>Move 1: Attracting reader's/visitor's attention</b>	√	√
<i>Strategy (a): Title/Heading</i>	√	
<i>Strategy (b): Sub-title/Sub-heading (sometimes in the form of questions)</i>	√	
<i>Strategy (c): (Audio)visual (esp. occurring at the top of the webpage)</i>		√
<i>Strategy (d): Quotation by famous people/authorities</i>	√	
<i>Strategy (e): Slogan</i>	√	
<b>Move 2: Targeting the market</b>	√	
<b>Move 3: Introducing the hospital</b>	√	√
<b>Move 4: Describing/(Essential) detailing of the hospital</b>	√	√
<b>Move 5: Indicating value of the hospital</b>	√	√
<b>Move 6: Justifying the hospital</b>	√	√
<i>Strategy (a): Indicating the importance or need to experience the hospital</i>	√	√
<i>Strategy (b): Offering unique feature(s) of the hospital</i>	√	
<i>Strategy (c): Establishing a niche</i>	√	
<b>Move 7: Creating a positive image</b>	√	
<b>Move 8: Establishing credentials</b>	√	√
<i>Strategy (a): Providing a positive and long-established reputation</i>	√	√
<i>Strategy (b): Offering the hospital's core statements and/or values</i>	√	
<i>Strategy (c): Highlighting the achievements and advances</i>	√	√
<i>Strategy (d): Indicating the novelty (quality) of services and/or technologies</i>	√	√
<i>Strategy (e): Indicating the affiliation and partnership</i>	√	√
<i>Strategy (f): Highlighting the strength (reputation) of the hospital's people and/or holder(s)</i>	√	√
<b>Move 9: Offering endorsements/testimonials</b>	√	√
<b>Move 10: Establishing/Reinforcing the relationship with potential customers/visitors</b>	√	√
<i>Strategy (a): Soliciting response</i>	√	√
<i>Strategy (b): Offering course or collaboration opportunities</i>	√	√
<i>Strategy (c): Using language options</i>	√	
<i>Strategy (d): Invoking/Undertaking social collaboration</i>	√	√
<b>Move 11: Giving extra/relevant information</b>	√	

## MOVE 1: ATTRACTING READER'S/VISITOR'S ATTENTION

This move is used to draw the attention of web surfers by creatively incorporating some attention-grabbing techniques in the "About Us" sections. We have identified 190 occurrences of the strategy (a) 'Title/Heading' and 607 appearances of the strategy (b) 'Sub-title/Sub-heading' usually occurring by means of multimodal resources such as different typefaces, text sizes or colors, and colored text boxes/bars. Other options include strategies (d) 'Quotation by famous people/authorities' and (e) 'Slogan' which have respectively occupied 7.3% and 9.7% of our entire corpus.

(1) "To provide hope to the less fortunate and relieve the suffering of kidney patients."  
- *Chairman Datin Chua Lay Ping*

(2) YOUR VISION MATTERS

Such examples showcase how succinct statements or slogans are strategically positioned to engage readers emotionally and cognitively, aligning with the representational and interactive meanings outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen. The strategy '(Audio)Visual', recorded in 103 instances across 73.1% of the "About Us" sections, plays a critical role in enhancing salience and engagement. These audiovisual elements often appear as static or moving banners, mastheads, or collages of pictures and logos, positioned prominently at the top of the webpages. The analysis shows that such visuals frequently utilize large sizes, central alignment, and animated features to attract attention, creating a system of salience that prioritizes certain elements over others (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). The placement of visuals, often preceding paragraphs, relates to the compositional meaning, as their positioning within the layout directs the viewer's attention and creates a logical flow of information. For instance, static banners or mastheads placed at the top of a page not only dominate the visual hierarchy but also serve as entry points to guide the viewer's focus toward subsequent textual content.



FIGURE 4. Static masthead

The occasional use of abstract mastheads or banners, such as those shown in Figure 4, enhances the graphical appeal and aesthetic quality of websites, making them more visually engaging and modern (O'Connor, 2004, p. 226; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Abstract designs, characterized by dynamic colors, shapes, and patterns, contribute to the overall beauty of the webpage while evoking emotional responses from viewers (Machin, 2007). Beyond their artistic

value, these elements serve as branding tools, projecting sophistication and innovation that align with the professional image hospitals aim to present, particularly within the competitive landscape of medical tourism (van Leeuwen, 2005).



FIGURE 5. Moving images

### MOVE 3: INTRODUCING THE HOSPITAL

Our findings indicate that private hospitals frequently use long-shot images to introduce their institutions, portraying the buildings from a distance that potential patients may interpret as symbolic of their future destination (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006, p. 128). Additionally, the positioning of these images at a high vertical angle from the viewer or the use of low-angle long and medium shots contributes to the perception of these hospitals as strong, powerful, imposing, or energetic (Harrison, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). These findings align with the interpersonal meaning within multimodality, where the analysis of angle plays a crucial role in shaping the relationship between the viewer and the visual subject. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) emphasize that high vertical angles create a sense of superiority or dominance, placing the institution metaphorically "above" the viewer, while low-angle shots enhance authority and power by making the subject appear larger and more significant. The frequent use of these angles by private hospitals communicates their strength and reliability, subtly reinforcing their credibility as healthcare providers.

- (3) **Assunta Hospital** was founded by a group of missionaries from the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) in 1954.

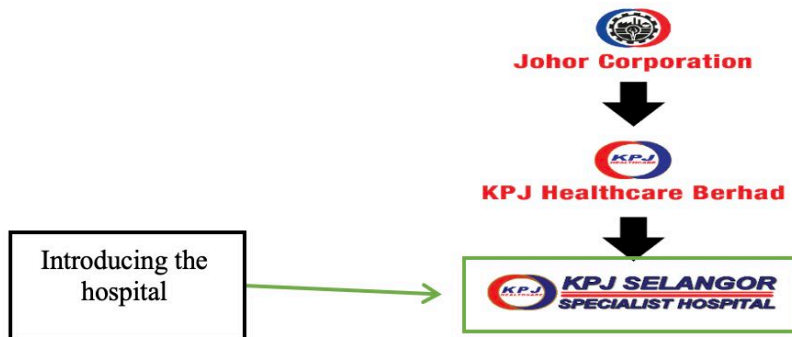


FIGURE 6. Logo of the hospital

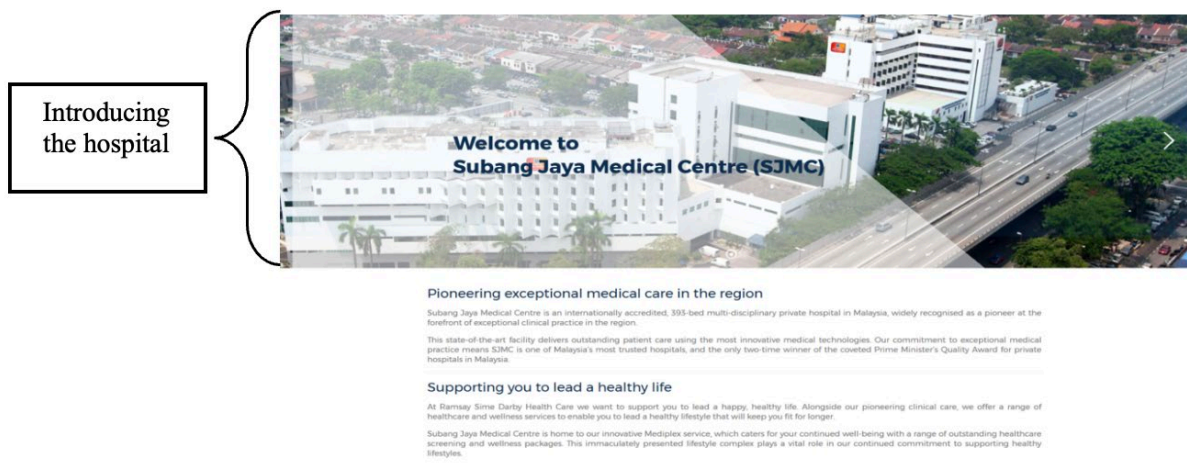
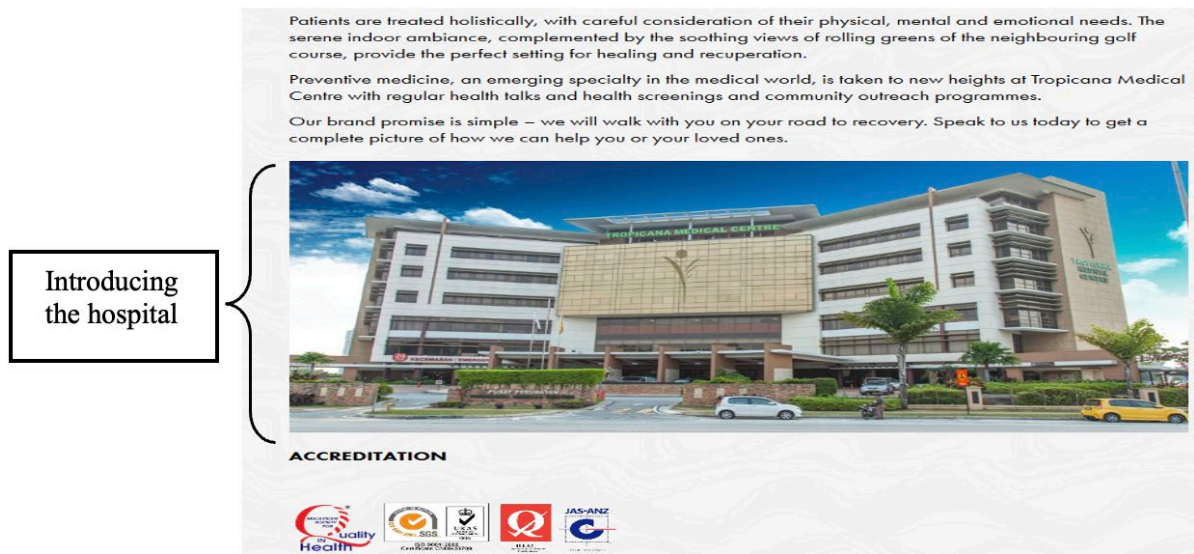


FIGURE 7. Bird's-eye view of the hospital



ACCREDITATION



FIGURE 8. Low angle long shot of the hospital

#### MOVE 4: DESCRIBING (ESSENTIAL) DETAILING OF THE HOSPITAL

"Offering a product description" that is good, positive and favorable is one of the key components of any promotional discourse (Bhatia, 2004). In the "About Us" sections, the communicative function of this move is to provide further positive and essential details about the private hospitals centering on either all or some of the following categories: (1) hospital profile (2) geographical location, (3) history (origin, founder, inauguration date, etc.), (4) facilities and/or technologies, (5) medical services, and (6) personnel/staff.

- (4) KPJ Sentosa KL Specialist Hospital is a modern 8-store hospital with 200 beds, located at No. 36, Jalan Cemur, Kompleks Damai, 50400 Kuala Lumpur, within vicinity of Hospital Kuala Lumpur and Institute of Medical Research.
- (5) The hospital provides an extensive list of medical services and specialties including anaesthesiology, cardiology, dermatology, psychiatry, ... and more.

Like Move 3, Move 4 can also be realized through modes other than language, i.e. visual. Our findings demonstrate that the private hospitals have visually expressed the move 'Describing/(Essential) detailing of the hospital' sixty-nine times by either employing a single picture or incorporating a collage of some pictures. These pictures often display the private hospitals' board of directors, management team, or staff and on some occasions, they are used to visualize their facilities, technologies, and medical services.

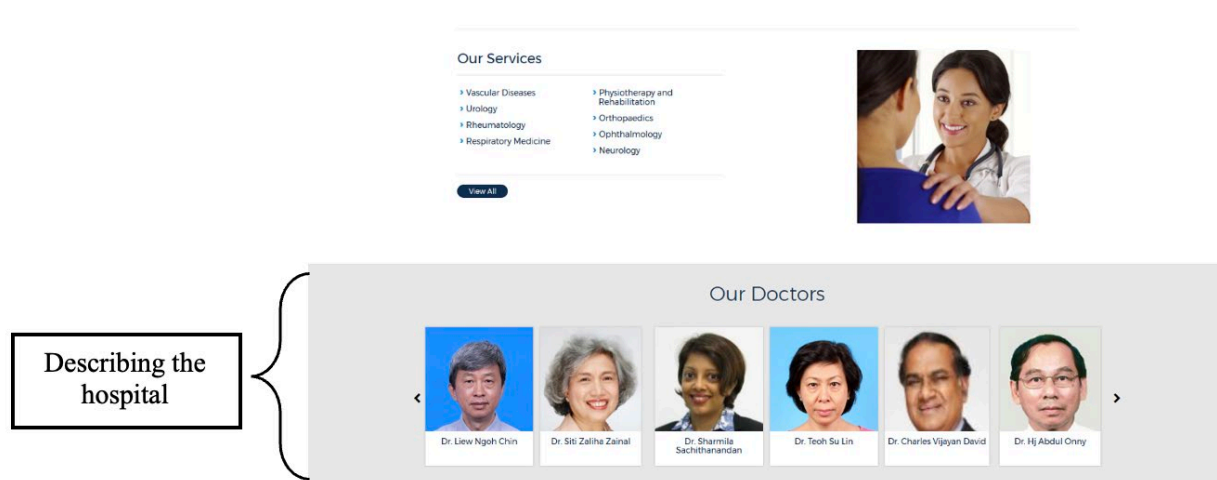


FIGURE 9. Hospital's medical staff

Figure 9 is a 'conceptual analytical' representation – the represented participants are illustrated in a part-whole structure (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006, p. 87). Here, the private hospital is the whole, a carrier which possesses the parts (specialists and doctors) who are one of the attributes of the private hospital. These participants are visually illustrated by a symmetrical composition (equal distance from each other and the same size). They are shown in a frontal angle, in an objective and decontextualized manner.

### MOVE 5: INDICATING VALUE OF THE HOSPITAL

This move functions to establish a positive and appealing image of the hospital through both verbal and visual elements, aligning with the multimodal perspective by combining textual and visual semiotic modes to achieve a cohesive communicative purpose. The verbal mode primarily employs evaluative language, with frequent use of positive adjectives such as "state-of-the-art," "modern," "high-quality," and "remarkable," emphasizing the hospital's superior facilities, technologies, and services. For example, phrases like "Gleneagles Penang is an iconic premier medical centre in the Northern Region of Malaysia" and "This modern design setting and state-of-the-art facilities will allow us to continue in providing remarkable healthcare" establish a narrative of excellence and innovation. Such verbal elements align with the ideational meaning by representing the hospital as a space of care and technological advancement, reinforcing its value proposition.

The visual mode complements this narrative, utilizing images of smiling staff and satisfied patients to evoke emotions of warmth, trust, and satisfaction. These images, such as the one shown in Figure 10, are illustrative of a reactional process (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006), where the participants—the doctor, mother, and baby—construct an interaction that communicates happiness and care. In this process, the doctor and mother, as reactors, create vectors through their gazes directed at the baby, the phenomenon. This visual composition contributes to the interpersonal meaning, building a relational connection between the hospital and prospective patients by fostering trust and empathy. The smiles and gestures further amplify the perception of a welcoming and caring environment.

Additionally, the placement and salience of these visuals contribute to the compositional meaning. Positioned prominently alongside textual descriptions, the images draw the viewer's attention, ensuring that the emotional impact complements the verbal narrative. For instance, the textual message "preferred choice for family" is reinforced visually by the image of a mother and baby, creating a cohesive multimodal representation that appeals to both logic and emotion. The synergy between verbal and visual elements ensures that the intended message—patients will leave the hospital satisfied—is conveyed effectively.

From a multimodal perspective, Move 5 integrates ideational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings to communicate the hospital's value. The findings reveal how textual descriptions articulate the hospital's offerings, while visuals provide emotional resonance and reinforce the narrative. This interplay between semiotic modes creates a holistic and persuasive depiction of the hospital, appealing to prospective patients through both rational evaluation and emotional connection.

About Columbia Asia Malaysia

Indicating value of the hospital



Columbia Asia is an international private healthcare company incorporated in Malaysia in 1996. It started its first hospital in Sarawak, East Malaysia in 1997. Now, Columbia Asia offers 28 medical facilities (hospitals/clinics/extended care facilities) across Asia with 11 in Malaysia.

Columbia Asia Sdn Bhd is 30% owned by the Employee Provident Fund (EPF) and 70% by a US-based fund, the International Columbia USA LLC (ICU), which comprise over 150 individual and institutional investors.

Leading the way in private healthcare trends, Columbia Asia offers optimum and affordable medical services through its hospitals and clinics. With modern amenities and highly trained doctors and nurses, these hospitals are located in residential areas, making quality private healthcare more accessible and efficient for patients. New medical technologies decrease the level of invasive treatments, reducing the length of hospital stays. Moreover, rate structures are transparent and comparatively lower than the standard model for private healthcare. Each Columbia Asia medical facility also houses no more than 100 beds per hospital. The hospitals may be smaller in comparison to other private hospitals but the concept behind its simplicity leads the way towards healthcare trends in the future – efficient, accessible and cost-effective. As such, its objective is to provide communities with effective healthcare at excellent value, and to be the preferred choice for families and businesses.

**Vision**  
We have a passion for making people better.

**Mission**  
To deliver the best clinical outcomes in the most effective, efficient and caring environment.

FIGURE 10. Happy medical staff and patients

#### MOVE 6: JUSTIFYING THE HOSPITAL

The primary purpose of Move 6 is to provide convincing evidence or reasoning to justify why prospective patients should consider the private hospitals' medical services and treatments. As outlined in Table 2, this move is realized through multiple rhetorical strategies, with the most prominent being the strategy 'Indicating the importance or need to experience the hospital'. This strategy employs both verbal and visual semiotic resources to substantiate claims and build trust with prospective patients.

Verbally, this strategy highlights the hospital's key medical services, performance metrics, or patient outcomes. For instance, the statement, "MMC maintains a very low incidence of unscheduled returns to the operating theatre", underscores the hospital's competence and reliability in delivering quality care.

Visually, this strategy is frequently realized through the use of technical graphs or diagrams, with 28 instances identified in the corpus. These visuals are conceptual rather than narrative, representing abstract data, trends, or performance indicators rather than processes involving human participants. For example, the abstract graph in Figure 11 illustrates the hospital's progress in reducing 'Door to Balloon Time' in PCI (Percutaneous Coronary Intervention) treatment over two years. The graph employs a line indicating progress along the vertical axis, symbolizing improvement from left to right. This visual representation, accompanied by semi-technical written text, contextualizes the data by explaining that the desired benchmark is less than 90 minutes, and the hospital achieved 45 minutes, demonstrating its high-quality medical services.

From a multimodal perspective, the use of technical visuals aligns with the representational meaning, as they abstractly depict critical processes and achievements. These visuals complement verbal explanations, which provide clarity and ensure that the message is easily interpretable. The integration of verbal and visual semiotic resources is central to effectively realizing this strategy. The graphs and accompanying text work together to substantiate the hospital's claims, offering



compelling evidence of its expertise and quality. As Gross and Harmon (2014) highlight, this synergistic interaction between modes strengthens the persuasive appeal, ensuring that prospective patients can easily understand and trust the hospital's justification for its services. This multimodal approach allows the hospital to project an image of reliability and excellence, directly addressing the needs of its audience.

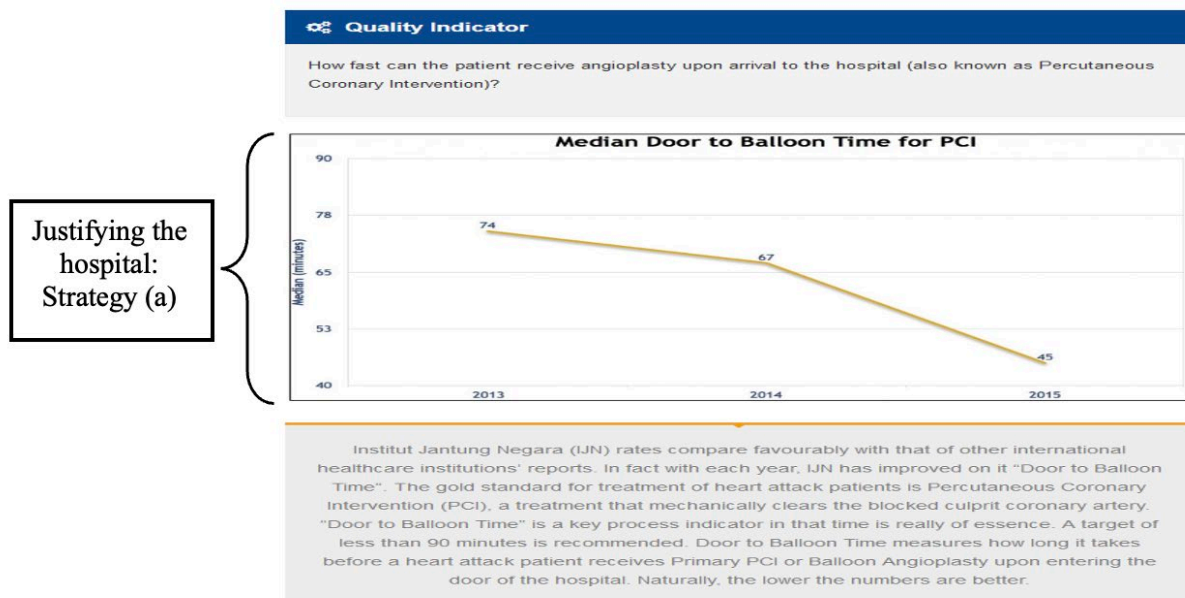


FIGURE 11. Technical graph (Door to balloon time for PCI)

The strategy (b) 'Offering unique feature(s) of the hospital' which only occurs by means of the verbal mode is essentially used to underline the most important aspect of the private hospitals which obviously distinguishes them from others.

- (6) Our commitment to exceptional medical practice means SJMC is one of Malaysia's most trusted hospitals, and **the only two-time winner of the coveted Prime Minister's Quality Award for private hospitals in Malaysia.**

Like strategy (b), we could find strategy (c) 'Establishing a niche' just happening in the verbal mode. The communicative purpose of this strategy is to address the real-life problems that patients may face in their life. In fact, by adopting the strategy (c) private hospitals tend to ensure prospective patients that they have some good and effective remedies for their problems.

#### MOVE 8: ESTABLISHING CREDENTIALS

Building up trust between the service or product providers and their prospective consumers is unquestionably one of the prerequisites of all successful businesses (Bhatia, 2004), especially when such businesses deal with providing healthcare services. That is why in the "About Us" sections, as Table 2 shows, the 'Establishing credentials' move is accomplished through six distinct strategies employing verbal texts and visual representations.

The strategy (a) ‘Providing a positive and long-established reputation’ which has been identified using both verbal and visual semiotic resources in our "About Us" corpus aims to demonstrate that the given private hospitals are already established healthcare institutions; hence, the prospective patients should trust them. In the verbal semiotic mode, this strategy is often realized by focusing on either all or some of the following categories: (a) operation period /foundation date, (b) acceptance among people for their (special) services, and (c) recognition by featuring on some local and/or international television shows, newspapers, and magazines. The Excerpt 7 below is one of its overall 64 occurrences in our data.

(7) Assunta Hospital has touched many lives through this journey **the past six decades.**

In addition, our findings reveal that 32 visual representations have been used to realize this strategy. Excluding just two cases, these visuals are almost always in the form of old black and white pictures of the buildings, opening ceremonies, medical staff, etc. or sometimes a collage of them. In one of the private hospitals, it has been expressed by a collection of the private hospitals’ videos broadcast in the (local) media showing its recognition, and in another hospital, its long-standing tradition has been mentioned or strategically superimposed on a colorful picture of a family. Like verbal texts, the use of old black and white pictures by the private hospitals (e.g. Figure 12) or videos that cast the recognition of the private hospitals (e.g. Figure 13) can display their reputation and long-established tradition.



FIGURE 12. Old black and white pictures

These monochromatic pictures have intentionally been used to create a ‘mood’ (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 106) of nostalgia and remind readers of the given private hospital.



FIGURE 13. Local media release (videos)

Another strategy which is noticeably employed for establishing credentials is the strategy (c) ‘Highlighting the achievements and advances’. This strategy is used for getting positive views of prospective patients on the private hospitals by calling attention to how satisfactorily they have performed in healthcare industry that they have been trusted by a number of official third parties.

**(8) Mahkota Medical Centre was awarded the prestigious Brand Laureate SMEs Master Award 2013 by the Asia Pacific Brand Foundation (APBF).**

The strategy (c) also lends itself to be realized via visual representations. The findings of this strategy demonstrate 141 usages of visual illustrations which can be classified into the following seven categories: (a) picture of milestones (9 cases), (b) logo of award (51 cases), (c) collage of logos of awards (8 cases), (d) picture of awards, accreditations, award-receiving ceremonies, etc. (41 cases), (e) collage of some pictures of awards, accreditations, award-receiving ceremonies, etc. (17 cases), (f) picture, graph or diagram showing advances (10 cases), and (g) collage of pictures, graphs or diagrams showing advances (5 cases).

Figure 14 is one of the visual representations which has been used to realize this strategy. This collage of the hospital’s pictures narratively represents its advances throughout the years (a vector, especially a diagonal line is formed by juxtaposing different sizes of the building from smallest to the biggest) as Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006, p. 59) argue "narrative patterns serve to present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements".

Establishing  
credentials:  
Strategy (c)

### About Parkway Pantai

Parkway Pantai Limited is one of Asia's largest integrated private healthcare groups with more than 30 hospitals throughout the region, including Singapore, Malaysia, India, China, Brunei and the United Arab Emirates.

### About IHH Healthcare Berhad

IHH Healthcare Berhad (IHH) is the second largest healthcare group in the world by market capitalisation, and is listed on the Main Market of Bursa Malaysia and the Main Board of the Singapore Exchange. IHH offers a full spectrum of integrated healthcare services and a wide range of ancillary services through its subsidiaries: Parkway Pantai Limited, Acibadem Holdings and IMU Health.






FIGURE 14. Hospital buildings (1973-2012)

The strategy (d) ‘Indicating the novelty (quality) of services and/or technologies’ is usually expressed by offering positive and good verbal descriptions of the private hospital’s operational systems, medical services, and technologies. These positive descriptions can ensure the potential patients will not face any problem during receiving healthcare services.

This strategy is realized by visuals as well. It can be visually realized by displaying the quality of medical services in comparison with some basic and/or international standards. Our findings have recorded the incorporation of ten graphs/diagrams and five collages of diagrams/graphs in the "About Us" sections for shaping this strategy.

Figure 15 depicts the incidence rates of a group of bacteria called Multi-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) between four quarters of years 2013-2015. Technically speaking, MRSA is common in hospitals, and people with open wounds and weakened immune systems are at greater risk of this hospital-acquired infection. As we can notice, this graph narratively represents how this private hospital has satisfactorily controlled the incidence rates of MRSA in two consecutive years, representing ‘processes of change’ – incidence rate reduction. This graph has the ability to realize the ‘Establishing credentials’ move by ensuring prospective patients that they will receive quality medical services at the given medical center.

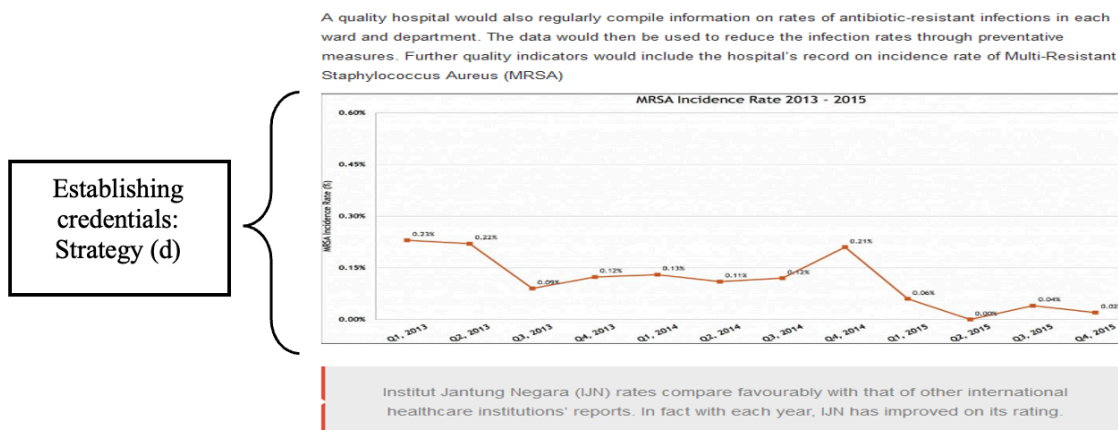


FIGURE 15. Technical graph (MRSA incidence rate)

In the context of the present study, the strategy (e) ‘Indicating the affiliation and partnership’ which has been counted 49 cases in the "About Us" sections is not only achieved by means of the written mode, but also occurs via employing visuals, especially the logos of the bodies or collaborators with which the private hospitals are connected (7 cases) or collages of their logos (5 cases).

**(9) THONEH is also one of the founding members of the ASEAN Association of Eye Hospitals (AAEH), alongside the American Eye Center**

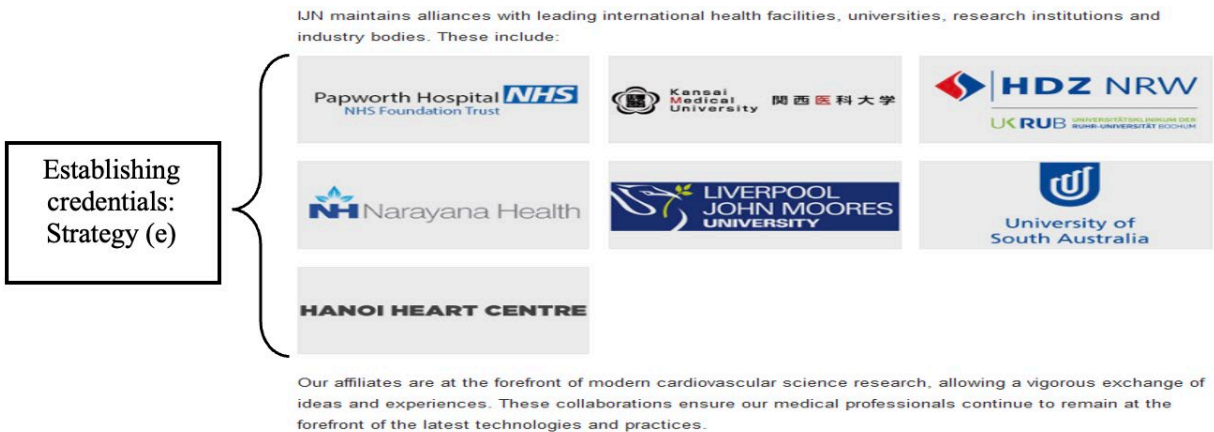


FIGURE 16. Affiliated bodies

The strategy (f) ‘Highlighting the strength (reputation) of the hospital’s people and/or holder(s)’ is almost always realized by means of language centering on positive descriptions and appraisals of reputation as well as the experience of private hospital’s board of directors, their specialists and consultants, holding groups and/or stakeholders. However, in just one private hospital’s "About Us" section, it was discovered that it is expressed via the help of a collage of pictures.

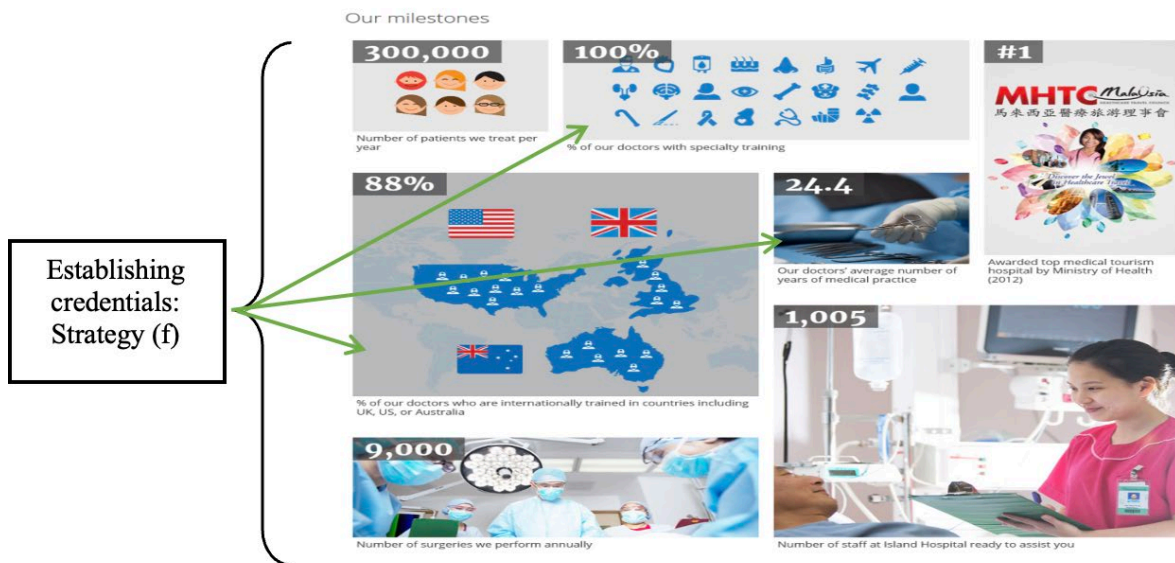


FIGURE 17. Specialists' reputation

- (10) Dr P Saras specialised in cornea and external eye disease... **she has served in THONEH since 1993, and regularly participates in continuous medical education, attending various ophthalmology meetings and conferences to keep abreast with the new developments in treatment and surgical techniques.**

### MOVE 10: ESTABLISHING/REINFORCING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS/VISITORS

Promotional texts are often viewed as ‘incomplete/unfinished’ (Bhatia, 2004) without accomplishing Move 10. The function of this move is to facilitate (re)building a relationship between good and/or service providers and their prospective customers or collaborators. As Table 2 indicates, this move is accomplished through four distinct strategies.

The strategy (a) ‘Soliciting response’ is deliberately used to prompt prospective patients to get in touch with the private hospitals. Of the total number of occurrences of this strategy (38 cases), our findings show the existence of just five visual cases (Google maps). Others have been realized by the help of written language most often by giving the specific names or details of those who may respond to the inquiries, physical/email addresses, and phone/fax numbers. The inclusion of private hospitals’ contact details can help readers better trust the content provided.

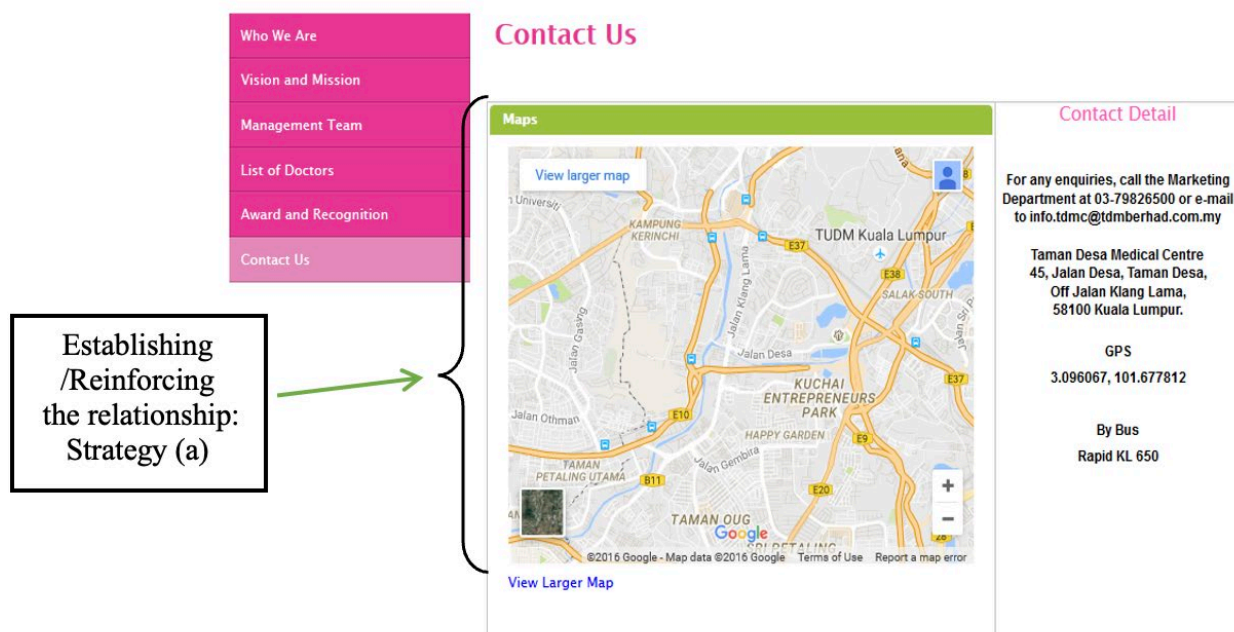


FIGURE 18. Google map of the hospital

The strategy (b) ‘Offering course or collaboration opportunities’ which is employed to make a relationship between the private hospitals and the medical professionals (doctors, nurses, etc.), medical groups, associations, companies, and organizations is often found in the form of job, course, program, and collaboration advertisements/offerings in the verbal mode. Similar to other strategies already addressed, the strategy (b) can also occur in modes other than language. In addition to the written mode, three visuals have been utilized to express this strategy. In Figure 19, the surrounding verbal environment helped us identify the communicative function of these

pictures since without reading the accompanying verbal texts it would have been really difficult to identify their rhetorical functions. These two different semiotic modes complement each other for realizing the strategy (b) and in turn, for expressing Move 10.

- (11) Island Hospital is constantly looking to recruit the best and the brightest for a variety of positions in order to enhance our roster of dedicated professionals. Below is a list of currently opened positions we are actively looking to fill.

**Establishing /Reinforcing the relationship: Strategy (b)**

**SPONSORSHIP**  
Sponsorship Programmes

**Degree in Therapy Radiography**  
We would like to invite fresh graduates who are keen to pursue a career in Therapy Radiography to apply for the above mentioned 3 year full time course.

**Requirements:**

- Minimum SPM (Science Stream) with a minimum of 4 credits including Biology
- Malaysian Citizen, single and aged between 18-25.

**Diploma in Pharmacy**  
We would like to invite fresh SPM/SPM graduates who are keen to pursue a career in Pharmacy to apply for the above mentioned 3 year full time course.

**Requirements:**

- Minimum SPM (Science Stream) with 4 credits (Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mathematics & Biology).
- Malaysian Citizen, single and aged between 18-25.

**Diploma in Nursing**  
We would like to invite the fresh SPM graduates who are keen to pursue a career in Nursing to apply for the above mentioned 3 year full time course.

**Requirements:**

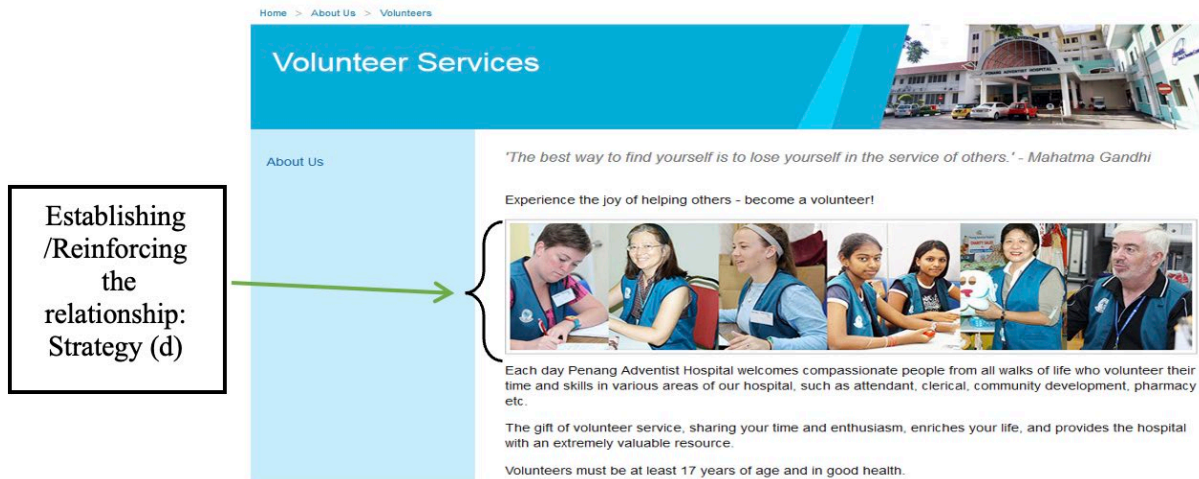
- Minimum SPM with 4 credits (Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mathematics & Science).
- Malaysian Citizen, single and aged between 18-25.

FIGURE 19. Hospital's sponsorship programs

The strategy (d) 'Invoking/Undertaking social collaboration' is also another strategy which the private hospitals have employed in the "About Us" sections of their websites for realizing Move 10. It is almost always expressed by referring to the fund-raising and health-awareness programs conducted by the private hospitals. In three cases this strategy occurs using collages of pictures, in three cases with the help of images, and just in one case by employing a logo of a charity program.

- (12) As part of its Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR), KPJ PSH plays a role in promoting health awareness to the public at large. As part of its activities; KPJ PSH provides free medical camps in the rural areas

Figure 20 is textually coherent. Here, the represented participants are connected to each other in several ways: first, absence of the frame lines between the individual pictures stresses their group unity and identity (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006, p. 203); second, its unity is achieved by the color of the represented participants' uniforms which is blue (in Malaysian context this color represents unity); third, the badges and uniform worn by the represented people illustrate that they are members of a team who are participating in some activities. Figure 20 represents a symbolic structure in which the represented people's (i.e. the carriers) identity is established by their attributes (the badges and uniforms worn). The accompanying written texts above and below this collage of pictures clearly demonstrate that these people are performing some volunteer activities for the given private hospital. Four of these represented participants (volunteer ladies) are looking directly at the viewers, and their eye contact realizes the interactive meaning 'demand' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006). Their happy and determined faces show how content they are in conducting such activities. By looking directly at the camera, they tend to encourage and invite the viewers to join them in their dedicated volunteer medical activities.



Establishing  
/Reinforcing  
the  
relationship:  
Strategy (d)

FIGURE 20. Volunteer activities

## CONCLUSIONS

Taking multimodal semiotic resources into consideration, the rhetorical structure of 41 "About Us" sections from Malaysian private hospitals' websites was analyzed, revealing the strategic interplay between verbal and visual elements to achieve specific communicative goals. Verbal components frequently emphasize credibility, professionalism, and technological advancements, while visual elements such as images, diagrams, and banners complement these messages by evoking trust, engagement, and emotional resonance. Certain moves, like "Establishing Credentials" and "Indicating Value of the Hospital," are realized through a combination of text and visuals, creating cohesive multimodal representations. However, other moves rely predominantly on one mode, reflecting a division of semiotic labor within this genre (Kress, 2010). This highlights how semiotic resources are strategically employed to achieve communicative effectiveness.

The study identifies key rhetorical strategies that underpin the generic structure of the "About Us" sections, including building credibility through descriptions of accreditations and awards, promoting services and technology with persuasive language and visuals, and engaging the audience with emotive imagery and interactive elements. These strategies demonstrate how verbal and visual elements are orchestrated to reinforce the hospitals' value propositions and appeal to international medical tourists and collaborators. The integration of semiotic resources ensures that the rhetorical strategies are cohesive and effective in achieving the intended communicative purposes. The findings highlight the importance of moving beyond traditional lexico-grammatical analyses to include other meaning-making resources (Guillén-Galve & Vela-Tafalla, 2020; Xia, 2020). Websites, being inherently multimodal and multisemiotic (Tan, 2010), require analysis that integrates both verbal and visual elements. Future research could expand by examining additional semiotic resources, such as hyperlinks, webpage layout, color, and typography, to further understand the generic structure and communicative strategies of web-mediated promotional genres.



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