

## “Say Hello to Vietnam!”: A Multimodal Analysis of British Travel Blogs

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### [ *Abstract* ]

This paper reports the findings of a multimodal study conducted on 10 travel blog posts about Vietnam by seven British professional travel bloggers. The study takes a sociolinguistic view to tourism by seeing travel blogs as a source for linguistic and other semiotic materials while considering language as situated practice for the social construction of fundamental categories such as “human,” “society,” and “nation.” It borrows concepts from Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics for interpersonal metafunction to develop an analytical framework to study how the co-occurrence of text and still images in these travel blog posts formulated the portrayal of Vietnam as a tourism destination and indicated the main sociolinguistic features of the blogs. The analysis of appreciation values and interactive qualities encoded in evaluative adjectives and still images show that Vietnam is generally portrayed as a country of identity and diversity. It provides tourists with positive experiences in terms of places of interest, food and local lifestyles and is cost-competitive. Strangerhood and authenticity are two outstanding sociolinguistic features exhibited in these travel blog posts. The findings of this study also

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underline the co-contribution of the linguistic sign, in this case evaluative adjectives, and the visual sign, in this case still images, as interpersonal meaning-making resources. To portray Vietnam, still images served as integral elements to evidence the credibility of verbal narrations. To unveil sociolinguistic characteristics of travel blogs, still images supported the linguistic realizations of authenticity and strangerhood on the posts, and in some case delivered an even stronger message than words. Not only does the study present a source of feedback from international travelers to tourism practice in Vietnam, but it also provides insights into multimodal analysis of tourism discourse which remains an under-researched area in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** travel blogs, multimodal analysis, appreciation, still images, sociolinguistics

## I . Introduction

The practical motivation for this research lies in the fact that tourism plays an essential role in the economic structure of Vietnam and so, understanding how Vietnam is portrayed and appreciated as a tourism destination in travel blog posts, may assist in the promotion of Vietnam travel. The statistics by the World Travel and Tourism Council (2021) has shown that after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector has suffered great losses with its contribution to global GDP plunging by nearly half compared to the 10.4% of world GDP in the year 2019. While 2021 saw some improvements, tourism stakeholders are working hard on adaptive solutions to recover the industry.

For Vietnam, tourism is a key component in the country's strategic development scheme. To some extent, positive results have been achieved. In 2018, Vietnam was ranked by the United Nations World Travel Organization as the third fastest growing destination in the world. Being honored twice with the World Travel Award as Asia's leading destination (in 2018 and 2021), the country has been chosen by an increasing number of international tourists as a

destination for their leisure pursuits and discovery of Asian cultures. More efforts are being made, especially for the post-pandemic recovery. For example, Decision No 147/QĐ-Ttg signed on January 22, 2020 identifies the general objectives to Vietnam tourism as:

By 2030, tourism will have become a spearhead and sustainable economic sector. Vietnam will have become a particularly attractive destination, in the top 30 countries with the world’s leading tourism competitiveness, meeting sustainable development goals.

To realize such objectives, it is important that tourism policy-makers as well as travel agencies be proactive about the growth and preservation of their industry. Over the difficult years of the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of maintaining prospective travelers’ interest in the country has been emphasized. This can be realized through efforts to encourage digital transformation in the tourism sector so as to get ready for restarting safe tourism activities, and possibly, word-of-web communications that recount positive tourism experiences in Vietnam. This leads to many questions. For example, is there a consistent picture of Vietnam in online travel reviews? Among discussions about Vietnam tourism on travel blogs, are the appreciations positive or negative? And do posts on travel blogs show an inclination for authenticity and uniqueness, or are there cultural and ideological clashes that the travelers experienced during their Vietnam trips?

On considering travel blogs as a source for data collection to answer the above questions, it was discovered that travel bloggers communicate their messages through an integrated use of texts and media. The more embedded media factors like images and videos are in the blog posts, then the clearer the picture of the destination is depicted, which may ultimately leave an impact on “the reader’s travel choice and decision-making process” (Cacchiani 2014: 196, cited in Denti 2015: 49). Such co-occurrence of, and interrelation between visuals and texts, methodologically imply that the analysis of travel blogs can be conducted on both of these modes of meaning-making, and that there might be significant findings from such a multimodal analysis.

The fact that more and more people are blogging about, responding to, and sharing travel-related contents about Vietnam indicates that blog posts can provide rich information to construct a portrayal of Vietnam and offer valuable data for linguistic study. However, to date, not many research works have focused their objectives on linguistic analysis of travel blogs (Orlando 2009; Fina 2011; Cappelli 2012), particularly travel blogs about Vietnam. This is the gap that this study will address. It investigates British travel bloggers' textual and visual accounts of their experience of travel in Vietnam in order to construct a portrayal of Vietnam and highlight the sociolinguistic perspective of tourism discourse which are reflected in their accounts. It seeks answers to two research questions:

- (1) Which domains of Vietnam tourism were appreciated in the travel blog posts about Vietnam?
- (2) Which sociolinguistic feature(s) of tourism discourse are prominent in these travel blog posts?

## **II. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1. A Social Semiotic Approach to Multimodal Analysis in English**

Multimodality is an interdisciplinary approach which attributes communication and representation to more than one communication mode. As recognized by numerous linguists, all communication is inherently multimodal with various semiotic systems complementing each other for meaning-making (Matthiessen 2006: 1; O'Halloran 2011: 120; Andersen and Boeriis 2012: 75).

The development of multimodality have been significantly influenced by Halliday's Systemic-Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL) and social semiotics approach. Halliday (1978) holds that every sign serves three meta-functions simultaneously: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These are umbrella concepts, and it would be impossible to work on every single aspect of each meta-function encoded in the text and the images. Instead, a sensible selection should be made in terms of which meta-function

to take on, and which SFL frameworks to be adopted for data collection and analysis. For example, to understand the interpersonal meta-function, particularly evaluation domains, a conceptual and analytical framework that integrates elements of the Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) and the Grammar of Visual Design (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) may work.

In addition, according to Kress (2010), the goal of social semiotic approaches to multimodality is to broaden the social interpretation of language and its meanings to include the means of representation and communication of a particular culture. Like the meanings of speech, the meanings of multimodal signs are shaped by the social origins, motives, and interests of people who create the signs in specific social circumstances. As multimodality proves crucial in the process of change and innovation, multimodal analysis is feasible for the examination of tourism discourse in general and travel writings in particular.

## **2.2. The Language of Tourism from a Sociolinguistic Perspective**

Tourism discourse can be characterized by its being expressive, emotive, and affective in both verbal and visual modes. These functions can be realized through the use of lexico-grammar devices and appropriate choices of camera shots, angles, and modality. Tourism discourse is conditioned to reflection and self-reflection of its participants, whose verbal behavior mirrors and influences their social behavior. It is characterized by four major theoretical perspectives:

- *The authenticity perspective* is connected with the work of MacCannell (1989), who claims that the tourists' main motivation is the search for authenticity (cited in Dann 1996: 7-11) although, for the sake of tourism, the real life of the Others has been largely manipulated and commercialized.
- *The strangerhood perspective* emphasizes that a driving motivation for travelling is the search for strangeness and new experiences (Dann 1996).
- *The play perspective* treats tourism as a game and

provides tourists with special experiences, which do not often match cultural and natural conditions of the visited destinations (Dann 1996).

- *The conflict perspective* concerns differences between the provided thrilling experience and the authentic past and present of the visited areas and their inhabitants (Hollinshead 1993, cited in Dann 1996).

The sociolinguistic treatment of tourism, until now, often draws on the content of promotional tourism media, such as brochures, magazines, pamphlets, booklets, and guidebooks. Recently, the rising popularity of travel blogs, a genre of tourism discourse, together with the richness of travel contents being shared in the blogosphere, has triggered the possibility of travel blogs themselves being a terrain for sociolinguistic inquiry.

### **2.3. Travel Blogs and Sociolinguistic Inquiry**

The advent of technology has brought about substantial changes in the ways that travel experiences are shared. What previously could only be found in special columns of travel magazines have now yielded to digital narration available on personal travel blogs and online travel communities. The birth and development of the travel blogosphere has allowed travelers, within just a few clicks, to keep a record of their travel experiences both textually and visually, discuss the experiences with ex-travelers of the destinations, and share them with future travelers.

Travel blogs belong to the informal category of tourism text. They are personal accounts being published online, and therefore they do not follow any specific criteria for publication. Travel blogs facilitate two-way communication, playing the role of a “customer-to-customer” communication platform, and can be characterized as of informative, descriptive, persuasive, and advisory functions. Travel blog posts focus on a number of topics such as history, nature, entertainment, food and drink, and so on, and they have distinctive linguistic features.

As D’Egidio (2014) summarizes, linguistically, narration on

travel blog posts is in the first person, consisting of many positive and negative expressions, and conveying the writer’s subjectivity regarding various aspects of the destination as well as their cultural needs and expectations. Posts on travel blogs often include both textual and multimedia materials, such as photos, videos, and hyperlinks. They contribute to the communication of the message, complementing each other in the manipulation of the readers. The persuasive force which drives tourists towards destinations and cultural assets is achieved through a set of discursive linguistic and visual strategies. Practically, travel blogs intend to “make see,” by means of description and images, “make know,” by narration and practical information, and “make do,” by means of advice.

Francesconi (2014) and D’Egidio (2014) explain why consultation with travel blogs before making travel decisions has gained much popularity. First, they offer up-to-date information. Second, since the travel bloggers have been considered “unmediated witnesses to the events, places, services or facilities they describe” (Francesconi 2014: 64), the stories they tell are perceived as a more reliable and “real” source of information than promotional guidebooks or brochures. Finally, although bloggers may consciously or unconsciously remediate both “pre-figured, mediatized representations and embodied, mediated actions” (Thurlow and Jaworski 2014: 471) while narrating their experiences, blog readers actually look for those evaluations and pieces of advice when they consider traveling to a certain destination.

The more popular they become, the richer the data that travel blogs can provide for analysis. Given that not much has been done on this subject (Orlando 2009; Fina 2011; Cappelli 2012), it was reasonable for this research to collect multimodal data from travel blogs for analysis and the accomplishment of its research aims.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Data Criteria**

Data for the study were taken from 10 blog posts by seven British

professional travel bloggers who were referred to as B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, and B7 in order to retain their anonymity. The group of seven British professional travel bloggers were selected based on a number of criteria that singled them out from other bloggers.

Firstly, prior to Covid-19, 2017-2018 tourism statistics show that compared to other countries in Europe, the UK held the second largest number of arrivals to Vietnam, after Russia, so it made sense to focus on travelers that originate from this English-speaking country. British travelers are among representatives of Western culture. While this article has no intention to discuss cultural issues, this choice ensures the reliability of applying Grammar of Visual Design since Kress and van Leeuwen have made clear that to them, visual language is culturally specific, and their theory applies to all forms of visual communication within Western visual designs (2006: 20). Second, they should be professional bloggers so that they abide by an unregulated ethical code, and the language use on their blog posts should be appropriate to a general public. As professional writers, they are supposed to be more careful in choosing language and visuals that exactly reflect their appreciation. Third, they are in the 25-45 age group, which implies that they are generally presenting mature views on the social situations which they experienced and encountered, and that they take responsibility for their evaluations and assessments. In addition, this age group fits in well with their main audience as frequent internet users and also between 20 and 45 (Kassegn and Sahil 2020). Next, they had to travel to Vietnam themselves and set foot in destinations in the northern, central, and southern regions of Vietnam so that their experience of the country was not biased or distorted due to the lack of exposure to local communities. Further, although their posts may contain affiliate links to tourism service providers, the posts being selected for study must not be written-to-order by any organizations, which will otherwise be expressed in a “disclaimer” under each post. Finally, their posts concerning Vietnam and reflecting their experience of leisure and heritage tourism must all date from 2014 to 2022 so as to provide up-to-date information about Vietnam.

To be included in the data set, posts on these seven travel

blogs had to recount the bloggers’ exposure to different parts of the country, and/or be a form of itinerary that they themselves followed when in Vietnam. Posts should not be giving tips about or describing a small aspect of a particular destination. In terms of data, there must be both texts and still images in the blog post. Interactive media, such as livestream clips, embedded clips from video hubs, or promotional videos, however, should not appear on the chosen posts because it may interfere with the interactive meaning making of the visuals in the posts.

### **3.2. Collection of Multimodal Data**

Since the focus of the study is on “static” texts, namely travel blog posts, the data were readily available. The major problem was that there were so many travel blogs. This was solved by firstly making a list of the 50 most popular travel blogs by British writers and then keying their information in a matrix with the abovementioned criteria. By doing so, from the initial list, the data log was narrowed to seven travel blogs (B1 to B7) to be included in this study.

Then, each post about Vietnam in the data log was put under many instances of viewing. Data sampling was conducted purposively in the sense that multiple layers were adopted to screen out the most suitable posts for the database. I engaged closely with the collected posts, sometimes covering one mode and focusing on the other and asking myself “what sense can I make of this text if I cannot see the images?” and vice versa. I focused on outstanding features but was always ready to return to the data pool to test the analysis of the selected extracts or incidences against it. By this step, the number of blog posts included was limited to 10 posts on seven travel blogs.

### **3.3. Description of Data**

As explained above, data for this study comprised 10 posts on the travel blogs which date from 2014 to 2022 and reflect the bloggers’ experience of leisure and heritage tourism. The database consisted of both words and still images. The text part of the database had 21,062 words, of which 256 are adjectives that

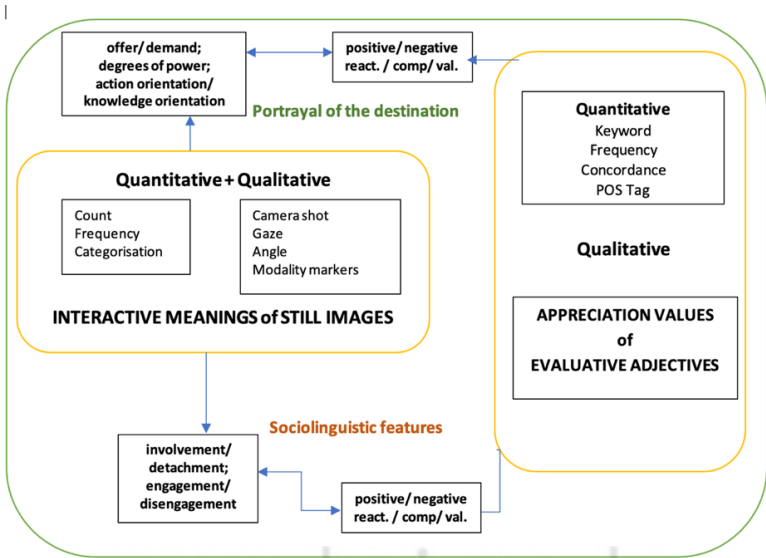
appeared 1162 times in total. The still image part of the database had 133 photos. A summary of word counts and photo counts from each blog is presented hereafter.

<Table 1> Summary of word and photo counts

Posts by...	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7
<b>TEXTS</b> <i>Total:</i> <b>21,062 words</b>	2362	1337	2703	2828	3572	5035	3225
<b>PHOTOS</b> <i>Total:</i> <b>133 photos</b>	26	8	15	29	22	15	22

### 3.4. Analytical Framework

The framework below was constructed to find out how the appreciation values of evaluative adjectives (linguistic resource) and the interactive meanings of still images (visual resource, with attention being paid to contact, social distance, attitude, and certain markers of modality) were put under analysis to construct a portrayal of the destination and draw out the sociolinguistic features in the travel blog posts.



Martin and White (2005) categorize *appreciation* into three types: reaction, composition, and valuation, each of which could be further identified as either positive or negative. Adjectival use can express reaction to impact or quality by answering the question “did it grab me?” and “did I like it?” They can also explain the composition in terms of balance and complexity, or address the worthiness of the appraised items. As in travel blog posts, the use of adjectives can indicate how interesting the object is, i.e. the reaction to impact. It evokes certain aesthetic feelings that the bloggers may have experienced at the site, making the site even more or less desirable, i.e. the reaction to composition. It also allows readers of the post, who may be potential travelers, to compare the appraised item with others of the same category and position it in a scale, i.e. the reaction to valuation.

Among three elements that Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) regard as essential to the analysis of a visual, interactive meanings are a range of ways of semantically relating interactive participants. An image has with it a contact/image act, a social distance and an attitude. Such meanings can be expressed with the choice of camera shot and angle, participants’ gaze, and certain modality markers. An image, with its image act, i.e., whether an image offers information or demands a response or reaction, the degrees of power, and certain modality markers, can interact with the appreciation values of adjectival phrasing to portray a destination. Similarly, the degrees of involvement and engagement encoded in the image can contribute to the expression of the four sociolinguistic features in tourism texts.

### **3.5. Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis**

The study was conducted quantitatively and qualitatively. First, data from each post were color-coded before going through a cleansing process. I then extracted a key word list from the text body to identify the aspects of Vietnam being narrated in the posts, and ranked the frequency of key words also to establish which aspect(s) were most mentioned. Next, I tagged the parts of speech for the text body to filter out the adjectives and created a list of evaluative adjectives. To present the analysis of appreciation, I resorted to the

coding system by Martin & White (2005).

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+ <b>positive appreciation value</b>	- <b>negative appreciation value</b>
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reac qual imp	“appreciation: reaction” quality impact
comp	“appreciation: composition”
val	“appreciation: valuation”

For example, by using the coding system above, I coded *+reac* for positive reaction; and *-val* for negative evaluation. A more detailed list includes such codes as *+qual/-qual*, *+imp/-imp*, *+comp/-comp*, and *+val/-val*. In the extracted data for analysis, adjectives to show appreciation would be in bold and italicized. The analysis of an extract like

“... ***Delicious*** street food... ... slurped on ***heartly*** beef Pho... My first Vietnamese iced coffee (***super strong, so delicious!***)” (B4)

may result in a table as follows.

Appraised	Appraising item	Appreciation
<b>Food</b>	<b><i>Delicious</i></b> street food	<i>+qual</i>
	<b><i>Super strong</i></b> coffee	<i>+imp</i>

Since visual materials in a blog post can combine with verbal description to tell the blogger’s appreciation of the destination, the analysis of still images in the database focused on answering two questions:

- Who/What are the represented participants in the images?
- What message(s) – interactive meanings could be sent to the audience with these images?

The identification of represented participants in the images depend largely on what has been previously described verbally (appraising items). The interactive meanings were analyzed by using the toolkits by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 148-149).

## IV. Result and Discussion

### 4.1. An Initial Sketch of Vietnam in the Travel Blog Posts

The bloggers B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, and B7 started their Vietnam trip either in Ho Chi Minh City (Ho Chi Minh City) or Hanoi, suggesting that these two metropolitan centers are the hubs to explore neighboring areas like the Mekong Delta, Ha Long Bay, or Sapa. They experienced different lengths of stay to discover the country, from one week to six weeks. They all stated that their time in Vietnam had been well spent and recommended a longer time or a more relaxed tour to discover the destinations to the fullest.

All 10 blog posts in the data collection started with a brief introduction about Vietnam before recounting the trip and/or describing different aspects of the country. A scan of adjectives presented at the beginning of each post shows that in these posts, Vietnam was portrayed as a vibrant place which features diversity.

... *bustling* Saigon.... the *lush* vegetation of the Mekong Delta, ... the *charming* town of Hoi An .... *chaotic* Hanoi with its distinct French flair, ... the *beautiful* hillside town of Sapa... (B1)

...*chaotic* streets of Ho Chi Minh, and Hanoi, Vietnam’s deep history, *delicious* food,... one of the world’s most *pristine* natural wonders, Ha Long Bay... (B3)

... an *interesting* place with bustling cities, floating markets, terraced green rice fields and white sandy beaches. (B6)

Vietnam is a *magical* place, with so much culture and cool things to do. (B7)

The use of opposite adjectives such as “bustling” and “lush,” “charming” and “chaotic,” and so on entails visible contrast

between a Vietnam of bustle and hustle and a Vietnam of beautiful nature.

The choice of title photos in the blog posts contributed to the initial sketch of Vietnam.

<Table 2> Some title photos of the blog posts

 <p><i>Vietnamese lifestyle (B1)</i></p>	 <p><i>Dawn in Lagoon, Hue (B3)</i></p>
 <p><i>A woman in Ninh Binh (B5)</i></p>	 <p><i>Ho Chi Minh City Post Office (B7)</i></p>

Among the seven bloggers, B3 and B7 used stock photos while the rest posted their own original or processed photos. Represented participants and interactive participants in these photos depict a variety of aspects of Vietnam, ranging from Vietnamese cultural identity (B1) to the scenic landscapes of smaller cities and towns (B3, B4, B6), places in metropolitan areas (B7), and local countryside people in their daily work (B5), all of which characterize a country of identity and diversity.

In short, the initial impression from the blog posts was that Vietnam was a destination of interesting contrasts, which was promising for further discovery when travelers exposed themselves more to and cast an intent gaze on the destination.

#### 4.2. Appreciation of Vietnam as a Tourism Destination

By means of extracting a keyword list and a frequency ranking list for the text body, and categorizing still images in the blog posts by themes, a consistent correlation was revealed between the distribution of the photos in use and the text body with regards to the domains for appreciation. Accordingly, **places** are the most commonly appreciated domain, followed by **activities** that the bloggers experienced at the destination, the lifestyle of the **local people**, local **cuisine**, and finally **accommodation**. The text body has 21,062 words, with 256 adjectives, many of which were used repeatedly and contributed to 1162 counts of total occurrence in the database (*delicious, good* [food], *beautiful* [scenery], *crazy* [traffic], *fascinating* [country, history], to name but a few). With regards to the visual resources, there were 133 still images, the breakdown of which by bloggers and themes is presented in Table 3. Since photos of places might contain local people or the bloggers engaging in some activities, the number of photos as pictured in the table comprise more counts than there are actually in the database.

<Table 3> Photo distribution, by bloggers and themes

<b>Bloggers</b>	<b>Places</b>	<b>The bloggers in activity</b>	<b>Food</b>	<b>Local people</b>	<b>Accommodation</b>
<b>B1</b>	8	6	1	5	2
<b>B2</b>	6	2	0	1	0
<b>B3</b>	11	0	0	4	0
<b>B4</b>	11	7	3	5	3
<b>B5</b>	10	9	0	4	0
<b>B6</b>	12	0	1	2	0
<b>B7</b>	15	0	1	4	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>

A comparison between the number of running words and the number of images in these blog posts show that texts play the main role and still images play a subordinate role in recounting the experience of the travelers. In other words, still images act as evidence of “been there, done that” to clarify the textual account.

**4.3. Appreciation of Places to Visit**

Analysis of the text body shows that Hoi An and Ha Long Bay were the two most favorite places. While Hoi An received positive impact and quality reactions for its cultural richness, Ha Long Bay was loved for its natural beauty. Other places that were appreciated for natural beauty were Sapa and Phu Quoc. For Sapa, it was its breath-taking a mountainous character that left a great impact on the bloggers; on the contrary, Phu Quoc was complimented for its spectacular ocean feel. As for the rest of the destinations, there were mixed appreciations. Hue City, although valued for its historic nature, received negative appreciation in terms of its commerciality, which was attributed to the crowded cafes, street entertainment and market vendors along the Perfume River at night. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City shared common negative appreciation for their hustle and bustle, together with hygienic problems in certain areas while possessing distinguished features that were appreciated positively. Ho Chi Minh City left a strong and consistent impact because of its “crazy” city life that moves very fast while Hanoi was noted for a distinct flair of culture and history under a messy, chaotic, and sometimes, indifferent cover. Hanoi and Nha Trang received higher counts of negative appreciation than other destinations on the list.

Adjectives expressing valuation, composition, and reaction are found in this theme. “Beautiful” and “unique,” for example, are confirmation of quality (the answer to the question “did I like it?”) and value (the answer to the question “was it worthwhile?”), while “different” exhibits the composition balance property (the answer to the question “did it hang together?”). Examples of appreciated destinations can be seen in the table below.

<Table 4> Appreciation values - places

Appraised	Appraising Items	Appreciation
Hoi An	<i>charming</i> town (B1) probably one of the <i>prettiest</i> towns (B2) the <i>exotic</i> orient that we Westerners dream of discovering (B5)	+imp +qual +comp
Ha Long Bay	the most <i>beautiful</i> place in the world (B7) this <i>magical</i> landscape (B4)	+qual +val

Appraised	Appraising Items	Appreciation
Ho Chi Minh City & Mekong Delta	<i>Crazy</i> city life (B7) <i>bustling</i> Saigon (B1) <i>Buzzing</i> (B5)	+imp +imp +imp
Nha Trang	<i>crazy</i> party life (B7) [Nha Trang] <i>doesn't</i> offer <i>much</i> in terms of culture (B1) a fairly <i>decent</i> city beach and nightlife (B2) <i>touristy, characterless</i> (B4)	+imp neg +qual  +val -val, -imp
Hanoi	I <i>didn't</i> feel very <i>inspired</i> to go out ... (B1) <i>chaotic</i> Hanoi with its <i>distinct French</i> flair (B5) ... <i>isn't</i> the most <i>friendly</i> or <i>relaxing</i> place to start ... (B4) Hanoi is a <i>tough</i> city to love (B6)	neg +val -comp, +imp neg +imp neg +comp, -comp

Together with verbal description and evaluation of places, still images play an indispensable part in helping the audience of blogs to visualize the destinations. Photos of places without the co-presence of people accounted for the largest number and appeared in all posts. There are 57 photos which fit in this category, all of which were taken in long shot, from a far or very far distance, from low or eye-level angles. The ones listed below could demonstrate this kind of consistency in *places* photos.

<Table 5> Places of interest

 <p>Hoi An's Old town (P3 – B6)</p>	 <p>City view from Chill SkyBar, Ho Chi Minh City (P4 – B4)</p>
 <p>Ha Long Bay (P5 – B2)</p>	 <p>Nha Trang beach (P6 – B1)</p>

The long shot in photos of places and destinations represents an impersonal relationship between the travelers and the destination. The photos are to show travelers' objectivity in description. They persuade readers that what they have described textually are original and worthwhile, which realizes the *valuation property* of the evaluative adjectives in the text body. For example, Photo 3 compliments Hoi An as a colorful and picturesque Old Town; Photo 4 shows off Ho Chi Minh City as a vibrant city; Photo 5 accompanies texts that describe Ha Long Bay as a must-visit; and Photo 6 illustrates the characteristic of Nha Trang as a "beach town" with clean sand and wide beaches. The photos visualize the characteristics expressed by the list of evaluative adjectives *beautiful*, *amazing*, and *spectacular*.

#### 4.4. Appreciation of Activities to Do

Together with describing the places they set foot in, the bloggers provided a narrative of the activities in which they engaged in each place and provided evaluations of their experiences. Appreciation of activities was expressed with diversified adjectives. For example, **visiting markets** for shopping or gazing at local people's lifestyle, a popular activity in Hanoi, Hoi An, Sa Pa, the Mekong Delta and Ho Chi Minh City, was mentioned 21 times in the corpus, with different adjectives to characterize them.

[Ho Chi Minh City] the *bustling* Ben Thanh Market (B4)

[Ho Chi Minh City] – Ben Thanh market] the *massive* market (B5)

[Hoi An] ...a trip to the local market to pick up *fresh* food... (B5)

[Hanoi Night Market] ... well worth a walkthrough for the *chaotic* atmosphere... (B5)

While Ben Thanh market in Ho Chi Minh City was suggested to be a must-visit and appraised for its being *massive* (+*comp*) and *bustling* (+*imp*), the local market in Hoi An was appraised for its *fresh* food (+*qual*) and the night market in Hanoi was where travelers could enjoy a *chaotic* atmosphere (+*imp*).

Other activities varied according to the destination characteristics. Nha Trang and Phu Quoc both featured seaside breaks, but Nha Trang had more nightlife. Da Lat did not have much to offer apart from the cool climate, a walk around the lake, and a coffee in the street while “people-watching.” Hue might be attractive to those who love history; however, all bloggers mentioned it as a stop for them on the way to Hoi An, with the best part of all being the motor ride across Hai Van Pass. Positive impact reaction was decoded from the bloggers’ use of the evaluative adjective “exhilarating” to describe the ride.

...an *exhilarating* ride, with *staggering* views, and is one of the *most fun* things I’ve ever done. (B3)

Turning to the still images, there are 23 of them in the photo database featuring the bloggers taking part in activities at the destination. Here are some examples.

<Table 6> The bloggers in activities

		
<p>Rowing a boat in Ha Long Bay (P11 – B1)</p>	<p>Taking a cooking class in Hoi An (P8 – B5)</p>	<p>Trekking through Sa Pa valley (P12 – B4)</p>

This group of “activities” photos were often taken in medium or close shot, with either a high or eye-level angle. This position expresses the social distance that the bloggers would like to create with their audience. The full details together with the representation of smiles or facial expressions of the bloggers helped to state their willingness and readiness to try the activities, and that they participated fully in the activities they recounted. Therefore, the reviews and advice in their blog posts, explicit or implicit, are valid and reliable.

#### 4.5. Appreciation of Local Lifestyle

As discussed earlier, in the blog posts, Vietnam was portrayed as being of pronounced contrast. On one extreme, the bloggers noted “the craziness of Ho Chi Minh City” (B3), “traffic rushing past to every side of us, in front and behind” (B7), “the buses [...]– imagine kamikaze-style drivers who are not afraid to swerve onto oncoming traffic in order to pass vehicles” (B1), “smelly streets [in Hanoi]” (B4). On the other extreme, they appreciated “the scenic Hoan Kiem Lake,” “French-influenced style building,” “lanterns hanging over the streets,” or “enjoying a coffee in a cool cafe and watching the world go by.” Even within a place, contrast could be depicted, like “the *narrow* streets of the *bustling* Old Quarter.”

The bloggers characterized Vietnam’s disorderly **traffic** with narrow streets packed with scooters and bikes. “Traffic” also received negative appreciation—all blog posts described the bloggers’ embarrassment when navigating and crossing the streets. Adjectives used to describe traffic were mostly realizations of negative composition and negative reaction to quality. The most common adjectives for appraising traffic were *crazy* and *chaotic*. Though traffic chaos posed difficulties to them, none of the bloggers got angry with it. Instead, they viewed this erratic traffic flow as an exotic challenge during their Vietnam tour, and even advised on motorbike rental to get round.

Another category with negative appreciation, though only mentioned in two out of 10 blog posts, was the activity of the vendors who “turned out in their thousands to sell all kinds of products” (B5) or “would try anything to get you in their shop” (B7). B5 and B7 described their experience with vendors in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi as *annoying* (-qual) and *frustrating* (-qual).

All blog posts characterized the **locals**, mostly hotel staff members and local people in the street, with two adjectives “*friendly*” (+qual) and “*helpful*” (+val), and intensified them with adverbs like “super” and “extremely.” This inscribed a positive appreciation.

... the Vietnamese people were *super friendly*. (B1)

The staff are *extremely friendly and helpful*. (B3)

The last category to be appraised in the lifestyle theme is **prices**. All travelers praised the country as one of the most affordable travel destinations. The adjective for prices is *cheap* (+qual). As B7 commented, “Vietnam is so cheap for a salaried Londoner.” Some comments from the other posts go by like:

flights are really *cheap* (B2)

handmade boots, shoes, suits and dresses for *unbelievably cheap* prices (B4)



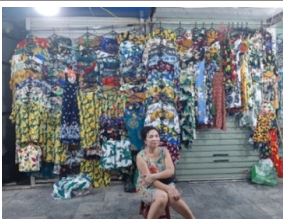
*cheap* dorm rooms ... *cheap* beers... (B5)

Transport around Vietnam is *relatively cheap* (B6)

While “*cheap*” appraised Vietnam for being super affordable, it does not mean that there were no costly services. For example, B4 went to Sky Bar in Ho Chi Minh City, which was “the most expensive bar in the city,” and B6 recommended travelling by train, which is more expensive than bus. However, they both claimed that the extra money was worth the experience. In addition, B5 also advised future travelers that they should bargain when getting around by taxis and shopping at the market. Yet, there was no sign of a negative attitude in their advice towards overpricing.

In the blog posts, there are 24 photos depicting the locals in activities. Here are some of them.

<Table 7> Locals in activities

		
<p>The busy streets (P22_B4)</p>	<p>A Sa Pa woman (P24 – B3)</p>	<p>Night market (P25 – B5)</p>

In this collection, photos were taken in long shot or medium shot, from behind or the side, while two had frontal view, one of a Sapa woman and the other of a shop keeper at Hanoi Night Market (see P24 and P25). Local people are portrayed working or doing their daily activities. Mostly, they appear at a certain distance, both physical and interpersonally, sometimes walking away or riding away from the travelers. In none of the photos can the co-presence of the travelers and the host be seen. The lack of travelers' appearance in these photos to some extent indicates that the travelers appreciated the local lifestyle—they valued it and found it captivating but were not ready to experience it.

Findings from this category indicate that the Vietnamese way of life was appreciated both positively and negatively by the bloggers in the text data. The photo data, however, did not give significant elaboration of the textual meaning. Rather, they suggest a position of the outsider that the bloggers preferred to take when viewing the local life and their refusal to temporarily emerge into the local community.




#### 4.6. Appreciation of Food

The blog posts said that in Vietnam, food could be sampled everywhere, in hotels, at restaurants, in the streets and at the markets. *Vietnam-style coffee* was mentioned 16 times, *Pho* especially *pho bo*, or beef pho, 15 times, and *beer*, or *bia hoi*, 11 times. Other popular dishes were *spring rolls*, *banh mi* and *banh xeo*. Such frequency indicated that in the portrayal of Vietnam, the above-mentioned foods and drinks were signature.

Among the 10 blog posts, only the one by blogger B6 included a section to advise would-be travelers on must-try dishes and good restaurants at each destination. Other bloggers described foods in general rather than naming the specialties of each place. Evaluative adjectives found in this domain expressed travelers' positive impact and quality reaction to Vietnamese food. Food and drinks in general, and *pho*, coffee and beer in particular were appraised as *delicious*, *amazing*, *spectacular*, and *cheap*. There were no adjectives that described the exact flavor of each dish.

Regarding still images, there are six photos of food and drink altogether. This correlates with the small percentage of detailed verbal description for food in the database. Also, only photos of *pho* and coffee were captioned with their specific names. There were no photos of beer, or of such popular foods as *bun cha*, *banh mi* or *banh xeo*. In two out of six photos, the bloggers, i.e. the interactive participants, were co-present with the focused foods, i.e. the represented participants. Here are examples of food photos.

<Table 8> Vietnamese food

		
<p>Pho in Hanoi (P16 – B6)</p>	<p>That was less than FIVE POUNDS. (P19 -B7)</p>	<p>Vietnamese steamed bun with crispy fried chicken (P20 – B4)</p>

**Food photos** which were taken singly were all in close shot, being in the foreground, being color saturated, from top down, with frontal or oblique angles. This offered an attention to the detail of the dishes. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 148), the close shot presents an intimate/personal realization while the frontal angle of the photos expresses an involvement with what is happening. The photos, therefore, illustrated how delicious, amazing, spectacular, and cheap Vietnamese foods are and why Vietnamese cuisine is among the top reasons for visiting the country.

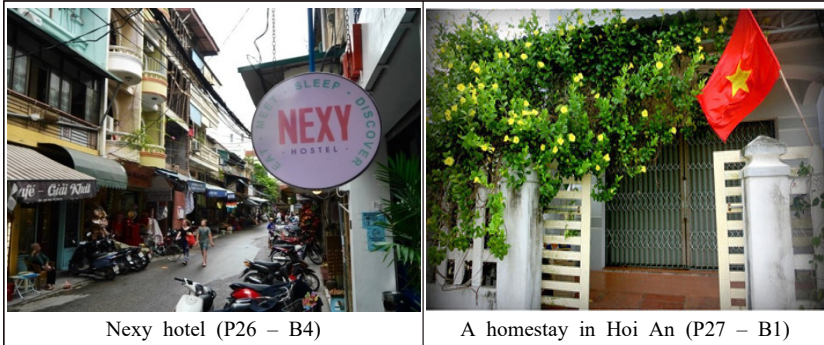
#### 4.7. Appreciation of Accommodation

The blog posts showed a diversified choice of accommodation in Vietnam, from luxury resorts to homestays and hostels. Among them, hotels in the crowded streets near city centers were prioritized. They are mostly complimented as being **clean** (+qual) and at reasonable prices. Besides, accommodation in Hoi An and cruises on Ha Long Bay were appreciated for being **charming** (+imp)

and **comfortable** (+qual). The positive evaluation was not for Hanoi airport hotel, however, which was complained for being skanky.

There were seven photos of accommodation such as houses, hotels, or cruise ships in the collection of blog posts, all of which were without people.

<Table 9> Accommodation



These photos were taken in medium, close, or very close shot and from frontal view, with full details. In this way, they feature a subjective shot, creating a sense of belonging, differentiating the bloggers from “other” tourists. However, the lack of the bloggers’ co-presence at the accommodation once again indicated that they would prefer to gaze at the others rather than stepping in and be an impermanent member of their community.

## V. The Portrayal of Viet Nam from a Sociolinguistic Perspective

Dann (1996) suggests that tourism can be treated sociolinguistically by drawing on both the semiotic analysis of tourism and the content of tourism materials. In the data collection of this study, authenticity and strangerhood are the strongest expressed sociolinguistic features. Conflict occurred in one instance, and play was not exhibited at all.

### 5.1. Authenticity Perspective

As stated by MacCannell (1989), tourists travel in the search of a sense of authenticity that they could not otherwise experience in their home life. Accordingly, any instances that make the experience “truly” or “typical” of Vietnam is an expression of authenticity. In this data collection, **authenticity** is exposed in the travel bloggers’ narration of the places they visited, the activities in which they participated, the food they ate and the people with whom they came into contact with.

In general, the adjectival structures that express authenticity often include adjectives with positive impact reaction and positive quality reaction. The adjectival phrases which serve as indicators of authenticity in this aspect consist of adjectives like “unique,” “local,” “truly,” and adverbs like “really.” For example,

[Halong Bay]... **Unique** (B4)

... the colorful traditions of the **local** cultures (B4)

Vietnam is a magical place, with **so much** culture\_and cool things to do. (B7)


Ranking top in the database was the adjective “**local**” which appeared 18 times, 6 times of which were in collocation with cultures, places, and the rest 12 were for beer, street food, way of life, woman, and service/ transport. “**Unique**” was used twice for appraising the authenticity of Ha Long Bay and four times for commenting on activities. For example, they described the water puppet show to be unique, shops with unique souvenirs in Hoi An, and a unique coffee shop. “**Typical**” is another adjective to exhibit authenticity, which was found in the collocation “typical Vietnamese gifts.”

In terms of adverbs, “**really**” was used to intensify the bloggers’ liking of the travel with 15 times, cheap prices with 3 times, attractive activity with 2 times and good hotel once. “**Truly**” appeared once, in combination with “delicious food.” Other adverbs like “**extremely**” and “**super**” in combination with “friendly and helpful” to describe local people were another indicator of the

authentic experience that the travel bloggers were describing to their audience about the country.

Other important words expressing authenticity like *authentic, true, pure, genuine* did not appear in the data collection. However, when viewing the data multiple times, the researcher came up with other phrases and sentences that describe authenticity, such as “I loved seeing that piece of Vietnamese culture.” (B3).

Photos of places, the bloggers in activities, and food strengthened the authenticity that were described verbally, and to some extent, even had a louder say in the display of authenticity. The photos of places, for example, had a frontal view and a medium or long shot, were taken at eye-level or from a high angle, and supplied full details with maximum representation of the place. Let us take a look at the following examples and analysis.

	<p><b>The Old Bridge, Hanoi (P28-B7)</b></p> <p>The inanimate participant represented in this photo is the Long Bien bridge in Hanoi. There is an absence of animated participants represented, and so is the gaze. This leaves the image act to be of information offering value instead of demanding an action from the viewer. The long shot with wide camera makes it possible for the viewers to see the length of the bridge as if they were seeing it in reality. The eye-level angle expresses an equality between the viewers and the represented participant. The high resolution brings about a maximum representation of the bridge. The frontal angle makes it at the center of the gaze, and so brings it to the focus of the viewers. The viewers were invited to observe it in detail and consume a place which was unique to Vietnam.</p> <p>It is notable that though the photo had a lot to tell the viewers, the text that accompanied it simply noted a list of suggested places of interest in Hanoi instead of making any comment about the bridge itself. The scenario may be because blogger B7, like other bloggers, perceived Hanoi as a place of contrast, and a combination of new energy under an old cover, and she unintentionally shared her perceptions with others. This is one way that a taste of authenticity, or the trademark of a destination, could be spread to prospective travelers.</p>
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Photos of the bloggers in activities and photos of local foods,

presented the clearest representation of authenticity. These photos were often in medium or close shot, taken from either low or high angle. The medium or close shot featured a social or personal relation, while the high angle presented an imaginary power of the viewers over the activities the bloggers were participating. As such, the viewers were invited to observe the activities and consider taking up the activities with the bloggers. The analysis of a food photo below illustrates these comments in detail.



**Vietnamese steamed bun with crispy fried chicken at the Ben Thanh Food Market, Ho Chi Minh (P29 – B4)**

The inanimate participant represented in the photo was a kind of bun that blogger B4 tried at Ben Thanh Food Market. The bun was placed in the forefront, with its crispy fried chicken, herbs and sauce being the center of the attraction. The photo was taken top-down, which suggests the viewers to be at a dominant position to the bun. The close shot shows the bun in elaborate description so as to encourage the viewers to give it a try because it is “local” and “delicious.”

Although the blogger did not appear in the photo, she was in fact holding a stick, which kept the fillings in place and signalled that this was how the local people would consume it, and that the blogger herself was going to try it. The absence of the direct gaze of the animate participant (blogger B4) could be compensated by her implied instructions on how to keep the bun and eat it. By doing so, the blogger was making an announcement to the viewers that she was there, in Ben Thanh Food Market, and was trying the local food in the same way as the locals.

Similar analysis was performed on other photos of places, food, and the bloggers themselves in activities in the data collection. It turned out that 30 out of 73 photos of places, 18 out of 23 photos of bloggers in activities, and all six photos of food had authenticity encoded in them. The photos were taken by the bloggers or chosen from some photo hubs and posted with a primary purpose of evidencing their verbal narration; however, they happened to narrate the experience in a higher degree of authenticity than the verbal narration. The frontal view and eye-level angle of the photos translate into their authentic experience of what is happening. The viewer is invited “to enter the represented natural or artificial space,

which seems to be waiting to be visited” (Francesconi 2014: 82). The bloggers give evidence of the authenticity of the represented, and persuade the reader to experience it.

Findings from the analysis of multimodal data in the concerned travel blogs showed that texts and images co-contributed to the manifestation of authenticity. While adjectival structures with positive impact reaction and positive quality reaction played as linguistic realizations of authenticity, photos which either offered information or demanded action from the viewers could realize a sense of authenticity, provided that they inscribed the bloggers’ willingness to accept the local way of life.

## 5.2. Strangerhood Perspective

Dann (1996) defines *strangerhood* as the search for strangeness and new experiences of tourists. In the multimodal data base of this study, the strangerhood characteristic was mostly observed in the bloggers’ description of places, food, and the Vietnamese way of life through the incidences they came across in different places. The strangerhood came out from both positive and negative appreciation.

### 5.2.1. Positive Strangerhood

In general, expressions of *positive strangerhood* tend to utilize the adjectival structures whose adjective has positive impact reaction and positive composition. The adjectives for strangerhood in this database included “*picturesque*,” “*quaint*,” “*fascinating*,” “*exotic*,” “*spectacular*,” “*different*,” and “*cheap*.”

the food was *spectacular*\_(B1)

a visit to this museum is both *fascinating* and *shocking* in *equal* measure (B4)

The roadside coffee though, now wow, that’s a *different* thing all together (B7)

“*Cheap*,” the adjective that appraises prices, has the highest count, with 24 combinations with food, clothes, transport, and

accommodation. Comments for things that are cheap may express both authenticity (Vietnam = super affordable) and strangerhood (Vietnam = ridiculously cheap or unbelievably cheap).

The adjective “*different*” appeared 14 times, 8 times of which collocated with look, feel, side, or thing. There were two incidences of “*exotic*,” one for describing Hanoi and the other for Hoi An. “*Fascinating*,” a common adjective for strangerhood, was collocated with the War Museum, the streets, the history of Vietnam and the country in general. “*Fascinating*” was used 10 times to describe either mesmerizing places in Vietnam or the strange things that made the bloggers shocked but still wanting to observe, such as the War Museum and Hoa Lo prison.

Other words expressing strangerhood like unsophisticated, unchanging, primitive, and untouched were not found in the data collection. Similar to the linguistic realizations for authenticity, there were other expressions in the database besides adjectives that could express strangerhood.

Certain photos of places, food, and local people in activity also indicated strangerhood. They elaborated in their verbal descriptions and visualized what was different and strange about Vietnam. Let’s take for analysis a photo of a local street vendor.



**Vegetable vendor (P31 – B1)**

There are two types of participants represented in the photo. The inanimate participant represented is the two baskets of morning glory. The animate one is the street vendor, a local woman in the typical outfit of local female vendors. She is wearing a conical hat, which is typically Vietnamese. The photo was taken from

the back of the vendor, showing her walking away from the viewers, and concentrating on her task rather than paying attention to the viewers. This indicates a detachment. Both participants were placed in the forefront of the photo, not so far from the viewers. The medium shot shows that the publisher (blogger B1) might be willing to be in a social relation with the animate participant, however this willingness was not strong because she let the participant walk away from her. The eye-level angle shows that the viewers and the animate

participant are in equal position of power, and, the viewer can observe the locals' daily work, but needs an "invitation/ permission" to enter that community.

In the blog post by B1, the above photo follows a paragraph about *warm, kind* and *caring* local people. However, it does not seem to directly support B1's verbal description. This may indicate that the choice of photos may sometimes not match the verbal intention of the bloggers. More than being for illustrative purposes, the photo in use may actually encode a viewpoint of its publisher, and in this case, the bloggers. Other photos of local people in activities which were mostly taken in long or medium shot, from side or behind reveal that the travelers viewed the destination and the locals' routine activities through the lens of an observer. For most of the time, they gazed at "the Other", i.e. Vietnam, with curious eyes and seemed excited at seeing strangeness. While these photos could be an indicator of *been there, seen that*, the non-presence of the travelers in such photos might imply that the travelers would like to view how local people practice their routines rather than try to participate in those routines

The findings above lead to a number of relevant issues. First, adjectival realization for strangerhood characteristics gave a positive impact reaction and positive composition. Second, the visual realizations featured a detachment of the viewers from the local ways of life or vice versa. Third, the distinction between authenticity and strangerhood in a photo was not linear. For most of the time, photos that showed local ways of life could make a bold statement about authenticity as well as expressed how different the instances/practices were to the bloggers.

### 5.2.2. Negative Strangerhood

While positive strangerhood was exposed in the use of adjectives with positive impact reaction and positive compositional value, **negative strangerhood** was exposed through the use of adjectives of negative quality reaction and negative composition, such as "chaotic," "crazy," "frustrating," and "shocking" which expressed the bloggers' comments on "the strangeness of the offered" (Dann 1996: 16). This characteristic was unveiled in the bloggers' narration of

two instances of lifestyle, which were the traffic and street vendors/sellers, and two places of interest, the War Museum (in Ho Chi Minh City) and Hoa Lo Prison (in Hanoi).

get *frustrating* ... constantly being nagged by the vendors ... (B5)  
the roads are *crazy* (B7)

[Hoa Lo] the exhibits were *interesting* (and quite *disturbing*) (B3)

The War Remnants Museum is *not* an *easy* place to visit for some people. (B5)


This museum is a *sobering* experience (B6)

In the blog posts, “*crazy*” appears in 13 combinations, eight of which were about Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, traffic and roads. “*Chaotic*” had nine counts, and all of them collocated with Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, streets and old town. Following these appreciations, the bloggers told how they themselves managed to cross the street, or navigate in such a “crazy network of traffic-packed streets.” It indicates that although the bloggers found the traffic in Vietnam different from what they experienced in their home culture, they did not really hate it. Rather, they considered it an exotic feature of the destination. While they were not willing to be a part of it, due to the need to travel around, they were forced to step out and engage the traffic. To some extent, they had overcome the strangeness to recount the thrill of conquering the traffic challenge in Vietnam. In this way, negative strangerhood was exposed while it did not always mean that the bloggers hated it and wanted to get rid of it.

A similar complicated evaluation lied in the use of contrasting pairs of adjectives such as “*interesting*” and “*disturbing*,” “*fascinating*,” and “*shocking*” for Hoa Lo Prison and the War Remnant Museum. While “*interesting*” and “*fascinating*” expressed positive strangerhood, “*disturbing*” and “*shocking*” were indicators of negative strangerhood. Though perceiving the two places in both extremes, all bloggers recommended them in their must-visit list, perhaps to indulge themselves into another world where they could observe the same incident in the lens of the Other. Also, their recommendations

indicated that an instance of negative strangerhood did not correlate with a demand to ignore a chance to see the place in person.

Respectively, photos of Hoa Lo Prison, the War Remnants Museum, and busy roads which loudly voiced negative strangerhood. Let us analyze a photo of traffic in Hanoi.

	<p><b>Busy streets in Hanoi (P33 – B4)</b></p> <p>In this photo, the animate participants represented are local people in Hanoi in the morning. They are on their way to work or school. The inanimate participants are the motorbikes that they are riding. The street is crowded, with some people moving and some not. Some are obeying the traffic law by wearing helmets while some others are not. There is a man who is crossing in front of some bikes. The street looks crowded and disordered, and it feels chaotic and a bit scary for those who have never been in such a traffic maze. However, the brightness and colourfulness of the picture encode the excitement of the blogger on observing and managing to navigate the road. The photo was taken from the back of the people, showing them riding away, and not paying attention to the viewers. This indicates detachment. The medium shot shows that the publisher of the photo might be willing to be in a social relation with the animate participant, but would choose another way if she could avoid the participation.</p>
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In general, **Strangerhood** was found to be the strongest sociolinguistic feature of this collection of blog posts. Strangerhood photos were taken in medium or close shot, from side or behind, from an oblique camera angle, at eye-level. They revealed that the bloggers mostly viewed the destination and the locals' routine activities through the lens of an observer. For most of the time, they gazed at "the Other" (Vietnam) with curious eyes and seemed to be excited on seeing strangeness. In addition, the instances/aspects of Vietnam that were considered negatively strange were not rejected by the bloggers, but instead were recommended to the blog readers as something that they should try with caution for a taste of difference.

### 5.2.3. Conflict Perspective

According to Dann (1996), conflict perspective concerns

differences between the provided experience and the real past and present of the visited areas and their inhabitants. While the other three elements are directly and explicitly incorporated into language use, conflict perspective manifests itself much more implicitly.

A marked finding in discussing conflict is that there is a tourist dilemma arising in this data pool. Tourists dislike some destinations such as the beach city of Nha Trang.

The town of Nha Trang doesn't offer much in terms of culture (B1)

Just a city with lots of holidaymakers and you really don't feel like you're in Vietnam there (B3)

There isn't any culture or history here (B4)

For crazy party life with other backpackers go to Nha Trang (B7)

Nha Trang was appreciated for a sea break, a stop by the sea for the travelers to recharge their energy during their Vietnam travels. While they understood what should be expected at a beach city—the sun, the sea, lots of hotels, parties, and a great number of tourists—they kept commenting on its lack of history and culture. This created the tourist dilemma, which could be translated into the exhibition of conflict. In the data pool, this sign of conflict was expressed through the verbal narration of the bloggers. There was no photo to depict it.

While there was such a tourist dilemma, the reaction of the travelers was too mild for anti-tourist practices. Unlike anti-tourist vacationers who attempt to distance themselves from the tourist category by trying the local style and exploring unfamiliar places (Jacobsen 2000), the bloggers in this study complained about the touristic beach town, but still enjoyed it.

## VI. Discussion of Findings

The analysis of data collected from travel blog posts has addressed Vietnam as a destination with identity and diversity, with five domains being appreciated in its portrayal. The study results also highlight authenticity and strangerhood as the two most exposed sociolinguistic features. Lexical resources, which are evaluative adjectives in this study, and visual resources, which are still images, co-contribute to the bloggers' search to "discover authentic places" (D'Egidio 2014, cited in Denti 2015: 64) as well as their gaze at the locality in each place. Their choice of still images is closely linked to what is considered authentically Vietnamese.

The findings above have brought about a number of implications, especially to the issue of travelers' visit and re-visit decisions. Researchers have identified several "push" and "pull" forces that act as the travelers' motivational factors for visiting and revisiting a destination. The *push* factors can be connected to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. For example, the intrinsic motivation for one to travel may arise from their desire to escape a perceived boring daily routine, to discover themselves, to relax, or to facilitate social interactions. For the bloggers in this study, possibly the intrinsic motivation for their travel to Vietnam comes from their demand to explore themselves, and search for relaxation rather than facilitating social interactions with the local community. The *pull* factors, which are more exposed in the travel blogs, are the attributes of the destination to serve as an attraction to tourists. Novelty functions as a cultural pull factor. Tourist evaluations of destination characteristics and their perceived utility values have become an essential component in destination selection. (Woodside and Martin 2008: 18-19). The pull factors for the bloggers' travelling (and re-travelling) to Vietnam are what Vietnam has on offer to foreign tourists. They are a rich culture and local ways of life at each of the destinations on their journey, delicious local cuisine, affordable prices and even exotically disordered traffic. These findings can bring about beneficial implications to tourism stakeholders.

By mapping evaluative adjectives and corresponding interactive

qualities of still images in the database, it is possible to determine a number of relationships between “the writer and reader, the visitor and the visited, the tourist and the destination” (Denti 2015: 56) in these travel blog posts. The significance of the themes of authenticity and strangerhood showed what the bloggers viewed as being local and exotic, and featured the memories of the trips that they would like to record and retain. Such a sociolinguistic knowledge of a public discourse on tourism destinations helps researchers, as well as practicing managers, to see blogger discourse as more than a means of feeding information or marketing to prospective customers. It makes a contribution to the understanding of existing theories within tourism discourse as a field of study, and the promising future of developing the theory of tourism itself.

## VII. Conclusion

Recent advances in webpage technology have facilitated even more effective communication among tourism consumers and their active contribution to produce tourism products. According to Bruns (2008: 2), the consumer is becoming a *produser* of shared knowledge. Bruns coined this term by combining “producer” and “user” to explain that consumers are changing from being an end-user of a tourism product to becoming both a user and a producer who, by sharing their knowledge and experience of the product, can contribute to the amendment of current products or the creation of new ones.

A search on Google using “travel Vietnam” as keywords returns about 2,300 million results in 0.66 of a second. Numerous websites and travel columns recommend Vietnam to be on the top of everyone’s travel list since it has “something for every traveler” with spectacular landscapes, a long history and rich culture, coupled with delicious food and reasonable costs. The analysis in this article of the 10 blog posts by seven British travel bloggers to Vietnam confirms these outstanding features of the country.

The study offers insights into the co-contribution of the linguistic and visual resources in blog posts about Vietnam

itineraries to travel narration and recommendations, which facilitates a C2C (consumer to consumer) discussion platform. There existed a consistently positive set of appreciations about Vietnam as a tourism destination in terms of destinations, attractions, traffic or accommodation or other products consumed. However, it is unlikely that readers of these blogs would achieve a deep understanding of certain aspects of Vietnamese everyday life and the range of cultural expressions across the country, including seasonal product offerings and cuisine, and/or differences between various destination regions.

Content analysis on the text body of the data collection has shown that Vietnam tourism is generally doing well in providing unique experiences of food and destinations, plentiful options for holidaying, super affordable costs, and decent accommodation services. The bloggers underscored the authenticity of their Vietnam experiences, the activities and the local lifestyle so that their narrations are “real,” and tell stories of cultural strangeness so that their advice is worthy. The tourist dilemma regarding Nha Trang beach city may indicate a need to improve facilities in the destination. Chaotic traffic and bothersome street sellers are other issues that should be addressed by stakeholders in tourism.

The findings of this research also underline the role of still images as integral elements to evidence the credibility of the blog posts. While words dominated the corpus, still images, though occupying a subordinate role, gave clear-cut ideas about the location and its surroundings. They supported the linguistic realizations of authenticity and strangerhood in the blog posts, and in some case delivered an even stronger message than words. Practically, such research findings have reconfirmed the attractive features of Vietnam tourism in its attempt for post-Covid pandemic recovery. Linguistically, the results have proved that multimodal analysis is a feasible approach to tourism discourse study.

More work is needed to see whether there are other types of travel blog authors who write about Vietnam or other places, and a breakdown of the travel blog author market may be required to assist destinations and businesses in deciding how to make use of this content. If research shows that blogs and other consumer-

to-consumer communications, namely travel forums, product recommendations, guest books, and so on, make significant impact on destination image and travel planning, destinations may need to incorporate blogging into their overall marketing communications strategy. The case study in this research may be valuable to organizations like the Vietnam Tourism Association who may wish to encourage specific types of travelers, such as travelers of particular age groups, travelers from emerging markets, summer tourists and so on to blog about their visits to Vietnam. Another option is to locate blogs that are relevant to Vietnam travel based on author demographics and trip characteristics, and direct potential visitors to them by inserting hyperlinks or suggestions on the destination’s website.

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Received: Feb 3, 2023; Reviewed: May 11, 2023; Accepted: July 8, 2023

