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Nation Branding Online

Multimodal Analysis of the BRIC Official Business Websites

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ABSTRACT

This study explores and identifies the strategies for 'nation branding' used by website producers of the BRIC countries' official trade and business websites. 'National Branding' is defined in this thesis as the promotion of a particular country to foreigners. Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) are grouped into the same category of fast economic growth countries.

The main research question for this thesis is 'How are these BRIC's official business websites created and how does this represent them individually?' The goal of this research is to better understand the representation of each of the BRIC countries online and how this 'image' is achieved by the websites' multimodal approach.

The multimodality method of analysis in this research took into account the combination of website dynamic design (images, text, colors, structure, and functions) to shed light and knowledge upon the websites' usability, and individual represented 'metaphor'. Alongside multimodality, social semiotics theory was used as a framework of analysis to draw upon the conclusions of the research.

After conducting the research and drawing upon conclusions, the researcher sees that national culture has a very small role to play, if any, in its image online. Brazil's online image in this research was *well-dressed but only half-functioning*. Russia took on a *minimalistic and serious* style. India had a lack of individuality as it adopted a *textbook* style and was too general in the materials presented on its website. China adopted a color scheme and website structure that can be compared to a *military uniform*, one that is organized and mostly functioning.

KEYWORDS: Multimodal Analysis, Social Semiotics, BRIC, Websites, CMC, Nation Branding

1 INTRODUCTION

This first section aims to introduce the main topic of interest and set the scene for the reader. Topics which come under this introductory section are nation branding; the growing popularity of the World Wide Web, the BRIC countries, the research problem and research questions will be presented in this first section also.

1.1 Background

‘Culture’ and ‘country’ are two separate concepts; although they may be easily confused to be the same, one’s culture may not necessarily be a result of one’s country of origin. This is fascinating to the researcher and is of high interest to her since she is a keen traveler and categorizes herself as a ‘Third Culture Kid (Adult)’. As defined by sociologists Pollock and Van Reken (2009: 13):

“A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of [their] developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.”

The researchers’ interest in experiencing life in multiple countries, paired with the fast developing technologies of today has lead to this research on ‘nation branding online’.

“Our culture teaches us rules or norms that tell us how to behave inside our culture... members of a culture share similar thoughts and experiences” (Jandt 2007: 25). However, what does culture mean for a country and how is this culture represented through technologies such as the Internet? Are cultures really shown online? If so, how is it shown? Or how not is culture shown online? These are just some questions that came to the researcher’s mind when the idea of doing a study on ‘nation branding online’ surfaced.

1.2 Scope of Study

‘Nation branding’ would be defined in this thesis as the promotion of a particular country to foreigners. The traditional methods of ‘nation branding’ often were shown as television commercials of a particular country as a holiday destination; or having print advertisements promoting a particular country (Marat 2009). For this research, only promotions done on the Internet are studied, hence the ‘nation branding *online*’ focus. The idea of the nation being an object of sale is intriguing because what it offers is really intangible, for example, the experience of drinking from a fresh plucked coconut on the white sandy beaches of Thailand, or, climbing Mount Fuji to enjoy the priced views of the beautiful sunset in Japan. These ‘commodities’ are incomparable.

However, this thesis will not focus on ‘nation branding online’ for the tourist industry. Instead, this thesis is only interested in ‘nation branding online’ for the ‘business/investors/economical sector’. There has been much studies done on the tourist industry and how nations brand themselves, however, studies on nation branding from an investor’s point of view is lacking. Therefore to fill in the gap in this field of research, this thesis would be focusing on nation branding for the economical sector, more specifically, in the “BRIC” countries.

Brazil, Russia, India and China have been termed as the “BRIC” countries due to their rapid business and economical growth. All these BRIC nations are at a similar stage of newly advanced economic development (O’Neill 2001). Hence, the official (governmental) business and trade websites of these BRIC countries would be the subject of research in this thesis.

These websites share several common features: firstly, their wide range of target users – investors and expatriates with the intention of promoting one’s economical development and opportunities. In addition, all these websites use English language texts, therefore making them comparable in a scientific research such as this. Lastly, all these official websites are government funded websites.

1.3 Research Problem

These official business websites have supposedly two main target audiences/users in mind as mentioned above: for investors and expatriates working in the host country. There is a slightly different agenda for each target group, therefore making this research more interesting and practical. However, all forms of persuasion rhetoric/marketing/advertising use basic persuasion techniques which induce a 'need' in the target audience (Beasley & Danesi 2002). Appealing to this *need*, persuaders then build on providing for this *need* in their product/service, or in the case of this research, website creators create a *need* for investors to invest in the available resources (satisfying the *need*). However, take note that these persuasive techniques are designed to speak indirectly to the target audience, therefore the need for semiotic analysis (Beasley & Danesi 2002). For investors, the webpage creator(s) would want to leave an impression on them, asking oneself 'how would we want to present ourselves through our official website to these investors?', 'what would these investors want to invest in, specifically in our country?', and 'is information easily retrievable on our website? Are we providing them with the information they need?'

On the other hand, for the expatriates coming from abroad, these questions would be asked, 'would they want to work in our country?', 'how would this website affect their choice?', and 'what are they hoping to find in our country to attract them to work here?'

These questions are only a sample of some of the questions that website creators would have to answer when designing these official business websites for each of the BRIC countries. There is however, the limitation of such a representation online. In other words, these websites would obviously not be displaying the 'real' facts of the nation, do not misunderstand the researcher, the information posted on these websites are no doubt truthful but it is what these websites creators want to show about their country, it is therefore very selective information. Therefore, how is this representation created and used? Just like persuasive advertising, these websites use the same techniques as traditional advertising and appeal to the target audiences' ethos, pathos and logos (Aristotle's theory of rhetoric); pathos appeals to the viewer's

emotions; logos appeals to one's logical reasoning, and ethos adds credibility to the particular character represented.

The main research question for this thesis is therefore 'How are these BRIC's official business websites created and how does this represent them individually?' To answer this research question, the researcher would formulate an analysis that systematically analyzes the multiple properties of websites (e.g. text, images) and interprets them. After which, she would identify the similarities and/or differences between these websites by using a comparative approach. The goal of this research is to better understand the representation of each of the BRIC countries online and how this 'image' is achieved by the websites' multimodal approach.

1.4 Structure of the Study

This thesis consists of five main sections, with each section focusing on specific parts of the research topic and each building upon its last section to give the reader a more concrete idea of the topic at the end.

The first section aims to introduce the main topic of interest and to set the scene for the reader. Topics which come under this introductory section would be a general introduction to the concept of national branding on the World Wide Web and a brief introduction to the BRIC countries, the research problem will be presented in this first section also.

The second section consists of a comprehensive literature review which focuses on the topics of computer-mediated communication, social semiotics, and multimodal analysis.

The third section discusses the methodology of this study and presents a more detailed understanding of the research problem and a justification of how qualitative data will be used.

The fourth section presents and discusses the findings in depth and critically. Primary data will be weaved into subcategories of findings to answer the research questions.

Finally, the fifth and last section will conclude the thesis with research results, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research on the topic.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive literature review is done in this chapter and key topics of the thesis will be discussed. These topics include internet communication, social semiotics, and multimodal analysis.

2.1 Internet Communication

The World Wide Web started a communication revolution as people's communication methods changed completely, for the better or for worse. The World Wide Web could well be the world largest archive/library/database, recording news, books, images, videos, music, etc. There is nothing you cannot find online. Not surprisingly, people's lifestyle and culture are greatly affected by the introduction of this media giant. The Internet which started humbly in 1969 is now one of the most powerful and influential tool used by various institutes and individuals alike.

Table 1. Increase in Internet hosts from 1969 to 1999, source, Hobbes Internet Timeline, (as cited in Mann & Stewart 2000)

Year	No. of Internet Hosts
1969	4
1979	188
1989	130,000
1999	56,218,000

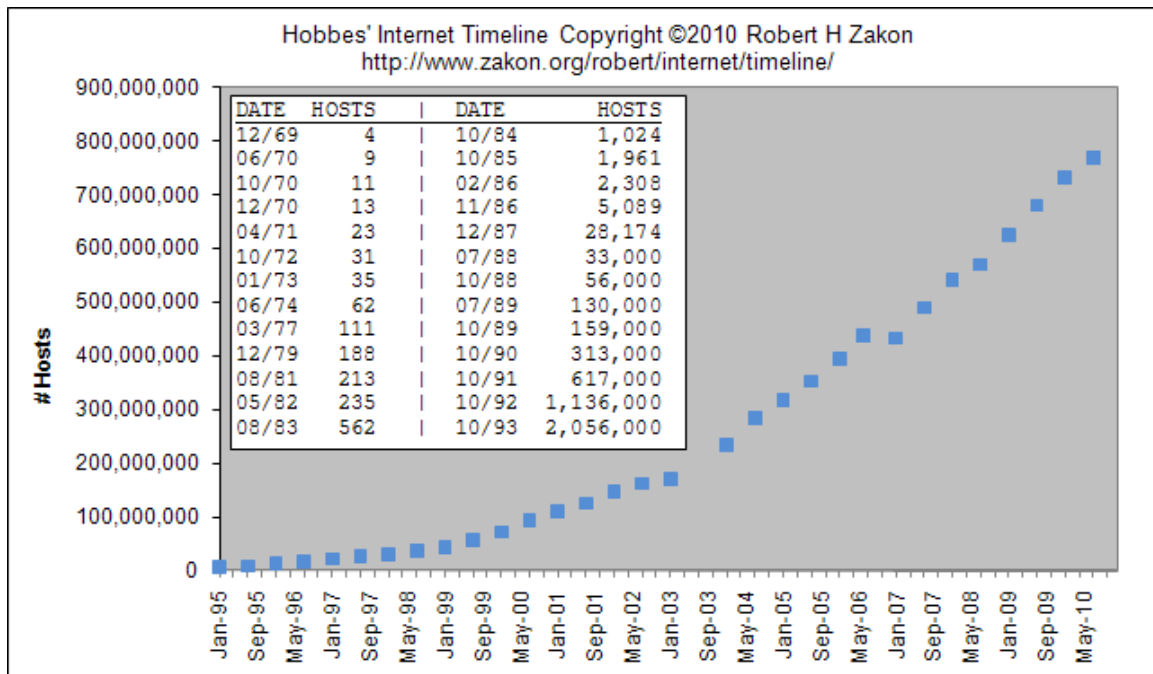


Figure 1. Internet Hosts from January 1995 – May 2010, source, Hobbes Internet Timeline, retrieved on November 29, 2011, from <http://www.zakon.org/robert/internet/timeline/#2000s>

The above tables show the rapid increase of Internet Hosts from 1969 to 1999, then from 1995 to 2010. The main driving force for this increase was caused by the recognition of the business power of the Internet (Mann & Stewart 2000). Its power to reach masses of people around the world, 24 hours a day was a huge draw.

2.1.1 Computer Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated-communication (CMC) is defined as the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages (December 1996). This covers both the delivery mechanisms, derived from communication theory, and the importance of the interaction of people that the technologies and process mediate (Naughton 2000).

CMC is a highly interactive form of communication as it provides complex processes of interaction between participants. It combines the permanent nature of written communication with its high speed. The possibilities for interaction and feedback are

not constrained. It is only the creativity, imagination, and personal involvement of participants that constraint the potential of online WebPages. Therefore CMC environments are more flexible and have the potential of containing richer qualitative information for research.

CMC text has several unique characteristics that differentiate it from non-CMC documents (e.g. reports, news articles, research paper). Three of these distinct properties were noted by Abbasi and Chen (2008) as described here. Firstly, the communicative nature of CMC text makes it rich in interactions (Sack 2000), which non-CMC documents are generally static and lack interaction in the information they provide. There are different levels of interaction from CMC texts and such depends on the communication context and mode (Fu et al. 2008; Herring 2002).

Secondly, CMC text also differs from non-CMC documents with respect to its informational composition (Abbasi & Chen 2008). While non-CMC documents have a high concentration of current, topical information (Mladenec 1999), such information is less available in CMC. Nigam and Hurst (2004) analyzed thousands of messages posted on USENET (a large collection of newspapers), and found that only three percent of sentences contained topical information. In contrast, web discourse is rich in opinion and emotion related information (Nigam & Hurst 2004; Subasic & Huettner 2001). Having said so, CMC contents still differ depending on the kind of website it is, for example, in this research, official government business websites would be analyzed; therefore its content would be more factual and formal (as compared to contents posted on a social network site).

Thirdly, CMC text and non-CMC documents also differ linguistically, with new CMC technologies bringing about the emergence of new language varieties (Wilson & Peterson 2002). CMC text encompasses a large spectrum of stylistic, genre-based, and characteristic language usage personalized to fit age, gender, educational, cultural, and contextual differences (Herring 2002; Sack 2000).

2.1.2 Nation Branding

There has been an increase in interest in the concept and practice of ‘nation branding’ in recent years. Although this is not a new concept, as evidently nations have been promoting their economic, diplomatic and military interests, it is only in the last decade or so that nations have turned to the explicit use of the techniques of branding as practiced in the business world (Dinnie 2008). Hence, terms such as ‘brand image’ and ‘brand identity’ are increasingly used to describe the perceptions that are held of nations amongst their various ‘stakeholders’ (Dinnie 2008).

As van Ham (2001) has noted that smart states are building their brands around reputations and attitudes in the same way smart companies do. Dinnie (2008) notes that this appearance of the vocabulary of branding into the international affairs of nations has gotten some negative views and has aroused suspicion regarding the appropriateness and relevance of such extreme commercial practices. However, almost every government now uses some form of ‘nation branding’ (Dinnie 2008). In addition, many advertising agencies, branding consultancies, and public relations firms have found ‘nation branding’ to be an extremely profitable revenue stream (Dinnie 2008). The key commercial objectives of nation branding are to boost export promotion, inward investment, and tourism.

2.2 Social Semiotics

The paragraphs below will speak about the topic of social semiotics in more detail. In general, social semiotics is the study of meaning-making between people in society. Social semiotics is not confined to only traditional modes of communication, instead, it covers a wide range, if not all, the forms of interaction and communication one can think of, for example, advertisements, news broadcasting, films, radio, painting, weaving, etc. Terms such as ‘semiotic resources’, ‘semiotic potential’ and ‘functional semiotics’ will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

2.2.1 Semiotics in the Present

The dynamic world of communication has changed and is still changing. The reason for its changes can be found in a vast web of intertwined social, economic, cultural and technological changes (Kress 2010). Many have categorized all these reasons under the umbrella term ‘globalization’; however, ‘globalization’ is not one single event. It is instead a collection of happenings which strings together making its effects felt globally (Kress 2010).

The ‘globalized’ semiotic effects are recognizable at various levels: at the level of broadcasting media and messages – most evidently in the shift from the book to the computer screen; at the level of semiotic production, the printing press is slowly being replaced by the digital; and in representation, the shift from the dominance of the mode of writing to the mode of image (Kress 2010).

Kress (2010) along with other semioticians (e.g. Theo van Leeuwen) recognize that we do not yet have a theory which allows us to understand and account for the world of communication as it is now; nor do we have an adequate set of categories to describe what we need to describe. In this situation, terms which were used in the former era, in particular from theories and descriptions of language, are used still today. Over the long period of time, these sets of tools have developed into a complex collection of terms (Kress 2010). However, tools which were used to operate the non-electric telegraph no longer work for the mobile phone, similarly, many of the older terms do point to aspects which semioticians need to consider and shape for present purposes, at the same time they cannot afford to be reluctant in introducing necessary new terms (Kress 2010).

The effects of social changes are shaping and reshaping communicational practices (Kress 2010). Therefore scholars in the semiotics field feel restricted when using ‘old’ terms, such as ‘grammar’. That inevitably means the obedience towards the ‘fixed rules’ of grammar. Semioticians are leaning towards using ‘resource’, rather than ‘grammar’, as in ‘resource for representation’. Social resources are socially made and therefore carry the evident regularities of social occasions, events and hence certain stability (Kress 2010).

2.2.2 Semiotic Resources (The ‘What’ of Communication)

Originally, semiotics was used to discuss linguistics and language, and it could be defined as a method to study ‘meaning’ making in languages (Halliday 1978: 192). Note that semiotics is neither a set of rules nor code, rather, a resource to analyze expressions (van Leeuwen 2005; Halliday 1978). van Leeuwen took the concept of using social resources in languages further to cover all ranges of social semiotics or communication semiotics, be it communicating by speaking with our voices or communicating with technologies like paints, computer hardware, textiles, clay, etc (van Leeuwen 2005). These, as van Leeuwen (2005: 3) notes, have been traditionally termed as “signs”, or the “observable form” of the “signified”, which is the meaning produced. For example, the color red is a *sign* for danger (the *signified*).

With such a broad covering, social semiotics is not limited to the traditional modes of communication – speech, writing and painting. Instead, social semiotics refers to every movement we make, therefore in principle; it allows room for different cultural meanings (van Leeuwen 2005). Once we have identified a semiotic resource, we then can investigate its “semiotic potential”, or its potential for making meaning (van Leeuwen 2005: 4). For example, maintaining eye-contact with another person could be seen as something natural, universal, and we may think of it as something non-semiotic. However, the use or lack of eye-contact could vary from person to person and also culturally – in Western cultures, it is polite that a child keeps eye-contact when an adult is speaking with him/her, whereas in African cultures, this eye-contact mustn’t be established to show the power-authority relationship between the child and adult (Furniss & Gunner 1995). Different use of eye-contact can show happiness, love, anger, shyness, authority, etc. No wonder the phrase ‘speaking through the eyes’ is used. Therefore there are many possible semiotic potential for such a physical activity – what kind of eye-contact can we observe here, how long was the eye-contact kept for, between which people where the eye-contact used, what kinds of meanings could be made from such a stare? van Leeuwen identified this questioning of the semiotic potential as the most important activity which semioticians do (2005). He describes this step as collecting; documenting and systematically categorizing semiotic resources with their semiotic potential (van Leeuwen 2005). The multiple meanings of semiotic resources is the key in these

studies because it also depends on who uses these resources, for example, the winking of the eye have the potential of ‘flirting’ or ‘hinting’, or just a ‘greeting’ – however, who does this winking, to whom is this wink given to, could all generate different meanings.

Gibson (1979) noted that the meanings we find are both objective and subjective, which is very similar to Halliday’s concept of ‘meaning potential’, however, Gibson went one step ahead to say that semiotic resources have ‘signifying potential’ rather than ‘specific meanings’, and they need to be studied in their social context. Gibson calls this the “affordances”, which he differentiates from ‘meaning potential’ as having recognized meanings, whereas ‘affordance’ allows for new interpretation of meanings.

One may start to wonder about the ‘reach’ of such a study of semiotics and modes since each culture is distinct in their way of expressions and communication. There are some highly general semiotic principles, which are common to all human communication (Kress 2010). These are present and evident in all human societies and their cultures; and are the expression of the socially formed individuals who give outward expression to their meanings using culturally available semiotic resources, which have been shaped by the practices of members of social groups and their cultures (Kress 2010).

The means for making meanings and the means of communicating these meanings are shaped by social and economic factors (Kress 2010). In a social-semiotic theory, the assumption is that the cultural technologies of representation, production and distribution are used within the frame of what is socially possible, since communication has been and will remain subject to social, cultural, economic and political constrains (Kress 2010).

2.2.3 Functions of language in semiotics (The ‘How’ of Communication)

A certain ‘object’ may be known by many people and we may well be discussing it amongst friends, but each having a different representation of the ‘object’. For

example the Second World War would be seen differently from a German as compared to a Jew. This knowledge which individuals have about some aspect of reality has to be personified into a representation, expressing the thoughts of the individual. This representation cannot determine what we can say about a given aspect of reality, but we cannot represent anything without them, therefore we need these representations as frameworks for sense making. Language and the use of language is a huge semiotic tool in creating these representations. The following are seven identified functions of language in van Leeuwen's book (originally derived from Halliday 1973), *Introducing Social Semiotics* (2005: 76-77):

1. The *instrument* function of language, the fact that you can use language to express what you want.

For example, an examiner would use language to communicate with the test-takers what it takes to pass the exam. These instructions are used to communicate actions for an outcome which the source already expects to see. "Please match the correct answers to the pictures."

2. The *regulative* function of language, the fact that you can use it to get people to do things for you.

For example, a parent may ask a child to bring a glass of juice to the table. This could come as a demand, showing authority. Or it could come as a polite request, depending on how the language was used. "Sam, could you please get me a glass of juice?"

3. The *interactive* function of language, the fact that you can use it to interact, for example, to greet or express your pleasure at seeing someone.

For example, a friend from abroad sends greetings to another friend in a different country. In this example, interactive language can be mediated through technologies, like the phone or via sending an email. "Greetings from Spain! How are you?"

4. The *personal* function of language, the fact that you can use it to express your feelings, for example, your pleasure or disgust at something.

For example, a husband communicating his love for his wife on their wedding anniversary day, language here can be used in many forms as well, such as through a love poem or a song, etc. “I love you!”

5. The *heuristic* function of language, the fact that you can use it to find out about things.

For example, a tourist asks a local where to find a particular place in the city. These commonly come in a question, but not necessarily. “Which bus do I take to get to the London Bridge?”

6. The *imaginative* use of language, the fact that you can use it to pretend.

For example, a little girl is speaking with her teddy bears at her miniature tea party table. “Would you like some tea, Teddy Sam?”

7. The *informative* use of language, the fact that you can use it to impart information.

For example, a professor teaches the students about the French Revolution, “The French Revolution began in 1789.”

From the above seven functions of language as identified by Halliday (1973), one can realize the multiple meanings that could be gathered from just one sentence. Language could come in many forms, e.g. text, speech, poems, songs, etc. In addition, these seven functions are never independent; it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the functions, hence making language semiotically high potentiated. van Leeuwen (2005: 94) calls this the “plurality of discourse” – there can be many different ways to present and interpret a particular ‘object’.

However, a multimodal social-semiotic theory shows the limitations of language (Kress 2010). ‘Language’ entails so much more which cannot be captured with just the seven functions named above. Therefore the theory of social semiotics opens the route to a clearer view of evaluation in different modes (Kress 2010). Multimodality and social semiotics together bring real benefits in understanding suitable forms of communication through better understandings of design (Kress 2010).

Halliday (1985: 68; Searle 1975) stresses that speech acts are dialogic: an ‘act’ of speaking...might more appropriately be called an ‘interact’; which is an exchange in which giving implies receiving, and demanding implies giving in response. Halliday (1985: 68; Searle 1975) identifies the dialogic nature of speech, meaning that speech, or the ‘act’ of speaking involves the interaction or an exchange of communication from the receiver and sender. In addition, every linguistic utterance is a representation of a ‘locutionary act’; and every movement an ‘illocutionary act’ (Searle 1975; as cited in van Leeuwen 2005). ‘Illocutionary acts’ could well be termed as ‘performances’, whereas ‘locutionary acts’ refer to the intention of speakers. Also, speech comes in pairs – the ‘initial move’ and a ‘response’ (Searle 1975; as cited in van Leeuwen 2005).

Finally, there are four basic types of speech acts, each with a preferred response and possible alternative responses: “the statement – offer of information; the questions – demand for information; the command – demand for goods and services; and the offer – the offer of goods and services” (van Leeuwen 2005: 118).

When *offering information*, a statement is made, for example, ‘The professor is friendly’. The preferred response of this could be acceptance, ‘Yes, the professor is friendly’; or there could also be disagreement, ‘Perhaps he is’. van Leeuwen (2005) mentions that the preferred response of such an offer of information depends on the context.

When *demanding for information*, a question is asked, for example, ‘Was the professor friendly?’ The preferred response would be the answer to the question, but there may also be refusal to answer, ‘I don’t know’.

When offering goods and services, Halliday (1985: 68) notes that “the exchange is essentially non-verbal, and language is only brought in to help the process along”. For example, ‘Here you are’. The preferred response would normally be acceptance.

Lastly, when *demanding for goods and services*, it is normally represented by a command, for example, ‘Show that you are friendly, professors’. The preferred response would be acceptance, although there may well be refusals.

As one has already seen, there are varieties in speech and these are dependent on the context of which they are used in. Also speech is often expressed with a combination of linguistic, non-linguistic and contextual features (Halliday 1973); hence the importance of studying multimodal communication.

2.3 Multimodal Analysis from a “Functional” Semiotics Point of View

Simply put, multimodal analysis is the study of more than one mode of communication. Multimodal discourse analysis is the practice of the analysis of discourse and sites which make use of multiple semiotic resources, e.g. language, visual images, space, etc (O’Halloran 2006). Kress (2010) has specified the three main modes of communication – text, image and color and “...using three modes in the one sign – writing and image and color...has real benefits. Each mode does a specific thing: image shows what takes too long to read, and writing names what would be difficult to show. Color is used to highlight specific aspects of the overall message (Kress 2010:1).” Therefore Kress (2010: 1) argues that ‘multimodality’ is the “normal state of human communication”.

In ‘functional’ semiotics, researchers assume that every piece of communication has three main functions: (1) to engage our attention and interest, (2) to convey some information about reality, and (3) to structure these into a coherent textual form. O’Toole (2011) has adapted these three main functions of semiotics to fit the analysis of images or displayed art. O’Toole (2011:10) work has these three functions: (1) what is represented (representational meaning), (2) how it engages us (modal meaning) and, (3) how it is composed (compositional meaning). Using O’Toole (2011)’s identified functions of displayed art, the researcher aims to uncover meanings represented through images in the four studied websites. The ‘Results’ (Chapter 4) section of this thesis would look further into ‘functional’ semiotics in regards to the findings of the study.

However, it is also likely that in a multimodal text using images and writing, the writing may carry one set of meanings and the images carry another (Kress & van

Leeuwen 1996). Therefore it is important to conduct a multimodal analysis in research so as to get as much meaning out of the resources as possible.

In addition, Skaar (2009:38) states that “when we choose to express something through the production of signs, we encounter resistance. This resistance can be related both to what we can express and how we can express it, i.e. our choice of both signified and signifier”. This goes to show the subjectivity of multimodality in social semiotics (refer to the ‘Limitations’ chapter for more explanation).

2.3.1 Multimodal communication

Images have been commonly studied as representations rather than as interactions (van Leeuwen 2005). The key questions of image analysis have been: ‘what people, places and things are represented in this image?’ and ‘what kind of connotative or symbolic meanings are associated with these representations?’ (van Leeuwen & Jewitt 2001:92). However, as van Leeuwen (2005) correctly points out, images have been clearly used for many different functions, such as to persuade (advertisements), instruct (patterns for knitting), explain (diagrams in textbooks), warn (image of skull and crossbones on a door), etc. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:121) have extended Halliday’s theory of ‘speech functions’ to images. Like linguistic representations, images can also either ‘offer’ or ‘demand’. For example, a ‘gaze’ is established if the character(s) in the image is looking at the viewer, this would be a ‘demand’. Whereas if the character represented in the image is looking away from the viewer, the image is described as an ‘offer’. It then ‘offers’ the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation (van Leeuwen 2005).

The specific nature of such offers and demands comes about through a combination of different visual and contextual features, just as in the case of the speech act. As seen in Figure 2 below, for instance, combines a visual demand with the American cultural icon Rosie the Riveter flexing her muscles, a commanding look starring straight at the viewer, and a clenched fist. The linguistic speech act in the figure expresses the demand for group work. It is a statement which includes the viewer into the picture by using ‘we’, and the promise and assurance that ‘we can do it’. The

image speaks to a large audience and does not address any specific person, indicating the mass response it prefers to reap. By analyzing Figure 2, the typography indicates assurance and determination, with each word capitalized and with large fonts, it gives the impression that each word is said with power and is accented to show certainty.



Figure 2. J. Howard Miller's "We Can Do It!" poster (1942)

The job of the semiotician starts here by defining the speech acts in the image. Is there one or two speech acts represented? One could see that there are actually two demands formulated twice, once in a rather direct way, and once verbally, in a more indirect, less personalized way. Or one single multimodal communicative act in which image and text blend to harmonize? Perhaps speech acts should be renamed *communicative acts* and understood as multimodal micro events in which all the signs present combine to determine their communicative intent (van Leeuwen 2005). The example shows how many linguistic and visual features can combine into a single communicative act, and how many different kinds of communicative act can therefore be expressed (van Leeuwen 2005). It also is an example which may at first sight seem monologic rather than dialogic. Yet it does of course have a preferred response – join the women workforce – and hence also a dispreferred one. Therefore we have seen that linguistic features of speech acts can be combined with other, non-

linguistic and contextual features to create multimodal communicative acts (van Leeuwen 2005).

2.3.2 Multimodal Genre and its Discourse

Generally, the term 'genre' is used to mean 'a type of text'. These texts are differentiated into its respective genres based on their characteristics (van Leeuwen 2005). These characteristics allow texts to be identifiable since they follow certain literature 'rules and guidelines'. These 'rules' could come from traditions, habits, role models, etc. Film and literature studies tend to use this content-oriented approach of categorizing texts. However, it should not remain restricted to these. Content, the 'what' of the text, is clearly important in all kinds of text. In social semiotics, content is studied under the heading 'discourse', rather than under the heading of 'genre' (van Leeuwen 2005).

Other methods of categorizing texts could be based on the 'expression' or media they use (van Leeuwen 2005). Most of the time, texts are written to serve a particular function, for example, the genre of advertisement is defined by its function of selling; the genre of news is defined by its function of providing information, etc. Social semioticians are interested in the social interactions of these texts, meaning the reactions towards these texts (van Leeuwen 2005). Therefore, the social semiotic approach stresses that studying the text alone is not enough. van Leeuwen (2005:123) recognizes that "the sequences of communicative actions that make up genres are embedded in social practices which contain other elements as well – actors, times, places, and so on. Social semiotics should look, not just at the actions, at 'what is done here with worlds?', but also 'who does it?', 'for whom?', 'where?', 'when?' etc".

2.3.3 Linking Word and Image

The classic semiotic approach to the linking of words and images originated from Roland Barthes (1977), his two key concepts are 'anchorage' and 'relay'. "In the case

of ‘anchorage’, words ‘elucidate’ pictures – the ‘text directs the reader through the signified of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others’ and ‘remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance’” (Barthes 1977). The concept of ‘anchorage’ is similar to Halliday’s concept of ‘elaboration’ (van Leeuwen 2005). ‘Anchorage’ is in fact a kind of specification whereby words pick out one of the possible meanings of the image out of its semiotic potential. “In the case of ‘relay’, ‘text and image stand in a complementary relationship’ and are both ‘fragments of a more general syntagm’, to which each contributes its own, distinct information” (van Leeuwen 2005:229). The concept of ‘relay’ can be compared to Halliday’s concept of ‘extension’: two items – one verbal, one visual – provide different, but semantically related information (van Leeuwen 2005).

In other words, there are two main categories of image-text relations – ‘elaboration’ and ‘extension’ (van Leeuwen 2005). And within these categories, there are more detailed characteristics. Firstly, ‘elaboration’ could be divided into another two sections – ‘specification’ and ‘explanation’. ‘Specification’ could either mean that the image makes the text more specific (illustration), or the text makes the image more specific (anchorage); whereas ‘explanation’ would mean that the text paraphrases the image or vice versa.

The second category of image-text relation – ‘extension’ can be further divided into three sections; ‘similarity’, ‘contrast’ and ‘complement’. ‘Similarity’ is self-explanatory, meaning that the content of the text is similar to that of the image. ‘Contrast’ is when the content of the text contrasts with that other image. Finally, ‘complement’ is when image adds further information to that of the text or vice versa (also called the ‘relay’).

To summarize the word-image links:

Table 2. Overview of word-image linking (van Leeuwen 2005:230)

Image-text Relations		
Elaboration	Specification	The image makes the text more specific (illustration)
		The text makes the image more specific (anchorage)
	Explanation	The text paraphrases the image (or vice versa)
Extension	Similarity	The content of the text is similar to that of the image
	Contrast	The content of the text contrasts with that of the image
	Complement	The content of the image adds further information to that of the text, and vice versa (relay)

2.3.4 'Reading' and the Design of Meaning in Websites

Reading is communication, even on CMC/websites. The notion of having authority embedded into writing makes sense. For example, in traditional pages of writing the author assembled and organized knowledge on behalf of readers and displayed that as a well-ordered text on pages of print (Kress 2010). Readers engaged with that text-as-knowledge in the order set out by the author; an order of lines; words on lines; on pages; in chapters, etc (Kress 2010). As seen, the authority rested with the author in these traditional writings.

On the other hand, in contemporary pages of writing, such as websites, are designed on the basis of a quite different social relation of author, reader and meaning-making (Kress 2010). Above all, the text/page is shaped generically with the assumption based on a very different social relation to that of the 'traditional' text and its genres (Kress 2010).

Unlike the traditional page, designed with a given order/arrangement for the reader's engagement, this site – a 'homepage', which has 'visitors' rather than readers – is given an ordering by the readers' interests through their design (Kress 2010). The readers' interests determine how they engage with this page. The sequence in which the elements are 'read' and ordered by them reflects the readers' interests. In effect, the readers' interests, reflected in the manner of their engagement, provides for them the design for this page: in other words, readers redesign the page (Kress 2003). This notion of 'reading' complies with the theory of communication, whereby material is

presented; and readers/viewers shape their ordering of that material, hence making meaning of their own, based on their interests; which formerly, would be shaped by the author or the initial maker of the text/message (Kress 2010). Clearly, this 'homepage' is designed; it is designed with the assumption of the readers' semiotic work (Kress 2010).

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology section of this thesis will describe the methods used to conduct the research. A justification of the method will also be presented in this methodology section. As a reminder, the main research question for this thesis is ‘How are these BRIC’s official business websites created and how does this represent them individually?’ The goal of this research is to better understand the representation of each of the BRIC countries online and how this ‘image’ is achieved by the websites’ multimodal approach.

3.1 Research Strategy

To answer the thesis’ main research question, the researcher would formulate an analysis that systematically analyzes the multiple properties of websites (e.g. text, images) and interprets them in a logical manner. After which, using comparative logic, she would identify the similarities and/or differences between these websites.

Social-semiotics theory is interested in all forms of meaning and meaning arises in social environments and interactions, which makes the ‘social’ into the source, the origin and the generator of meaning (Kress 2010). This research would use social-semiotic theory for its analysis because it matches the goal of the research question – to identify the meaning of representations of the BRIC countries on their official business websites.

The core unit of semiotics is the sign, which exist in all modes; so that all modes need to be considered for their contribution to the meaning of a ‘sign-complex’, which in the case of this research would be the multimodal websites. The focus on sign-making rather than sign use is one of several features which distinguish social-semiotic theory from other forms of semiotics (Kress 2010).

Kress (2010) identifies several assumptions on which the theory of social-semiotics is built upon: signs are motivated, not chance relations of meaning and form; the motivated relation of a form and a meaning is based on and arises out of interest of

makers of signs (i.e. website creators); the forms/signifiers which are used in the making of signs are made in social interaction and become part of the semiotic resources of an online (community) culture.

3.2 Research Method

The method of multimodal analysis would be employed in this research. For the purpose of this research, all WebPages of the websites would be studied. This is because the meaning represented by each website is built upon the whole collection of its branched-out WebPages. If this research were to only study the ‘homepage’ of the website, it would not paint a holistic picture of the represented country.

Upon finalizing all the websites to be used, the researcher would have to make a formal analysis of each webpage within the websites. This would give the researcher a collection of webpage grids which would be comparable with each others. By comparing all of them, the researcher would then construct categories that fit for all of the websites, or at least for some of them. The following steps below would further explain this method.

Step one would be to get a screen shot of the ‘raw data’ to be studied – for example, the figure below it is a screen shot of the official Brazilian investors’ webpage, always take note of the date of retrieval since content on the Internet is constantly updated:



Figure 3. Brazilian Homepage, <http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/investor> (Retrieved online: 21.10.2011)

Step two, would be to manually identify each and every detail on that particular webpage, as seen below in Figure 4. By ‘identifying’, the researcher means to ask herself a set of fixed questions about each detail (each mode) on the webpage, i.e. ‘what do I see?’, ‘what information is this mode about?’, and ‘in what form is this mode represented in?’

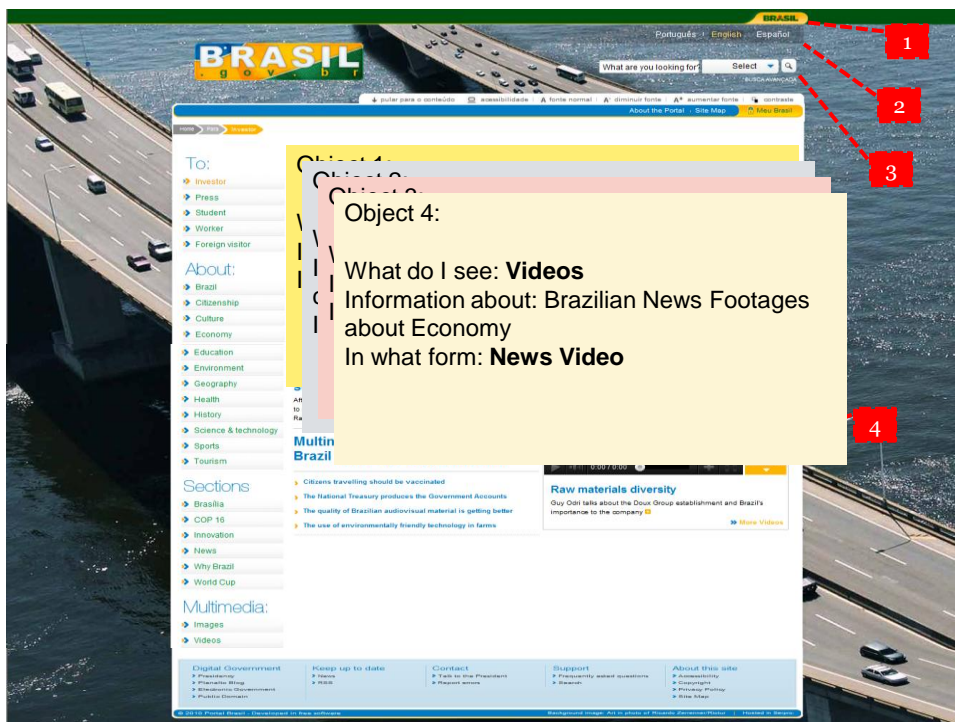


Figure 4. An example of how to identify each mode on the website
The finished product of step two should look like the figure below:

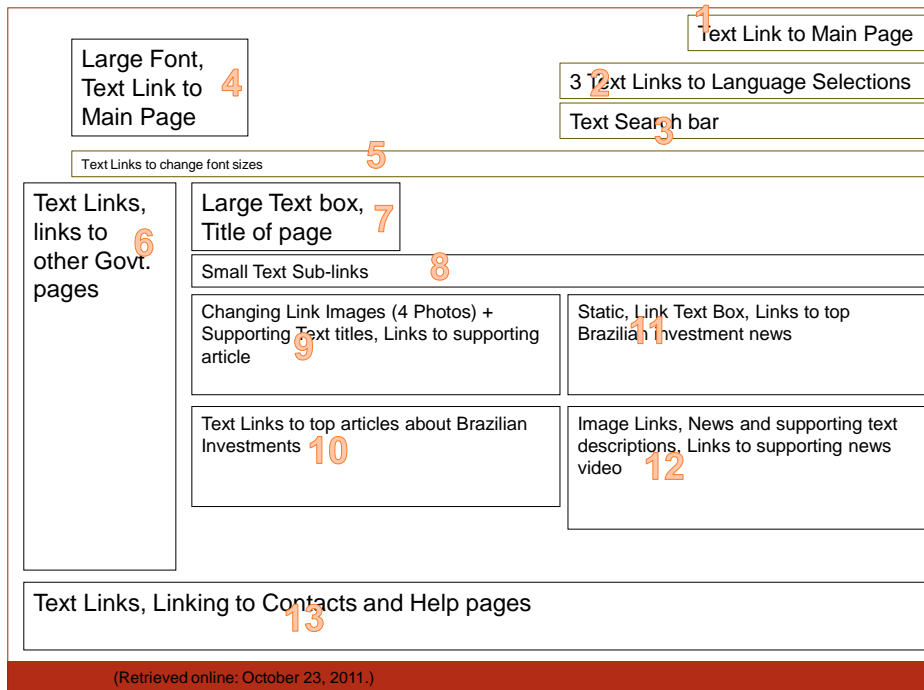


Figure 5. Semiotic modes, a collection of all the identified details from step two

Step three would be to gather all the identified modes from step two into a grid as seen:

Table 3. An example of a grid which can then be used for comparison with other webpage grids

No.	Object	Form	Issue
1	Link	Text	Main Page, increased usability (IU)
2	Link	Text	Language selections (IU)
3	Search Bar	Text	Search within site (IU)
4	Large Link	Text	Main Page (IU)
5	Link	Text	Change font sizes (IU)
6	Link Bar	Text	Other govt. pages (IU)
7	Text Box	Text	Title of page, showing boldness
8	Small Link	Text	Sub-links to secondary pages (IU)
9	Link	Changing Images with supporting text	Links to supporting article about practicalities of investing in Brazil, increased credibility (IC), accuracy
10	Link	Text	Links to articles about investing in Brazil (IC)
11	Link	Text	Links to written investment news (IC + IU)
12	Link	Image	Links to video investment news (IC)
13	Link Bar	Text	Links to contacts and help pages (IU)

Finally, for data analysis, the research would have to study the webpage grids and comparisons for their represented meanings, and how such meanings are made, using

which modes, etc. The following questions would be used as a guide to help this analysis: ‘how are these objects interacting with each others?’, ‘do the images support the text?’, ‘why are the objects arranged in this kind of layout?’, and ‘what is the intention of this?’

To conclude this research, the researcher hopes to be able to categorize her findings and support them with the social-semiotics theory.

3.3 Data Collection

The raw materials for this research would be the webpage grids from the official business websites of the BRIC countries. The researcher spent one day per website so as to capture all qualities of the website before it changes or is updated on another day.

3.3.1 Brazil

The Brazilian website chosen for the purposes of this research was: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/investor> and the researcher retrieved all needed data from this website on November 22, 2011. This website is a branch out of the larger official government website for Brazil: www.brazil.gov. For the purpose of this research, only the WebPages linking to the ‘Investor’ section were analyzed.

Branching out from the ‘Investor’ section were twelve other sub-sections: ‘Brazil’, ‘Investing in Brazil’, ‘Economy Sectors’, ‘Infrastructure’, ‘Professional Events’, ‘Sustainability’, ‘Direct Foreign Investment’, ‘Culture’, ‘Geography’, ‘Tourism’, ‘Translator’ and ‘Phonebook’. As one can see, there are a few sub-sections that overlapped with the ‘Tourism’ Section, however since the website was designed in this way, the researcher would further analyze (in Chapter 4) the possible semiotic potential of such an overlap (refer to Figure 6).

Tourism

Infrastructure | Types of Tourism | Major destinations | Climate | Translator | Phonebook



Figure 6. A screen grab from the Brazilian Tourism webpage; links to the Business WebPages can be found, hence an overlap. Source: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/sobre/tourism>

The researcher noticed that there was a standard webpage layout which was used throughout the website, and a screen grab of such an example would look like this:

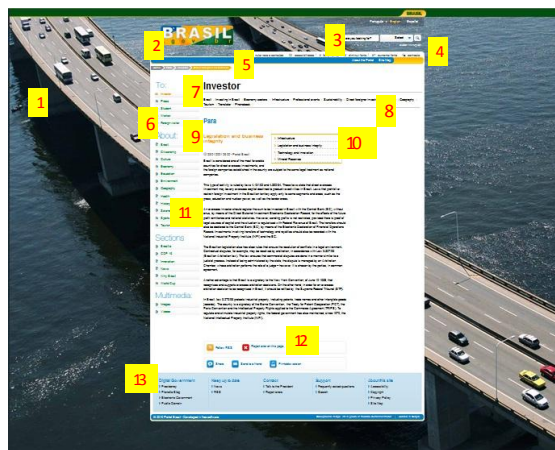


Figure 7. A screen grab example of a typical, standard webpage layout used throughout the Brazilian website, with 13 distinct items

From the above webpage example, it would then translate into the following webpage grid, which again, was standard for all the WebPages found in this Brazilian website:

Table 4. An example of the standard webpage grid formulated after studying the standard WebPages from the Brazilian website

No.	Object	Form	Issue
1	Background	Image	Highway with cars
2	Logo	Calligraphy	Link to homepage
3	Link	Text	Language selections
4	Search Bar	Text	Search within site
5	Link	Text	Font size changes
6	Link Bar	Text	Other govt. pages
7	Big Text	Title of Section	“Para”
8	Small Link	Text	Sub-links to secondary pages
9	Link	Text	Title of page/article “Legislation and Business Integrity”
10	Link	Text	Links to other 2 pages in “Economy Sectors” section
11	Main Text	Text	Main Text about local business laws
12	Link	Image(Icons) and Text	Tools to share this page
13	Link Bar	Text	Links to contacts and help pages

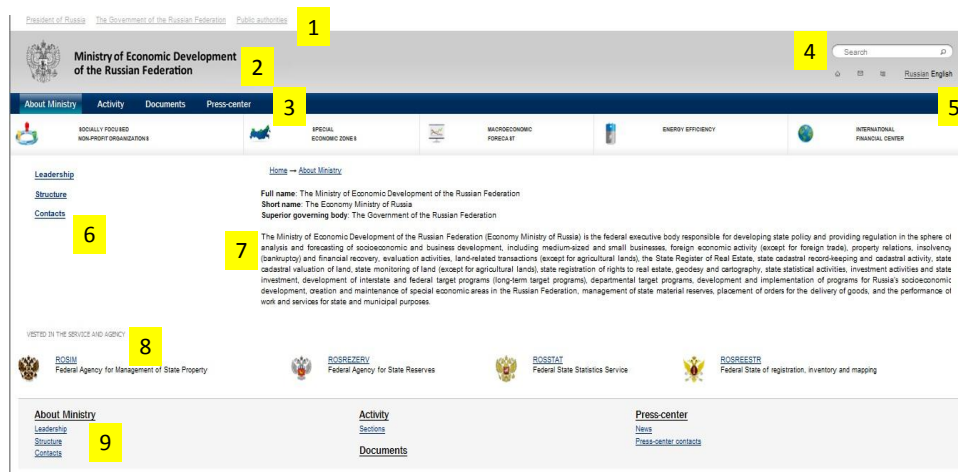
Although the layout was the same in all the pages on the Brazilian website, the content of each page was obviously different. For example, some pages would have a supporting image to match the text, while others only have text. The background image in all the WebPages from the ‘Investor’ section is the same – the big highway running through the page with cars driving on it (refer to Figure 7 above for an example). This background image changes only when the user visits another branch of categories in the website, for example, the ‘Brazil’ sector has a dark green background with the Brazilian flag on the top right corner of the page.

3.3.2 Russia

The Russian website chosen for the purpose of this research was: <http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/economylib4/en/home> and it is a branch out of the official Russian governmental website. The researcher retrieved all needed data from this website on November 23, 2011. For the purpose of this research, only the WebPages with the web-address of ‘www.economy.gov.ru’ were analyzed.

Branching out from this website were four main sub-sections: ‘About Ministry’, ‘Activity’, ‘Documents’, and ‘Press-center’. Under these four main sub-sections are its further broken-down detailed pages, of which could range from 3 pages to 33 pages.

The researcher noticed that there was a standard webpage layout which was used throughout the website, and a screen grab of such an example looks like this:



<http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/economylib4/en/home/about>

Figure 8. A screen grab example of a typical, standard webpage layout used throughout the Russian website, with typically 9 distinct items

From the above webpage example, it would then translate into the following webpage grid, which again, was standard for most of the WebPages found in this Russian website:

Table 5. An example of the standard webpage grid formulated after studying the standard WebPages from the Russian website

No.	Object	Form	Issue
1	Link	Text	Allowing navigation to other governmental websites
2	Link	Logo and text	Linking back to Homepage
3	Link	Text and Icons	Allowing navigation to other sections in website
4	Search Bar	Search bar	Allowing searches done within website
5	Link	Text	Changing languages: Russian/English
6	Link	Text	Allowing navigation to other pages in section
7	Main Text	Text	Text to fit title of section
8	Link	Icons	Allowing navigation to Federal websites
9	Link	Text	Same navigations as those in no.3.

Although the layout was standardized in most of the pages on the Russian website, there were some variations. For example, the pages in the ‘Press-center’ were differently structured due to the more news-reporting like style used there. One obvious observation was the lack of images in this website; only the pages in the ‘Press-center’ had images, and they were all images of political figures in Russia. The background color of this website is a plain white with grey and blue contrasts. This background theme is carried out throughout the website.

3.3.3 India

The Indian website chosen for the purpose of this research was:

<http://business.gov.in/> and it is a branch out of the official Indian governmental website for business purposes. The researcher retrieved all needed data from this website on November 23, 2011.

Branching out from this website were 24 main sub-sections, ranging from discussions about “Starting a Business” to “Business Financing”.

The researcher noticed that there was a standard webpage layout which was used throughout the website, and a screen grab of such an example would look like this:



Figure 9. A screen grab example of a typical, standard webpage layout used throughout the Indian website, with typically 12 distinct items

From the above webpage example, it would then translate into the following webpage grid, which again, was standard for those main WebPages which linked from the main homepage of the Indian website:

Table 6. An example of the standard webpage grid formulated after studying the standard WebPages from the Indian website

No.	Object	Form	Issue
1	Main Link	Logo	Links back to Homepage
2	Image	Logo	Government of India official seal
3	Search Link	Text	Search engine tool
4	Image	Image	Image showing a fair-skin man in a suit reading some documents
5	Title of page	Big text with fun font	"Starting a business" title
6	Main Links	Text	Allowing navigation to other WebPages in site
7	Main Text	Text	Text supporting stated title of webpage
8	Links	Text	Links to FAQs about the topic of "starting a business"
9	Link	Text	Links to page where user can give comments about the page itself
10	Link	Text with Icon	Linking to government tenders
11	Colorful Links	Links with images	Links to practical forms needed to start a business
12	Links	Text	Links to help pages/ sharing pages

Although the layout was standardized in most of the pages on the Indian website, one obvious observation was the lack of images in this website; only one small (repeated) image is shown next to the main title of each page. This small image changes when the user enters another main sub-section in the website. The background color of this website is a plain white with grey, blue and yellow contrasts. This background theme is carried out throughout the website.

3.3.4 China

The Chinese website chosen for the purpose of this research was: <http://english.gov.cn/business.htm> and it is the official Chinese governmental website for business purposes. The researcher retrieved all needed data from this website on November 24, 2011.

Branching out from this website were four main sub-sections: 'China Factfile', 'Services', 'Business', and 'China Today'.

The researcher noticed that there was a standard overall webpage layout which was used throughout the website. The differences in these WebPages would be the main

content of that particular page. A screen grab of such an example would look like this:



Figure 10. A screen grab example of a typical, standard webpage layout used throughout the Chinese website.

From the above webpage example, it would then translate into the following webpage grid, which again, was standard for those main WebPages which linked from the main homepage of the Chinese website:

Table 7. An example of the standard webpage grid formulated after studying the standard WebPages from the Chinese website

No.	Object	Form	Issue
1	Link	Text	Language selection
2	Logo	Image/logo	Chinese government logo
3	Title of website	Large Text, red font	Title of website
4	Text	Text	Date visited website
5	Title addition	Image	Image of Great Wall
6	Link	Image	Special reports in Chinese news
7	Links	Text	Links to other subsections
8	Link	Image	Links to photo gallery
9	Link	Text	Links to updates about market info
10	Link	Text	Links to Chinese biz articles
11	Search bar	Search bar	Search functions within website
12	Links	Text	Links to related topics articles
13	Links	Text	'Quick links'
14	Links	Text	'Laws and regulations' pages
15	Links	Text	'Foreign trade & investments'
16	Links	Text	'Services' pages

The Chinese website has the most apparent differences within its website as compared to the other three studied websites. Although there is a fixed overall layout or structure of the WebPages, the actual content of the pages varies in content and also structure. Just from the first glance, there are many more links found in this website than the others. The background used in this website is a combination of dull green, white and grey. More detailed analysis of this website will come in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Upon gathering all primary data from the four chosen websites, the researcher would proceed to conduct a systematic multimodal analysis. There would be five main areas of analysis in which the research and results would reflect on, and these categories were adapted from Baggio, Mottironi and Corigliano's (2011) research on technological tourism communication. Firstly, 'structure and navigation' looks at the rationality of the websites' functions and how this perceived rationality translates into meaning for the website user. Secondly, 'design: graphics and text' would be a

study of the quality of graphical elements (pictures, symbols, photographs, etc.) and the balance and relation between texts and images. The category of ‘informational (text) contents’ studies the completeness and usefulness of information provided and clarity of language, and this section would be incorporated into the analysis of image-text links. Next, ‘interactivity and services’ investigates the quality of the interactive services and usability of the functions. Lastly, ‘technical management’ studies the degree of updating of the contents, perceived speed in response times and absence of errors or missing links.

4 RESULTS

The aim of the section is to answer the main research question with the findings. The main findings from the multimodal analysis will be discussed and covers discussions between website structures and how it has affected the usability of the website to meaning potentials of images, text and color use on those websites. Keep in mind that the social semiotics theory is constantly in use to make sense of these findings. Critical analysis will be done upon gathering the main findings and finally the applicability of these findings will be evaluated.

4.1 Structure and Navigation

In contemporary pages of writing, such as these websites, are designed on the basis of a quite different social relation of author, reader and meaning-making (Kress 2010). Above all, the text/page is shaped generically with the assumption based on a very different social relation to that of the 'traditional' text and its genres (Kress 2010).

The readers' interests determine how they engage with this page. The sequence in which the elements are 'read' and ordered by them reflects the readers' interests. In effect, the readers' interests, reflected in the manner of their engagement, provides for them the design for this page: in other words, readers redesign the page (Kress 2003). This notion of 'reading' complies with the theory of communication, whereby material is presented; and readers/viewers shape their ordering of that material, hence making meaning of their own, based on their interests; which formerly, would be shaped by the author or the initial maker of the text/message (Kress 2010). Clearly, this 'homepage' is designed; it is designed with the assumption of the readers' semiotic work (Kress 2010). Therefore, keeping in mind such a claim that the website is 'redesigned' according to the reader's semiotic work, the researcher has found the following interesting regards to the structure of the four websites studied.

The layout of each website is different, as each website serves its own purpose. Amongst the studied websites, five main items or as researchers Baggio, Mottironi and Corigliano (2011) calls the 'functionalities' make up the structure of each website: (1) Informational content, which consists of information and documentation materials. (2) Visitor relationship content, which is content and services that build and maintain relationships with visitors. (3) Interactive services, these are general interactive functions and services. (4) Web 2.0 functions, such as social networks, blogs, tagging, etc. (5) E-commerce, which are commercial and e-business functions. These five functionalities would be further discussed in the sub-chapters below.

From the analysis, all four websites had a webpage template. By being consistent, the users could navigate around the website easier since he/she would know where to expect a certain subject after viewing a few WebPages. Having consistency within the website, these websites gave the user an idea of order and being systematic. This could be read as being a well-planned/well thought through organization that has created the website, which would reflect upon the represented country.

After studying each of the starting webpage or 'homepage' of each website, the researcher notes that there are always more items or modes presented on the 'homepage' than on the subsequent WebPages. All websites used all three main forms of modes on their homepage: image, text and color. The Brazilian website even had an extra mode presented on its homepage, and that is the use of moving images or videos. Having said so, three out of four websites used some form of animation (text and/or image) in their homepage, the only exception being the Chinese website. Computer-mediated communication studies (e.g. Abbasi & Chen 2008; Sack 2000; Fu et al. 2008; Herring 2002) did point out the differences between CMC and non-CMC text, and interaction was highly visible in CMC modes, therefore it is no surprise that most of the studied website had animated text/images on its homepage.

In the Brazilian website, there was an average of 13 modes per webpage. For the Russian website, it was an average of 9 modes per webpage. For the Indian website, there were about 12 modes per webpage and for the Chinese website; there was an average of 16 modes per webpage. This illustrates the use of space on each website.

The Chinese website was the most crowded, as there were many modes on the website which wanted attention from the user. On the other hand, the Russian website was much less cluttered. The Russian website used a minimalistic style and it was also the website with the least images, this could perhaps indicate the seriousness of the website as it was also the only website to have a graph on its homepage. Scientific texts and articles tend to use graphs and charts to prove their point therefore the link between such an interpretation could be drawn upon.

All websites studied had their 'search bar' located on the top right corner of their homepage, except for the Chinese website that had it on the middle left side of the homepage. This would not mean much at first glance, but it could be decided upon this layout in the Chinese website because traditional Chinese writing is to be read from left to right of the page. It is possible that where the search bar is located means the place of importance to the website designer. It is also important to note that all the search bars were easily located on their respective websites and the user does not need to scroll down the webpage to find it. This demonstrates the importance of the search bar since its location is not hidden. Also, not taking for granted the fact that there is a search bar in each website, meaning that the ability to look for something fast and specifically is recognized by each website creator.

4.2 Design: Graphics and Text

Graphical user interface, layout (which overlaps from the section above on 'structure and navigation'), and the visual part of the website are all included under this heading of 'design and graphics' (Giannopoulos & Mavragani 2011). This 'visual appearance' factor impacts the initial impression given at first sight of the website by the user (Giannopoulos & Mavragani 2011), therefore playing an important role in creating meaning for the user. Visual appearance is examined with regard to the format and design (or in other words, the structure) of the webpage, which includes the existence of graphics, text, photos (Singh & Formica 2006), and the structure of information, since the way the website is organized and structured is clearly distinguishable from the website content (Huizingh 2000). In addition, information overload which provokes a degree of frustration in the searching process (Pan &

Fesenmaier 2000), shows how information structure plays an increasingly crucial role in the website design. All of these elements go on to create potential semiotic meaning for the user of the website.

Together with 'functional' semiotics and O'Toole (2011)'s three main functions of semiotics in display art, the researcher assume that every piece of communication has three main functions: (1) to engage our attention and interest, (2) to convey some information about reality, and (3) to structure these into a coherent textual form. O'Toole (2011) has adapted these three main functions of semiotics to fit the analysis of images or displayed art. O'Toole (2011:10) work has these three functions: (1) what is represented (representational meaning), (2) how it engages us (modal meaning) and, (3) how it is composed (compositional meaning). Using O'Toole (2011)'s identified functions of displayed art, the researcher has found the following meanings represented through images in the four studied websites.

This section also studies the usefulness and completeness of information provided and the clarity of language use on the websites. 'Text discourse' is studied in social semiotics and text can be characterized on the basis of their means of expression, function and source (e.g. who does it? From whom? Where? Etc) (van Leeuwen 2005).

All the websites used informational means of expression, meaning that their main purpose of writing and material posted on their websites are to inform the visitor. This could be to inform them about VISA requirements, business laws and rules of the country, recent business happenings and news, etc. The use of English language in writing form has been of a high quality in all websites too. This shows that all BRIC countries see their official websites as a place of importance and it is not taken lightly. Information written on the website is done to a high quality and with a good command of English, despite it not being their national language.

The source of these websites are all governmentally owned, and perhaps produced. The researcher cannot access this information, but assumes that such is done in-house at each country's own department of business and trade. They would know the

information best, therefore all information, if not produced, should have gone through them for approval.

4.2.1 The Communicative Functions of Background Images and Colors

Moving on to discuss the use of images and colors as the background of each website, the researcher has found that only Brazil's website uses images as its background while the other three nations use color(s). What does this go on to show the user? What kinds of semiotic meaning potentials does it have? The researcher went on to analysis these backgrounds in more detail.

Firstly, for the Brazilian website, a different background image is used for each section of the website; as for the 'Investor' section, the image of a big motorway with many vehicles traveling on it is shown (refer back to Figure 7 for an example). This motorway is built over the waters, and it seems to give the impression that this motorway is very long and it connects two very important locations together, therefore indicating the importance of this motorway. At the very bottom of the webpage it says "Background image: Art in photo of Ricardo Zerrenner/Riotur". This gives the researcher concrete assurance that the motorway portrayed in the background is of great importance to Brazil; 'Riotur' is a very big tourist attraction city in Brazil. "Ricardo Zerrenner" is a very well-known photographer in Brazil and has made his name known through his photography.

Using a photograph taken by a famous local photographer, showing a big and busy motorway in an important tourist location in Brazil, what kind of meanings does this give for the user? It demonstrates national pride (using everything local: local talent and local infrastructure), good communications and developed infrastructure (the motorway is shown to be busy with many vehicles, cars, buses etc.), and because this background image is used for the 'Investor's' WebPages, it illustrates almost a guarantee for business success and confidence in the Brazilian economy.

Colors can be difficult to analysis since one would consider colors are having its own personal effects, however, it is true that there is a dominant discourse of color in

which color is primarily related to affect, therefore it is a mode in its own right (Poynton 1985; Kress & van Leeuwen 1996).

Color can be used to denote people, places, and things as well as classes of people, places and things, and more general ideas (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). For example, the colors of flags denote states; maps use colors to differentiate between land and water, etc. Color is also used to convey interpersonal meaning such as red for energizing, green is for soothing conflicts, blue is for maintaining calmness and pastel orange is good for gently encouraging activity (Verner-Bonds 2002). In all these cases color enables social relations which are interpersonal. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) explains that color does not just ‘express’ or ‘mean’ things such as ‘calm’ or ‘energy’, rather people actually use color to try to energize or calm people. Color is used to act on others, to send managerial messages; it is used by people/organizations to present themselves and the values that they stand for (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996).

The Russian website continued to carry on its sense of seriousness by using dull blue, grey and white background colors (refer back to Figure 8 for example). Areas where large bodies of text are found, the background would be a plain white color, and the headings would be dark blue text with a light grey highlight. These colors give the Russian website a very formal impression, again fitting to the seriousness of its images and charts.

In a study conducted by Law and Ngai (2008), they found that if inappropriate text colors are used, the text serves no purpose regardless of how useful it is. Also, a good color contrast should, therefore, be provided for text and background. In the case of the Russian website, the text was black in color, while the texted-hyperlinks were in dark blue. They stood out well in front of the white/grey background (refer to Figure 8).

The Indian website has a combination of dark navy blue, yellow and white on its website (refer to Figure 9). The color yellow is used as a background color for the ‘business update’ portion of the website. White is used as the main color where the text body is fitted. Blue is used as a majority color to fill in anywhere else that isn’t

yellow or white. These colors do not relate to the national flag of India, except for white. The researcher was not expecting to find a correlation between flag colors and website color schemes; however it is interesting to see how website designers are choosing colors which are completely different. The way the Indian website is designed and colored, it gave the researcher the impression that it is a website of an ordinary company in operation. There wasn't a sense of being official nether was there a feeling of seriousness that the researcher got from the Russian website. It was rather simple and had a clean feeling to it.

The Chinese website has another combination of colors which are used as the background for its website: dull green, dull yellow, white, and grey (refer to Figure 10). The researcher's first impression of this color combination is of a military uniform! This image of having a uniform asserts a sense of power, authority and order.

4.2.2 Represented and Interactive Participants of Visual and Text Communication

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:115) recognized that images involves "two kinds of participants, 'represented' participants (the people, the places and things depicted in images) and 'interactive' participants (the people who communicate with each other through images, the producers and viewers of the image), and three kinds of relations: (1) relation between represented participants; (2) relations between interactive and represented participants (the interactive participants' attitudes towards the represented participants); and (3) relations between interactive participants (the things interactive participants do to or for each other through images)".

Interactive participants are therefore real people who produce and make sense of images (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). Questions which interactive participants have to solve would revolve around the actual production and the thought processes before image production; regulate what may be 'said' with images, how it should be said, and how it should be interpreted (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). In some cases the interaction is direct and immediate; for example, producer and viewer know each other and are involved in face-to-face interaction, as when we take photographs of

each other to keep in albums. But in many cases there is no immediate and direct involvement. Such a case would be when the producer is absent from the viewer, and the viewer is absent from the producer. For example, images in these websites were produced without direct involvement with the viewers. Therefore producers must have an image of ‘the’ viewer and ‘the’ way viewers make sense of their pictures/visual art (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996).

Similarly, when the viewers are viewing the production of the creator/producer, the producer is not present to see how the viewers receive or react to their work, therefore they should make the message ‘right’ the first time. “However important and real this disjunction between the context of production and the context of reception, the two do have elements in common: the image itself, and a knowledge of the communicative resources that allow its articulation and understanding, a knowledge of the way social interactions and social relations can be encoded in images” (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996:115).

4.2.2.1 Brazil Encourages Foreign Investments with its Image-Text Links



Brazil has one of the largest mineral reserves in the world

Picture 1. An image showing Brazil’s mineral reserve in the Brazilian website, source: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/investor/direct-foreigner-investment/mineral-reserves>

The above image shown in picture 1 is found on one of the “Investment” WebPages from the Brazilian website. It was accompanied with text that was explaining the vast quantity and quality of Brazilian’s mineral reserves; as the caption of the image reads

“Brazil has one of the largest mineral reserves in the world”. This image was obviously taken by an interactive participant since he/she would not have known who the viewer of this image would be; however, he/she must have an idea of who the target viewer should be. In this case, the image speaks of exactly what the caption says and is basically used as a photographic proof to support the text claiming that Brazil is rich in natural minerals and therefore has many natural resources. On the other hand, another viewer would understand this image differently – one may find this image repulsive and see the destruction made to nature in Brazil for the purposes of business and money. In the middle of the image are two machines left on the site, these two machines are almost impossible to be seen if the image were not enlarged; indicating two things – (1) there is so much natural resources in relation to people working on them, therefore there are many work and growth opportunities in Brazil’s industrial sector; (2) this is a deserted work location and is no longer generating profits. With more than one semiotic potential, this image would need to be analyzed with its accompanied text to get a better understanding of the creator’s purposes. This kind of situation is not unusual, once again stressing the importance of multimodality analysis.

The text accompanying Picture 1 has a strong emphasis on Brazil’s abundance availability of minerals, for example, “Brazil has one of the largest mineral reserves in the world, together with the United States, Canada, Australia, China and Russia. The country also appears among the six largest mineral exporting countries in the world” (Portal Brazil 2010). The *informative style* of language is paired up with the *instrument functions* of language as the text is imparting information on the reader about Brazil’s rich resources and at the same time implying investment opportunities which Brazil expects to receive (Halliday 1973). The text further uses statistics (*informative function* of language) to support its claims, making it more scientific and realistic, for example, “The federal government expects that the mineral industry shall receive total investments of R\$ 56 billion by 2011 (Portal Brazil 2010)”. The researcher counted on this particular webpage that the text included statistics in every other sentence; a screen grab below will show an example of this.

and Russia. In 2008, Brazilian mineral production brought in R\$ 51 billion, which was 11% more than obtained in 2007, excluding the Petroleum and the Gas. Considering the mining industry and also mineral transformation, the value of Brazilian production reaches R\$ 152 billion, which is an increase of 13% compared to 2007. The generation of added value for the segment was also a highlight in 2008, with a contribution of US\$ 84 billion, which is about 5.25% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Brazil, that reached US\$ 1.57 trillion.

The country also appears among the six largest mineral exporting countries in the world. The trade balance for the mineral sector (primary goods, without transformation, and excluding the Petroleum and the Gas) in 2008 was US\$ 13 billion, a record which accounts for 52% of the total balance of foreign trade for the country that reached US\$ 25 billion. If we consider semi finished, finished and chemical goods, then the mining and transformation industry in 2008 reached a balance of US\$ 20 billion, or 80% of the Brazilian Trade Balance.

The sector is also responsible for the creation of 2 million direct and indirect jobs in 2008, not considering those created in the planning, research and prospection phases, as well as the labor in the extraction units (garimpos). The federal government expects that the mineral industry shall receive total investments of R\$ 56 billion by 2011.

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Brazil has one of the largest mineral reserves in the world

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Why Brazil
World Cup

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Figure 11. Screen grabs showing the webpage where Picture 1 appears, highlighting (in red) where the use of statistics is found in the text; source: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/investor/direct-foreigner-investment/mineral-reserves>

After analyzing the text, the researcher now understands that the supporting image (Picture 1) was aimed at inducing an invitation for more workers and investments on its mineral resources. The attractive statistics in the text gave the researcher the impression that investing in Brazil's mineral resources is fool-proof; this has been achieved by the website's use of *informative* and *instrumental* language (Halliday 1973).

Another image taken from the Brazilian website can be seen below:



Investors can obtain support through specific bodies, chambers of trade, consulates and embassies

Picture 2. An image from the Brazilian website showing a business exposition, source:

<http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/investor/investment-and-banking/support-to-foreign-investors>

The image above was retrieved from the webpage which was aimed at encouraging foreign investments in Brazil. The image was again supporting the text of that webpage and the caption reads “Investors can obtain support through specific bodies, chambers of trade, consulates and embassies”. Together with the image, supportive text, the webpage also had hyperlinks that allowed the user to visit websites of other chambers of trade in Brazil. This image (Picture 2) is obviously different from the image shown in Picture 1. Although both are ‘wide shots’, showing a large space, or an overview of a particular location, Picture 2 shows more details (i.e. people’s faces, their facial expressions can be read). By looking at Picture 2, the researcher sees mostly Asians depicted in the image and they are not paying attention to the camera/viewer. Hence, giving the researcher the impression that this image was taken in an Asian country where Brazil was present for a business exposition and the viewer is asked to look from afar the events that took place on that day. Such an image is almost like a ‘taster’ to the viewer of what it would be like to join in with the event portrayed in the image. Of course the two images are different, but they both are in line with the same message of ‘come and invest in Brazil, you will get lots of friendly help and there are lots of mineral reserves and resources to invest in”.

The supporting *informative* text of Picture 2 assures the viewer that investing in Brazil is not a risk; instead, foreign investors are protected by Brazilian laws. “Foreign investors are protected by the law as well as specific bodies dedicated to their support. These institutions can help foreign investors in getting information on business, the capital market, market intelligence or how to contact the important members of the Brazilian economic scenario. The support to investors also occurs through chambers of trade, and the consulates and embassies of their respective countries (Portal Brazil 2010).”

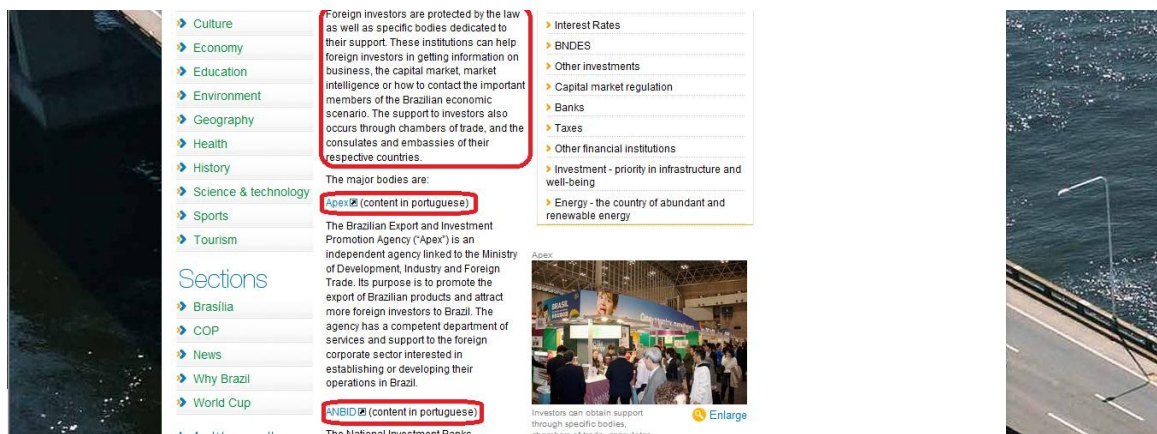
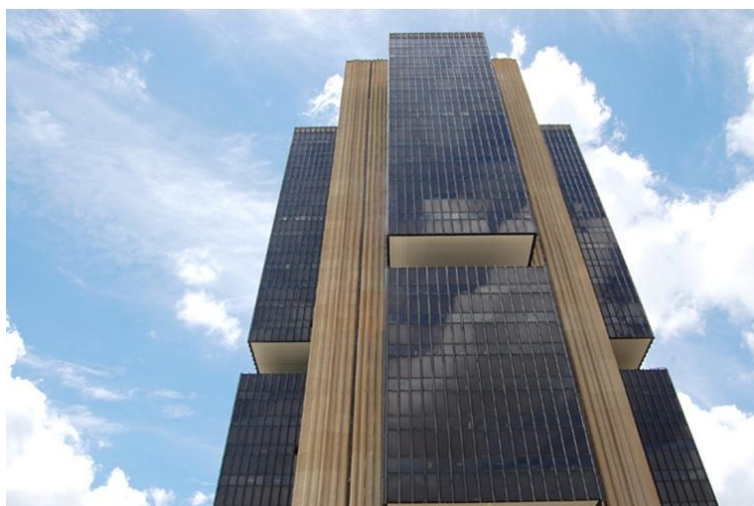


Figure 12. Screen grab of webpage where Picture 2 appears, highlighting (in red) where text indicates investment security and links to “Major Bodies”; source: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/investor/investment-and-banking/support-to-foreign-investors>

The main text body is a description of the “major bodies” which promised foreign investors their financial safety in Brazil. The use of *interactive* language draws in the reader; however, the researcher gets a lack of trust and feeling of security when these “major bodies” had the following phrase written next to their website links “content in Portuguese”. There were five “major bodies” as mentioned in the text, and all of their websites gave the warning that website content is in Portuguese, however, the researcher realizes that three (out of five) of these websites were actually in English. This is obviously an error on the part of the Brazilian website, one mistake that could be costly. If the viewer was to believe that these website content were only in Portuguese, he/she may be turned-off or even be annoyed at such a lack of (simple/taken for granted) customization

A third image to look at from the Brazilian website is as follows:



Central Bank headquarters in Brasília

Picture 3. An image of a skyscraper in Brazil, source: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/investor/investment-and-banking/central-bank>

This last image that the researcher would share from the Brazilian website is of the Central Bank building in Brazil. The skyscraper matched with the sky blue (and beautiful clouds) background gives the sense of professionalism and elegance. The building's position in the image is slightly to the right, leaving more space on the left, indicates to the viewer that perhaps there is more space for other skyscrapers to be built here in Brazil, or that there is still space to 'breath' even with skyscrapers in the city. The idea of having a 'concrete jungle' is not found in this image; instead it produces a sense of space, freedom and order at the same time. The point of view of the photographer looks up at the tall and prominent building, indicating a sense of authority and almost like an idol for worshipping. Again, this image drums home the same message as the other images shown earlier from the Brazilian website.

The supporting *informative* text of Picture 3 describes the important roles which the Central Bank of Brazil plays in the country's economy. The qualities of the Central Bank as a result of analyzing the image can be matched with the supporting text. The researcher first analyzed the image, than the text. The *informative* and almost authoritative-like text speaks of a stable economy in Brazil as secured by the works of the Central Bank. "The Central Bank regulates and discloses the economic indicators such as the basic interest rate, and controls the flow of foreign capital circulating in the country, ensuring the stability of the foreign currency market (Portal Brazil 2010)." Other responsibilities of the Central Bank as indicated in the

text are “defining the basic interest rates”, “regulates financial institutes”, “defines annual inflation goal for the Country” etc. These roles of the Central Bank directly affect and influence foreign investors in Brazil, therefore both text and image elevates the importance of the Central Bank and its stability and efficiency.

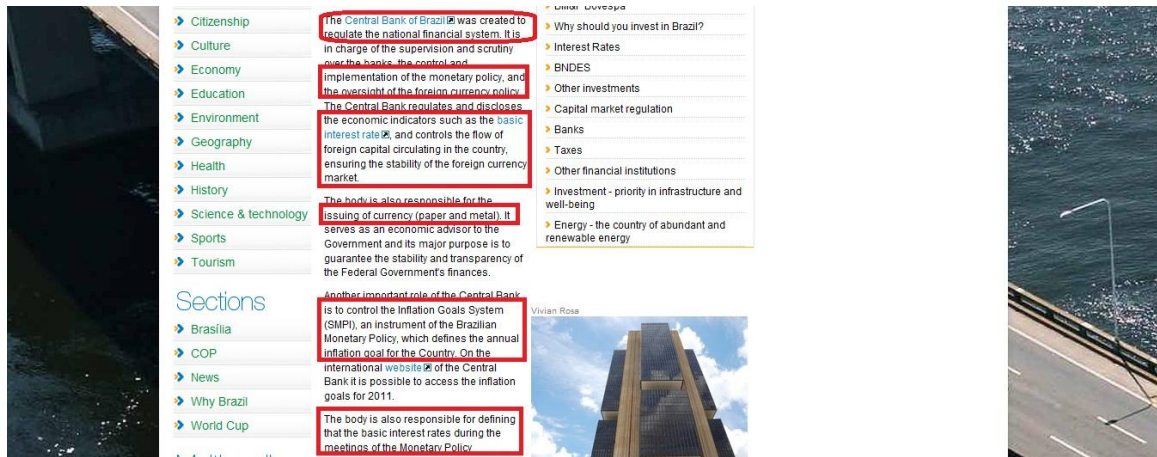


Figure 13. Screen grab of webpage where Picture 3 appears, highlighting (in red) where the functions of the Central Bank is emphasized in the supporting text; source: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/investor/investment-and-banking/central-bank>

These three images have been selected to be a representative sample of the images found on the website as they represented well the main message of the website – which is to encourage investment in Brazil. Most images were of the same nature as those represented, most of them are photographs taken from the ‘observer’s’ point of view, always giving the viewer a ‘taste’ of what it would be like in Brazil. Overall, the Brazilian website’s word-image links are mostly in the form of ‘elaboration’; whereby there is either ‘specification’ of the image made clear by the supporting text; or ‘explanation’ where the image paraphrases the text (van Leeuwen 2005).

By looking at the screen grab examples of these Pictures (1, 2 and 3), the researcher sees very clearly that the supporting text in each webpage follows a strict agenda and normally floods the webpage with one specific, purposeful text. In each of the screen grabs, the highlighted red text shows the specific textual purpose of each text, as each of these screen grabs are filled with red highlights, the highly repeated emphasis of each meaning for each text is easily found. The highly repetitive nature of the text elevates the importance of each point made in each webpage. The researcher need not

specifically find special quotes to prove her point since the text is punctuated with multiple use-able examples. The image-text supportive relationship in all three studied WebPages in the Brazilian website gives the whole website a consistent ‘feel’. However, broken links on the website fails them. Despite having good quality images and text, functionality of the website affects the success and usability of the website as a whole.

4.2.2.2 Russia’s Limited Image Use Emphasizes Seriousness

The researcher would like to tackle the issue of the limited use of images on the Russian website. The only form of image/picture used in the website can be found in the ‘News’ section of the website. Such images used are showing only head-shots of individual politicians. For example, below is a screen-grab of one of the very few images shown in the Russian website:

The screenshot shows the website of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation. The main navigation bar includes 'About Ministry', 'Activity', 'Documents', and 'Press-center'. Below this, there are several thematic icons: 'SOCIALLY FOCUSED NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS', 'SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES', 'MACROECONOMIC FORECAST', 'ENERGY EFFICIENCY', and 'INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL CENTER'. The 'News' section is active, displaying a list of 'Top news' items. The most prominent article is titled 'Minister Elvira Nabiullina Attends the Meeting of APEC Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Trade', dated 14.11.11. The article text discusses her participation in the meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii, and mentions her opening statement on the multilateral trading system and WTO accession. A small thumbnail image of Minister Nabiullina is visible on the left side of the article.

Figure 14. Example of an image in the Russian website, source:

http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/economylib4/en/home/press/news/doc20111114_2



Figure 14.1. Image shown bigger

As seen from the image example above, the researcher sees the image of a middle-aged female looking away from the viewer; this female character in the image could possibly be “Minister Elvira Nabiullina” as indicated in the caption next to the image, this is image-text relation is called ‘extension-compliment’ according to van Leeuwen’s categorizations (2005). The researcher gets the feeling of ‘fear’, ‘uncertainty’, ‘seriousness’ and ‘unfriendliness’ when she looks at the image. The accompanied text with Figure 14.1 was in the form of a news-article and it reports about Minister Elvira Nabiullina’s discussions during a Meeting of APEC Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Trade held in the United States. The topics revealed in the text were mostly of economical problems, for example, “Discussion of the regional economic integration problem was primarily focused on the problems of the next generation of trade and investment issues, in particular, participation of small and medium enterprises in global supply chains as well as development of innovation policy” (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation 2011).

The screenshot shows the website of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation. The main navigation bar includes 'About Ministry', 'Activity', 'Documents', and 'Press-center'. The 'Press-center' section is active, displaying a news article titled 'Minister Elvira Nabiullina Attends the Meeting of APEC Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Trade'. The article is dated 14.11.11 and includes a 'Print version' link. The main text of the article is highlighted in red in the original image. The highlighted text reads: 'Discussion of the regional economic integration problem was primarily focused on the problems of the next generation of trade and investment issues, in particular, participation of small and medium enterprises in global supply chains as well as development of innovation policy. Elvira Nabiullina supported the results achieved in the course of discussions on these issues by noting that "we'll continue working in this direction in 2012 by paying special attention to policy in the field of innovations".'

Figure 15. Screen grab highlighting text about economical problems, source: http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/economylib4/en/home/press/news/doc20111114_2

The text only introduced the main issue of the whole text in the fourth paragraph (as can be seen in the screen grab above, where the first mention of ‘economical problems’ is highlighted red). This gradual build-up of informing the reader of such a gloomy topic is done to minimize negativity upon the nation’s economical image.

‘Extention-similarity’ can be applied to this image-text link as the facial expressions of fear and uncertainty is evidently found in the supporting text, which was a full description of economical fears/problems and worries for Russia. However, the

article does not end at the problems, it continues to explain what Russia's ministers are doing to solve these problems.

In the *informative* text, the author illustrated the global reach of Minister Elvira Nabinllina, listing out the discussions she had with Trade Ministers from many countries such as Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Indonesia and U.S.A. The topics of each discussion with each country's minister were also recorded, for example, "The key topic of discussion at the meeting with the New Zealand Minister of Trade Tim Groser was the ongoing negotiations on a free trade zone between Russia and New Zealand" (Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation 2011).



Figure 16. Screen grab extended to highlight text (in red) showing international relations of Russian Minister Elvira Nabinllina, source:

http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/economylib4/en/home/press/news/doc20111114_2

The dedication to providing detailed information on the Russian website gives it a very formal uplift, indicating their respect for other countries' ministers as well as their own. By presenting the full name of each of the ministers present at the meeting, the article elevates the importance of the described meeting as well as Russian's involvement in such a crucial meeting. Such also demonstrates Russian current involvements with international trade and business.

The other images used in the website arouse the same initial negative feeling from the viewer. Another example would be the following:



Picture 4. Another example of an image shown on the Russian website, source: <http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/economylib4/en/home/about/management/manilov>

The Russian website is again portraying its seriousness towards its business sector and networks. The creators of this website has also illustrated a sense of ‘no-nonsense’ and ‘seriousness’ in other modes too (e.g. graphs and charts). The character in Picture 4 is Russia’s Deputy Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, Mr. Igor Manylov. The text accompanied by Picture 4 is structured like a work resume of Mr. Igor Manylov; his date of birth, his past and present work positions and his current work responsibilities are all listed.

The screenshot shows the official website of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation. The profile for Igor Manylov is displayed, including a photo and a detailed work history. The work history lists the following positions and dates:

- 1991—1992 — Legal Advisor, Government Head, Head of Administration, Department Director, Chief Manager of Business, Joint-Stock Commercial Bank SIB-Bank, Ekaterinburg.
- 1992—1995 — Director General of Centre of Economic and Financial Examination ZAO (Closed, Joint-Stock Company), Moscow.
- 1995—2000 — Head of Administration, Department Director of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, Moscow.
- 2000—2004 — Chief of Staff of the Legislation Committee of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation of the III Convocation, Moscow.
- 2004—2008 — Chief of Staff of the Civil, Criminal, Arbitration and Procedural Legislation Committee of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation of the IV Convocation, Moscow.
- June 2008 — Deputy Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation.
- November 2010 — Secretary of State — Deputy Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation.

The profile also lists his functions, which include ensuring performance of the Ministry's functions on formulating the state policy and regulatory affairs on land relations, state administrative records and cadastre activities, state registration of immovable property and transportation means, state control for and regulation of lands of agricultural use, and coordination of work with the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation and other functions of the Secretary of State — Deputy Minister of the Russian Federation.

Figure 17. Screen grab showing Picture 4 in its webpage, source: <http://www.economy.gov.ru/wps/wcm/connect/economylib4/en/home/about/management/manilov>

Getting to know the work background of an important authoritative figure in Russia would help foreign investors understand the Russian work ethics. The fierce and

stern facial expression in the image would either scare off some weak investors; however, it may show how powerful and serious the Deputy Minister of Economic Development treats his job, and his responsibilities. The openness and transparency of his job functions available on the website provides as a safety net for whistle blowing. Transparency in business is valued by every ethically sound investor.

4.2.2.3 India's "Textbook" Approach with Image-Text Links

Below, the researcher would be showing some examples of how she analyzed images found on the Indian website. Firstly, the general impression of these images found on the Indian website gave the researcher the thought of reading a business textbook (refer to Figure 18 for such an example). There was a mixture of cartoon graphs to planes, to maps, to pictorial business charts, to human figures shaking hands, etc. All of which would be found in an average business textbook.

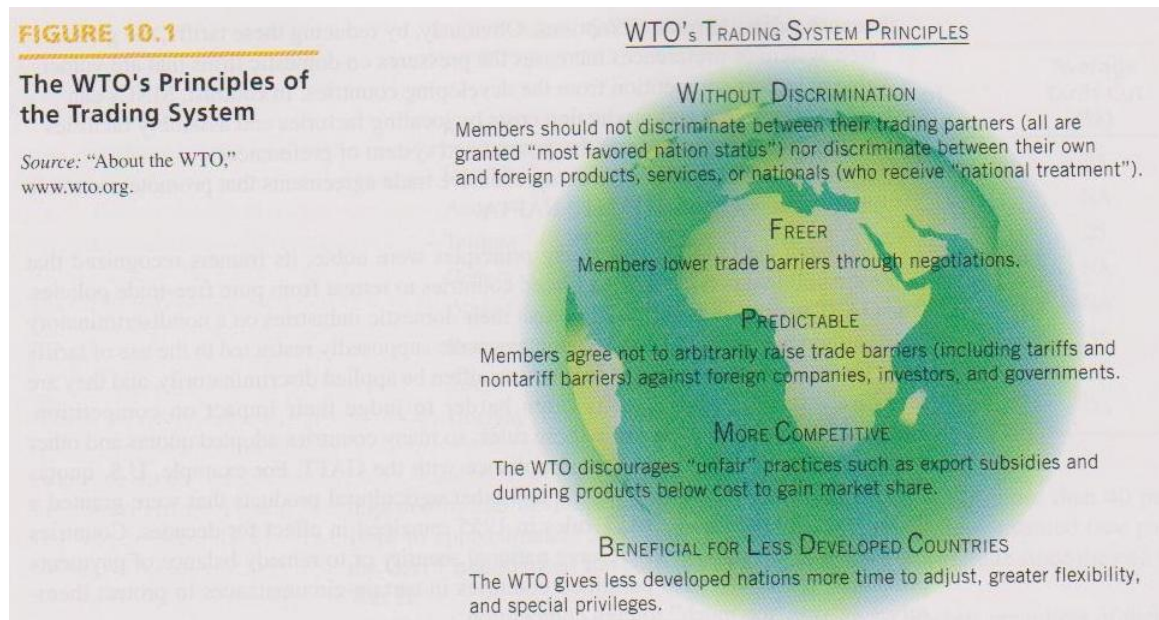


Figure 18. An example of a typical image from a business textbook



Figure 19. Image taken from the homepage of the Indian website, source: <http://business.gov.in/>

When comparing the textbook image (Figure 12) to the image found on the homepage of the Indian website (Figure 13), the viewer gets the same off-colored picture with some form of text in the image, and has a sense of information-overload; the viewer is not given a focal point in the image. Figure 13 has an interesting mix of objects in the image, there could possibly be an information overload here and give the first impression that it is unorganized. The oversized charts on the right corner take most of the attention from the viewer. These charts show a growth trend, however, the lack of detail on the chart allows for the viewer to fit in which ever commodity into the charts; it could be a growth chart of profits, of foreign investments, etc. Next, three men dressed in very light colored (almost white) shirts with neck ties are shown smiling and shaking hands. They seem to be standing in a very windy place since their shirts and ties are blown towards the left, perhaps they are greeting each others at the airport and they could be business partners at welcoming each other to their business meeting. These three men have quite pale skin, therefore showing only one specific race in India. Plus, the choice of having only (whiter) males in this image could be interpreted as stereotypically favoring rich males in India's business world. The world map and the plane flying across in the background give a sense of being international, or having business internationally. This could be an illustration that Indian business men go abroad for business and it could also mean that foreign business men come to India for business. The white dome building with the Indian flag soaring on it could be a replica of the Taj Mahal monument in India. The Taj Mahal is a UNESCO World Heritage site; therefore it

leans itself to the global business image of India. Finally in the image is the oversized arrow pointing at a business report, indicating that India is goal driven and takes business seriously.

The following three examples of images used in Headings of the Indian website would be analyzed together.



Figure 20. Image used in a Heading on the Indian website, source: http://business.gov.in/doing_business/index.php



Figure 21. Another image used in a Heading on the Indian website, source: http://business.gov.in/manage_business/index.php



Figure 22. A third image shown in the Heading, source: <http://business.gov.in/enterprises/index.php>

In Figure 20, the characters in the image are looking at the viewer, giving the viewer an invitation to join them. One of the characters has a whole head of white hair, which would indicate wisdom in the Indian culture. The mix of ages could be an indication that anyone (or any male), no matter of your level of experience and age will bring you good business results in India. There seems to be a lot of hand shaking

action shown on the Indian website. This could be a sign for success in negotiations or just a very friendly environment for business.

Overall, the images shown in the Indian website is of the same design, showing all males, all smiles and all positive images and meanings portrayed. Coming back to the researcher's first impression of the images found here, they could be images used in business textbooks; this could translate into the practicality of doing business in India and the low uncertainty assurance of such activities also. However, the user of the website is reduced to the level of a student instead of a possible investor or businessman in India.

After analyzing the text in the Indian website, the research gets the same type of feeling as if she was a student reading a business textbook. *Instrumental* Texts were constructed with lots of bullet points/lists, bold text to show importance, and simple language. Texts were very general, not customized to teach the reader about India's business world. For example, the text accompanying Figure 21 has the title of "Managing a Business" and it has an introductory paragraph to the topic and proceeds to three main points of the article; "Technical skills", "Human skills", and "Conceptual skills". The text is very educational but it is not informative if the reader wanted to learn about managing a business in India.

The screenshot shows a webpage titled "MANAGING A BUSINESS" on the website "BUSINESS.GOV.IN". The page is structured as follows:

- Left Navigation Menu:**
 - MANAGING A BUSINESS
 - Promotion
 - Client Relationship Management
 - Managing your Intellectual Proficiency
 - Insurance
 - Marketing and Sales
 - Managing your Finance
 - Regulatory Requirements
 - Distribution
 - Managing Human Resources
 - Taxes
- Main Content Area:**
 - MANAGING A BUSINESS**
 - Good business management is the key to success of any business house. It is a creative force which helps in the optimum utilisation of resources of an organisation. The process of managing a business comprises several intertwined elements by which the goals and objectives of the organisation are achieved. These elements or functions include, promoting and marketing the product produced by the firm; making the product available to prospective consumers through proper distribution channels; managing the accounts and finances of the firm; protecting its intellectual property, etc. It also involves creating harmony among the working of various departments and divisions of the firm. Managing human resources and managing relationship with the customer's are the most important elements in the whole process of business management.
 - An entrepreneur with good managerial skills can convert the disorganised resources of men, money, material and machinery into a productive business enterprise. In a modern business, different types of skills are required in order to effectively manage an organisation in a dynamic environment. These skills include:-
 - Technical skills:** refer to the ability and knowledge in using equipment, techniques and procedures involved in performing specific tasks. An entrepreneur must know the skills which should be employed in his enterprise and must understand both the role of each skill employed and the inter-relationship between skills.
 - Human skills:** consist of the ability to work effectively with other people both as individuals and as members of a group. Such skills are required by an entrepreneur in order to win co-operation of others and to build a base for a successful work team.
 - Conceptual skills:** comprise the ability to see the whole organisation and the inter-relationships between its parts. Such skills help the entrepreneur to conceptualise the environment and to take a broad and farsighted view of the organisation. These skills include the competence to understand a problem facing the organisation in all its aspects and solving the problem. It is necessary for rational decision making
 - Managing is a dynamic and an on-going process which continues to operate so long as there is an organised action for the achievement of group goals.
- Right Sidebar:**
 - HOW DO I**
 - Register a Company
 - Register as Employer
 - Complaint with Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)
 - Apply for TAN Card
 - File Income Tax
 - Help us enhance **BUSINESS.GOV.IN**
 - Tell us what more you would like to see
 - GOVERNMENT TENDERS**
 - View and Access latest Government Tenders...
 - PATENT INFORMATION**
 - REGISTRATION FORM FOR COPYRIGHT
 - PATENT FORM

Figure 23. Screen grab extension of Figure 21, highlighting (in red) the use of bullet points and general terms similar in textbooks, source: http://business.gov.in/manage_business/index.php

This lack of details about investing in India could be a turn-off for the potential investor; he/she must already know about the generalities of starting a business and would come to this website expecting to learn about the specifics of business laws in India and would be let down by this website's (lack of) informational content. Instead, the user of this Indian website would leave the website feeling like a freshman in the School of Management of a business university. In the screen grab above (looking at the main text), the researcher notices that there is no mention of "India" at all in the text, this is a perhaps a clear indication that the text was not specifically written for the website.

4.2.2.4 China's Professionalism Expressed in Image-Text Links



Figure 24. Chinese website's photo gallery page, source: <http://english.gov.cn/photos.htm>

The Chinese website has its own 'photo gallery' page which was a collection of all the images shown in the website. This photo gallery is well organized into five sections: 'Leaders Highlights', 'Nation', 'China and World', 'Business' and 'Local'. For the purpose of this research, the images in the 'Business' section were studied.



Buildings are seen in [Nanjing](#) city, capital of east China's Jiangsu Province. Oct. 18, 2011. Investment in the China's property sector in the first nine months of 2011 rose 32 percent year-on-year to reach 4.42 trillion yuan. The rise was 0.9 percentage points lower than that in the first half. About 3.18 trillion yuan went into residential housing, an increase of 35.2 percent from the same period last year, according to the [National Bureau of Statistics](#) (NBS) Tuesday. (Xinhua Photo)

Picture 5. An image of unidentifiable high-rise buildings in China, source: http://english.gov.cn/2011-10/19/content_1973239.htm

These high-rise buildings shown in the image above would never be identifiable if it weren't for the caption below explaining that it shows newly built buildings in Nanjing City, the capital of east China's Jiangsu Province; this is 'elaboration-specification (anchorage)' according to van Leeuwen (2005) as the text identifies and makes the image clear. The center point of the image would be the half finish-built building slightly to the left. The other buildings are significantly shorter than this main building, and it could be a metaphor for constant growth upwards in the Chinese markets. This image supports the text explaining that China's property sector is rising, especially for residential housing. These high-rise buildings are also an illustration of the modernized Chinese living environment and standards. This image could be taken from any modern city in the world therefore stating that China has reached world standards.

The accompanying *informative* text to this image (Picture 5) describes in detail the rapid increase in Chinese private properties prices and hence many new projects are being built. Potential real estate investors who are looking to buy a property in China are urged to take advantage of the 'lower' property prices now (before they go any higher). Those who are presently property owners in China would be happy since the property values are raising. However, the locals are pleading with the Chinese government to intervene in this situation as property prices are too high to afford. The *informative* text shows the Chinese government very high respect and describes in detail what the government is doing in this situation, "The government adopted a series of tightening measures earlier this year, including asking local governments to

set new home price control targets, raising minimum down payments for second-home purchases, limiting purchases of new homes and introducing property taxes in the cities of Shanghai and Chongqing, in order to keep housing prices down” (Mo 2011). This specific text quotation is chosen from the webpage because it summarizes the main purpose of the page – which is the positive and professional intervention of the Chinese government in difficult economical situations. In the case of the researcher, who is not a Chinese-national, gets the same comfort as if she were to be a Chinese citizen. The warmth of knowing that ones’ government is actively seeking to better the standard of life of its people is assuring to a business investor, both local and foreign.

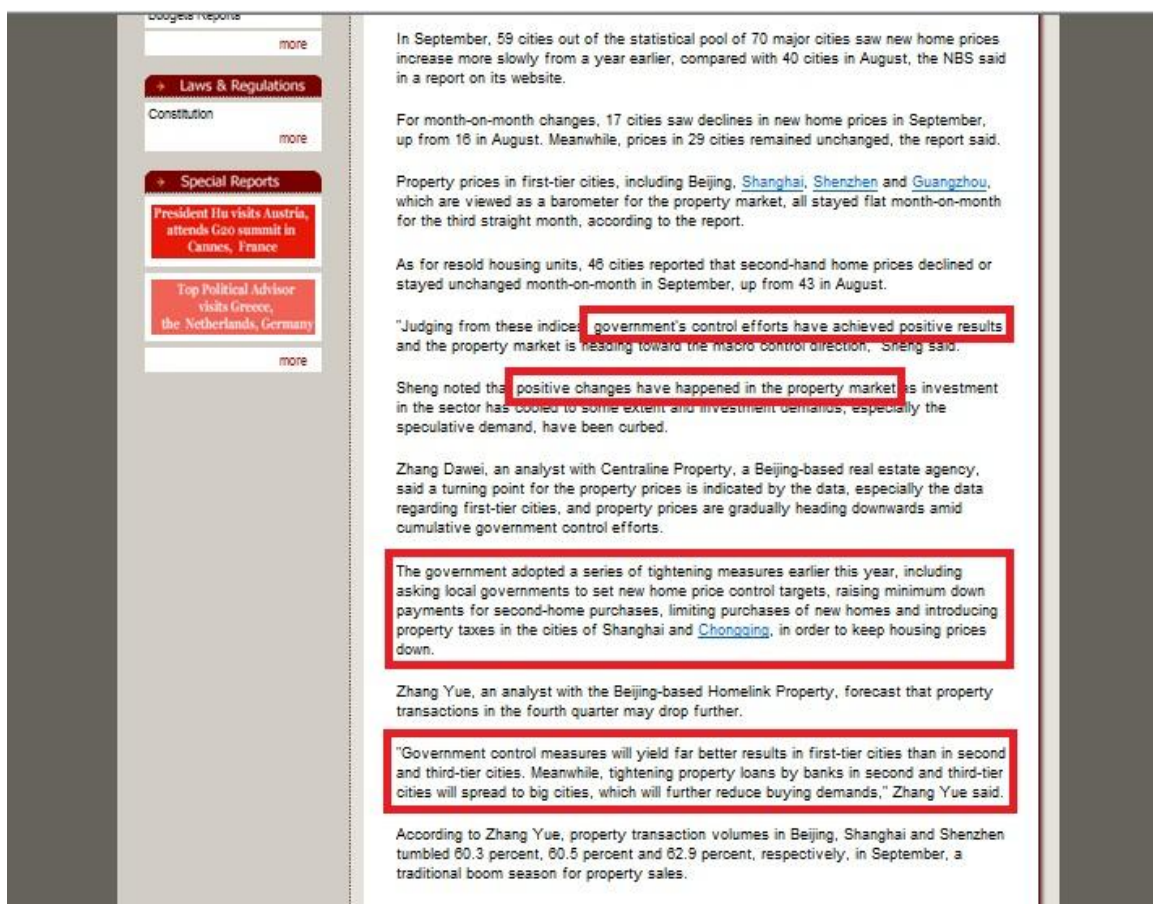


Figure 25. Screen grab extension of webpage where Picture 5 appears in, highlighting (in red) text that speaks about the Chinese Government’s help in improving the property market’s situation, source: http://english.gov.cn/2011-10/19/content_1973239.htm

The text gives all parties a good diplomatic answer to their enquiries about the Chinese property market: (1) for local, the government is working on lowering prices and have succeeded in slowing down price increase; (2) for present property owners, the prices are now controlled but there is still growth; and (3) for potential

property investors, since prices are more regulated now, it is a good time to invest as prices are expected to grow consistently but at a moderated rate. This assurance given to all possible readers shows the extended thought process of the website author, having considered the text carefully to keep the interest of the readers.



John Rutledge, a former U.S. presidential economic advisor, addresses during the Boao Forum for Asia Global Energy and Resources Roundtable held in [Qingdao](#), east China's [Shandong](#) Province, Nov. 5, 2011. Some 50 officers, enterprisers and experts around the world attended the roundtable meeting here on Saturday. (Xinhua/Li Ziheng)

Picture 6. An image of a white well-dressed, perhaps, an important business figure giving a speech, source: http://english.gov.cn/2011-11/05/content_1986590.htm

The image in Picture 6 shows a middle-aged, white, well-dressed man giving a speech to perhaps some Chinese people (since there are Chinese characters in the background). Looking at the caption under the photograph, the viewer then understands that it is an image of a former U.S. presidential economic advisor and he is addressing the Boao Forum for Asia Global Energy and Resources Roundtable held in Qingdao. Again, ‘elaboration-specification’ (anchorage) is used here (van Leeuwen 2005). The caption also stated that “some 50 officers, enterprisers and experts around the world attended the roundtable meeting”. The photograph chose to show an important foreigner addressing an international crowd on homeland. This illustrates the international draw of China’s business markets. By giving importance to address the foreigners, the website is able to attract the attention of foreigners and locals alike to the website. For foreigners, they get a sense of assurance and comfort when they can identify with someone like them. Whereas for the locals, it is perhaps encouraging to know that foreigners are taking up on Chinese markets too. The photographer chose to showcase the character in the image with his hands showing

an imaginary increasing graph or growth chart. This is done intentionally to perhaps highlight a certain point of the speech. This webpage was not supported with any additional body of supporting text; only the caption under the photograph is given. The researcher chose to present this example in the thesis to show the importance of having an image which speaks for itself. Of course, this image had the help of a short caption, but it was enough to explain the character and activity in the image. This is not comparable to the other three nations' websites as they had images which needed longer and more detailed explanation for a justifiable understanding.



People replace the price board at a gas station in [Chongqing](#), southwest China, Oct. 9, 2011. China reduces retail prices for gasoline and diesel by 300 yuan (about 47 U.S. dollars) per tonne starting Oct. 9. The benchmark retail price of gasoline is cut by 0.22 yuan per liter and diesel by 0.26 yuan per liter, according to the [National Development and Reform Commission](#) (NDRC). (Xinhua/Li Jiang)

Picture 7. An image showing a Chinese male worker changing the gas prices, source:

http://english.gov.cn/2011-10/09/content_1964762.htm

The last image that the researcher would share from the Chinese website would be Picture 7. It is an image of a big and bright red gas price billboard with a Chinese man wearing a shirt with a name tag is changing the prices on the billboard. The caption below the image explains ('elaboration-specification') that China has reduced retail prices for gasoline and diesel. The bright color of the billboard is very striking and indicates that something important is happening, in this case, the prices for a main resource that fuels businesses, gasoline, has been reduced. The image shows a worker working during the night and this is an indication that business is progressive.

Similar to Picture 6, this Picture (7) did not have a main body of text; instead, it had another image shown below it. This second image served the same purpose as Picture 7.



Figure 26. Screen grab showing both images displayed on Picture 7's webpage, source:

http://english.gov.cn/2011-10/09/content_1964762.htm



Figure 27. Screen grab extension showing similar photo captions, only difference (highlighted in red) is the location of each photo taken, source: http://english.gov.cn/2011-10/09/content_1964762.htm

Figure 27 above shows a good example in the Chinese website that when there is a lack of supporting text; another image is used to “make-up” that lost. No meaning is lost as additional images are used to further clarify the purpose of the first image. In this example, the decrease of gasoline prices is practiced all over China. The website creator has chosen to illustrate this by showing images from different cities in China.

Images and texts shown on the Chinese website are all of the same nature. The ‘news-like’ images support news coverage that happens in regards to the business world, mostly in China, but also abroad. *Informative* Text (and/or photo caption) are supporting the images and giving the images its meaning, what van Leeuwen describes as ‘elaboration-specification’.

4.3 Interactivity and Services

Websites are claimed by public relations scholars and practitioners to be good modes to build relationship between organization and the public (Vorvoreanu 2008; Falk, Sockel & Chen 2005). In the professional world, there is a sense that corporate public relations websites influence a public’s perceptions of an organization and loyalty towards it (Vorvoreanu 2008). Providing a good experience on the organization’s website is crucial to maintaining a good relationship with publics, increasing reputation and customer loyalty, and ultimately surviving as a business (Vorvoreanu 2008). Johnson (1997) interviewed public relations practitioners and have learned that it is very important to have a website that is kept up-to-date and also to keep its reputation.

‘Interactivity’, Riganti, Strielkowski and Wang (2007) claimed that this website feature should be guaranteed, as it is also named as one of the major Internet or CMC capabilities (Naughton 2000; Zott, Amit & Donlevy 2000; Sack 2000; Sigala 2003). It further consists of four characteristics which are adapted from Giannopoulos and Mavragani’s (2011) study on studying European tourism websites; (1) downloadable

material (e.g. videos, business reports, business regulations and laws, checklist for starting a business in country, etc.). (2) Web 2.0 features/functions (e.g. e-forums, social network links, etc.). (3) Communication (or visitor relationship content) through e-mail, newsletters. (4) Contact details (e.g. email addresses, telephone numbers, mailing/visiting addresses, etc.).

Connecting all the elements of the website, the issue of ‘usability’ comes into play. This means to question oneself or the user of the website how easy is it for oneself to get to certain information on the website or how easy it is to find answers to questions that the user may have with regards to what is assumed to be on the website. Travis (2003) defined website usability as the extent to which a specific website can be used by specific users to achieve specific goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a particular environment. In simpler terms, how ‘user-friendly’ is the website. The website may gain usability by having the following elements: (1) language selection – the user should be able to use the website in a comfortable language for he/she to understand the information displayed, (2) search engine within the website – the user should be able to search for specifics within the website to get to desired information quickly, (3) customized information – depending on the user’s national IP (Internet Protocol) address, is the website able to adjust to their location?

4.3.1 Brazil’s Website and Public Relations: Got a Question for the President?

The Brazilian website gives its user a good first impression and usability at first use. On the top right corner of the website is the language selection links, allowing languages such as Portuguese, English and Spanish. Portuguese being its national language can be taken for granted that it is there. Since Brazil is located together with other Spanish speaking countries it is wise to have Spanish on its websites for the ease of its neighboring businessmen. English can almost be taken for granted since the ‘working language’ of today is English, although some may argue that languages such as Spanish and Chinese will match that of English, however, it is generally recognized that English is still valid. Directly below the language selection links, the user sees the search engine, which allows the user to conduct searches within the

website. This search engine allows the user to narrow down the search by having some categories which the user would like the search to take place in, e.g. images, text, videos, files, etc. This search engine functions well and efficiently. No prompt is made to ask the user where he/she is from, hence no customized information can be found on this website.

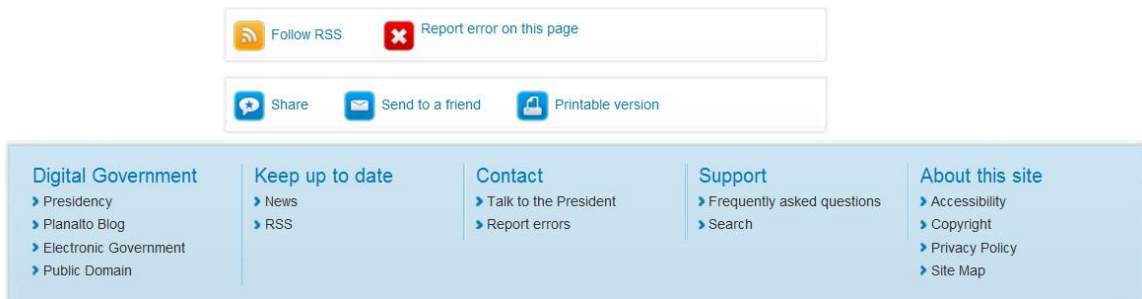


Figure 28. Screen grab showing links which allows user interaction and communication with Brazilian website producer, source: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/para/press/press-releases/february/brazil-keeps-inequality-reduction-trend-while-coping-with-the-crisis>

The figure above shows the typical set of links which can be found at the end of every webpage on the Brazilian website. These links allow the user to “follow” the website, or to always receive emails from the website if something were to be updated. These links also allow for the user to “share” information on the website to social networks. One of these links allows the user to report an error on the webpage to the website creator. This indicates their humbleness, and it perhaps allows for some great ideas to come from the users!

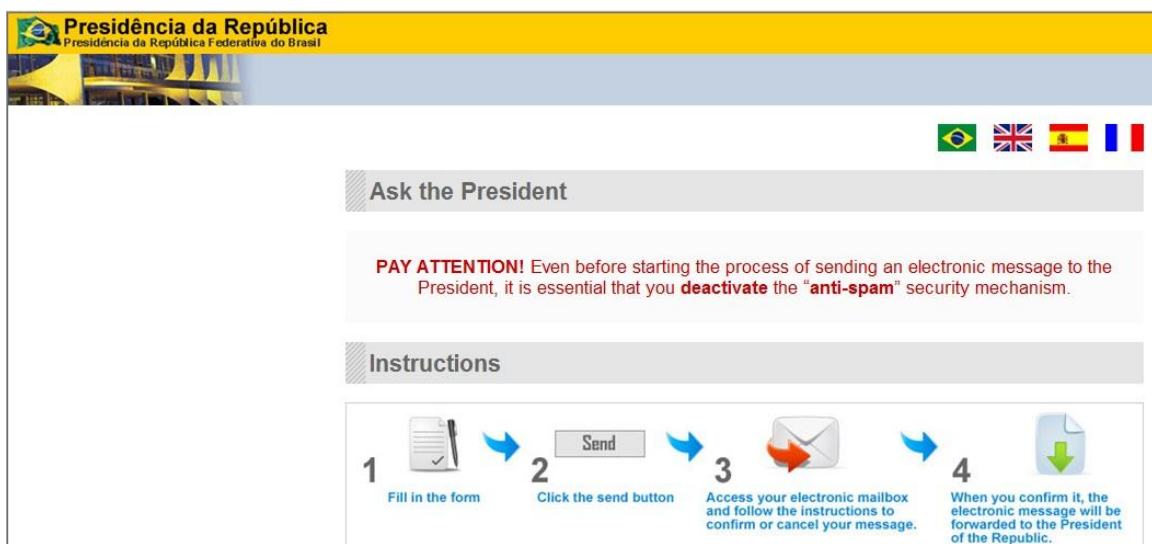


Figure 29. The webpage from the Brazilian website allowing the user to ask the President of Brazil a question online, source:

https://sistema.planalto.gov.br/falepr2/index.php?IND_IDIOMA=I

The most surprising and interesting way of allowing communication and interaction on the Brazilian website was the “Ask the President” section of the website. From the name of the webpage, it is self-explanatory as to its functions; any user may communicate with the President of the Republic of Brazil via email! This creates a friendly atmosphere and image on the website and also to the nation’s leaders.

4.3.2 Russia’s Website and Minimalistic Public Relations

On the Russia website, the search engine comes before the language selection links. However, there isn’t much of a difference between which item comes first on the website since they are both seen at the same time. The language selections are naturally, Russian and also English. The Russian website, if compared to the Brazilian website does not allow for much interactivity between the website and its users. The Russian website adopts the attitude of “what I have I present to you”, it gives the impression that the website creators are very confident in what they are presenting on their websites and expect a ‘no mistake’ tolerance on their information. On the other hand, it makes the website creators seem foreign and far away from the users. Contact information of the ‘Media and Information Department of the Russian Economic Development Ministry’ is given, but that is all that the user has to keep in contact with the website creators. Of course, there is the question of whether the user needs to contact the website creators or any other personality in the website; the Russian website is clearly used as an information dispenser, perhaps not a relationship-building website.

4.3.3 India's Website and Friendly Public Relations

The first user-friendly feature of the website was its simple URL: www.business.gov.in. This is a big advantage which the researcher recognizes before analyzing anything else on the website. By having a short, simple and recognizable web address, the user is able to remember and return to the website easily. Compared to the other websites studied in this research, the Indian website's URL is by far the easiest.



The screenshot shows a feedback form on a dark blue background. At the top, it says 'GOVERNMENT OF INDIA' with the national emblem. Below that, it reads 'Help us enhance BUSINESS.GOV.IN' and 'Tell us what more you would like to see'. The form contains a text area for 'Your Suggestion(s)', followed by input fields for 'Your Name', 'Your Email ID', and a dropdown menu for 'Occupation/Profession'. A 'Verification code' field is present with a CAPTCHA image showing the code '5 a 3 2 1 6 f'. At the bottom, there are two buttons: 'Tell Us' and 'Close'.

Figure 30. A screen grab of one of the interaction opportunities offered to the user of the Indian website, source: <http://business.gov.in/search.php#>

Figure 30 above shows the request from the Indian website creators to its users for suggestions about how they can improve. This initiation for self-improvement and development makes the nation look 'warm' and welcoming, almost saying to the visitor that 'your opinion is valuable to us'. The researcher did not send any suggestions to the website creator, so she cannot comment on how well they respond to these suggestions which they receive.

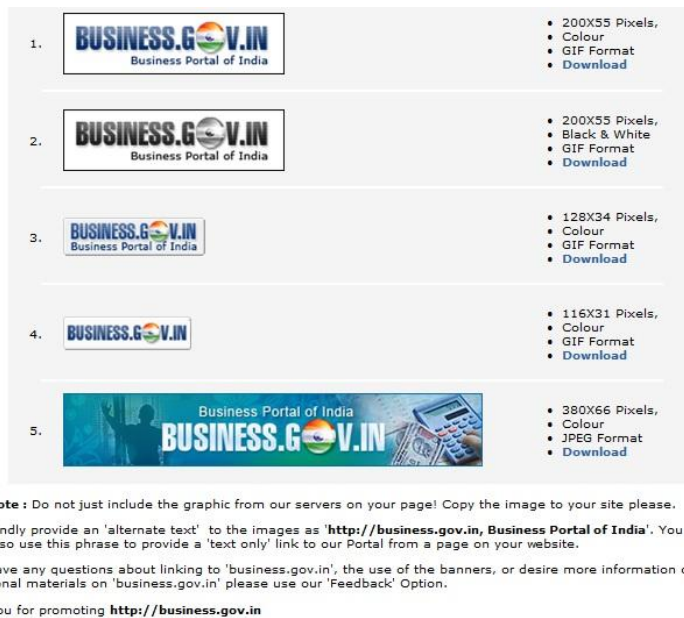


Figure 31. The Indian website creators encourages its uses to promote their website, source: <http://business.gov.in/linktous.php>

The Indian website had a very unique feature and that was its call to other website producers to help them promote their website. Figure 31 shows the website offering its different logo designs to be downloaded and the permission to be uploaded onto other websites. This is very creative and a good way of promoting themselves. This also reflects well on the nation – one that encourages knowledge sharing and networking.

The other features of website creator-user interaction and communication functions were standard, as found on other studied websites.

4.3.4 China's Website and Standard Public Relations

The Chinese website also shares the same standard interaction/communication tools between the website creator and the user: the search engine is functioning and there are language options allowing Chinese and English language.



Figure 32. The 'Contact Us' webpage on the Chinese website, source: http://www.gov.cn/misc/2005-10/24/content_82605.htm

The figure above shows the three email addresses (of which two are the same) which allow the user to give feedback to the website creator. A phone and fax number are also issued. There are different email addresses as each email-address addresses a different type of issue: a technical error (like a broken link); a content error (like the display of a wrong date); or suggests/comments on the website. The opportunity to help improve the website seems to be a common feature on these studied websites (except for the Russian website), which indicates that these calls for help are beneficial.

4.4 Technical Management

This section measures the degree of updated-ness of the website content, perceived speed in response times and absence of errors or missing links. Cappel and Huang (2007) have identified several website design errors in their analysis of company websites. The following list will explain each design error in which they have pointed out:

1. A *splash screen* is used before the user enters the main page of the website (Flanders & Peters 2002). These splash screens are added in hope of creating a certain mood or atmosphere for the user, getting them ready for the website.

However, these splash screens normally take a long time to load and often times have technical errors which could frustrate the user, ending in a lost interest in the site (Flanders & Peters 2002).

2. *Horizontal scrolling* is needed to view the entire webpage. Most users do not bother scrolling horizontally from left to right if such a need is required, instead, they would leave the website only viewing half of its contents (Johnson 2000).
3. The home page contains a *self-link*. These self-links brings the user from their current page to the same page again and this often times creates confusion and disorientation for the user, and should be avoided (Johnson 2003).
4. *Text links not underlined*. This may seem simple but researchers (e.g. Shelly et al. 2002; Cappel & Huang 2007) found that users would only click on links which were underlined. In addition, these links should be in a different color than the other text, most often, blue. Normally web designers apply the same color for all text, regardless of it being a hyperlink, thinking that it reduces clutter and improve appearance, but research has shown that users often times miss these important links because they are almost 'hidden' (Van Duyne et al. 2003). Also, the hyperlink should change its color after the user has clicked on it, many web designers fail to see the importance of this small detail, but users rely on this to help them remember which links they have visited and so as to not return to the same page and waste time (Nielsen & Loranger 2006).
5. *The company logo missing from internal pages*. Users tend to use the company logo as a link to return to the home page. Sometimes, web designers replace the company logo with a text hyperlink that says 'home', but users often times miss this and would rather prefer the company logo as a back link (Gold 2003).
6. *A site search capability is needed*. Some users prefer a search engine rather than navigating to a specific webpage (Cappel & Huang 2007).
7. *A FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) or Help option should be provided*. Users are not given help or guidance when using a website; therefore it is important that they can find help when needed (Van Duyne et al. 2003).

Firstly, the Brazilian website takes a relatively long loading time before the user can access the WebPages. This is an obvious weak point as the modern user of today expects everything to be instant, especially when the internal pages also take time to load. Looking beyond this weakness, the user is impressed that there are no broken links in the website. However, this does not cover the fact that the website is not updated – the ‘news’ section of the website is showing a news article from May 31st, 2011 as the most recent. Many events must have happened between May to November 2011, therefore the news page promoting its most ‘recent’ article dated back to May does not please the user. Although the Brazilian website does not ‘commit’ any of the seven common website errors as listed above, the user is not completely satisfied that it is out-dated and slow. Unfortunately, this reflects poorly upon the nation.

The Russian website is more updated than the Brazilian website as it has a news article posted every other day. The Russian website’s designer obeyed the rules about using blue hyperlinks as the whole website contains blue links against a white background! The loading time on the Russian website is faster than that of the Brazilian. There are also no broken links. The only error that could be noted would be the self-link on the home page, where a link would bring the user back to the same page; however, this is very minor. Therefore the user would give the Russian website a higher technical management rating than that of the Brazilian website. This portrays the nation as being more professional and not over-seeing details.

The Indian website has a very fast loading time and does not have any errors listed on the list above present in its website. The website works efficiently with no broken links. Its hyperlinks are indeed blue and after clicking on a hyperlink, it turns yellow! The news section is also updated and information on the website is also updated regularly. This efficiency of its technical management shows the web designer’s eye for detail and also technical expertise, which highlights India’s reputation for technical competence. From another point of view, the website is kept very simple; hence there are fewer chances for errors.

Finally, the Chinese website loads unexpectedly fast (almost instantly), even with its crowded website; the only exception being the ‘photo’ page, which naturally takes

more time to process. However, there are quite a few broken links which stops the user from viewing a certain page. This is frustrating as the user would not be able to access information which he/she is promised. A special feature on the Chinese website is the constant opening of a new window. This is annoying to the user as he/she would accumulate many windows and would have to manually close each window after viewing it. This is unnecessary and can be problematic since the user may end up with some twenty windows and it slows the computer down.

5 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS: REPRESENTATION OF EACH COUNTRY ONLINE

The following paragraphs would summarize the findings of each country studied in the research and discussion on the represented individuality of each nation would be presented. Social semiotics theory would be drawn upon to systematically draw conclusions. The multimodality method of analysis in this research took into account the combination of website dynamic design (images, text, colors, structure, and functions) to shed light and knowledge upon the websites' usability, and individual represented 'metaphor'.

5.1 Half-Functioning Brazilian Website

Upon conducting multimodality research, the Brazilian website has the following list of social characteristics: *well-dressed up but failing in its functions*. By "well-dressed up", the researcher refers to the website's good combination of its semiotic signifiers such as its images and text which shows the cooperative relationship between its multiple modes; informational content provided in the website were very welcoming for potential foreign investors; and the possibility of communicating with the country's President added the friendliness edge and sociable aspect of the website. However, despite all of the carefully selected choice of images and text that portrayed Brazil's economy well, the broken links on the website fails the test, earning itself the title of a "Half-functioning" website. This is a shame since the website has the potential to be a well-functioning and beautiful website at the same time. The user takes on the position of an "explorer" while surfing the Brazilian website – the images bring the user to different events and places in Brazil, allowing him/her to "taste" a little of Brazil. The "explorer" encounters a "dead-end" when reaching the broken links on the website.

5.2 Russia: The Serious Minimalist

The Russian website gave Russia the image of being: *minimalistic, serious and authoritative*. The website's focus on the activities of its business ministers was a big contribution to its image of authority. The only images used in the website were close-up shots of its ministers, therefore adding to the formalities of seriousness. Its color selection on the website adopted the minimalistic style and had the impression of being organized and to-the-point. The website allowed limited interaction between the website creators and its users, therefore underlining the distance it keeps with the masses/public; making Russia seem like a super-power. However, its choice of portraying its ministers with their 'natural' facial expression (e.g. minister shown with a sad/fearful face, as compared to a happy smile) demonstrates the country's honesty and transparency. Hence, earning itself the title of "The Serious Minimalist". The potential investor who visits this Russian website would find current information about its business events and also the practicalities of conducting business in the country.

5.3 Textbook India

India is portrayed as being: *careful, general, and educative*. The lack of specific information about India gave the researcher the idea that India is holding back or guarding information from the public. This careful attitude resulted in the website being too general, and even seen as only an educational business course book. The potential target audience is deprived of getting a gist of Indian business, instead being reduced down to the level of a student who has just started to learn about general business guidelines. Although the first impression of such a website may seem practical, it lacks professionalism. Potential investors who visit the website would not be able to find practical information about doing business specifically in India.

5.4 China: Organized and Uniform, but Not Perfect

China is represented with the following characteristics: *up-to-date and formal with a “military” style, however lacking in functionality*. The images shown in the website gave the researcher the feeling of being in the midst of the action, may it be at a business meeting with international business ministers or at a construction site. The ability to draw the viewer into the image is paired up with the detailed text accompanying its images. These texts are also loaded with statistics and are formally written. The user is able to learn and get informed about more recent Chinese business activities. The organized structure of the website, plus its choice of dull green and grey colors gives the website a “military uniform look”. The potential investor visiting the website would be able to get ample information about current business related events in China however, the problem of having broken links in the website will lead to frustration and a lost of information.

5.5 Summary of Conclusions

After conducting the research and drawing upon conclusions, the researcher sees that national culture has a very small role to play, if any, in its image online. For example, despite China’s ‘collectivistic’ culture, its official business website makes an effort to speak to the individual. With computer-mediated-communication (CMC), the website reaches to the masses, but has to speak individually to specific persons.

The use of social semiotics as a framework for analysis has given the researcher the opportunity to consider the modes subjectively within means. For example, what the Brazilian website means to one researcher would differ to another researcher; however, because specific semiotic theories were used in the analysis, these conclusions should not differ completely.

How these websites affect their draw of foreign investors is unknown to the researcher, however, from the studies on website usability, the researcher has a justifiable understanding that the higher the degree of usability, the more visitors would use the website. However, having said so, the researcher is well aware that

traffic flow of these websites could be affected by various factors, such as website marketing, funding, credibility etc.

In conclusion, how the countries are represented on these websites have little to do with their national cultures. The online community has its own defined culture and would therefore cover that of the nation's culture. However, since these governmental websites are produced and regulated by governmental authorities, they were at least diplomatic.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

“Social semiotics is not ‘pure’ theory, not a self-contained field” (van Leeuwen 2005:3). It only comes into its own when it is applied to specific instances and specific problems, and it always requires immersing oneself not just in semiotic concepts and methods as such but also in other field(s). It can only come into its own when social semiotics fully engages with social theory. This kind of interdisciplinary is an absolutely essential feature of social semiotics. Some may see this as a limitation of such a discipline; however social semiotics has much more advantages when used correctly. “Social semiotics is a form of enquiry. It does not offer ready-made answers” (van Leeuwen 2005:3). Unlike statistics and mathematical methods, $1+1$ does not necessarily equal to 2 in social semiotics; two apples in a bag could be used for many other purposes other than to eat. Social semiotics offers ideas for formulating questions and ways of searching for answers. Researchers are encouraged to ask questions, test these findings/theories and arrive at their own independent conclusions. The reason why this is written in the ‘limitations’ section is to clarify the complexities of social semiotics; conclusions are made differently within reason. This goes to mean that social semiotics is not a ‘general-purpose’ analytical tool, researchers should always study the basic theories of their subjects too (e.g. linguistic theories, musical theory, film theory, etc).

5.7 Suggestions for Further Studies

This research studied the BRIC countries' official business websites, obviously other countries also have their official business websites too, therefore this research could be expanded to other regions/countries. Also, the research could be extended to study other genres of websites, for example, university websites, tourism websites, sports websites, local news websites, etc. There are many different website genres and each would present a different result. The researcher decided upon analyzing business websites to fill in the research gap on this particular field.

This research had data collection done within one month's time; the possibility of extending the study to explore the long term consistency of these websites is appealing. Also, the future studies could also focus more on how up-to-date these websites are. Although this research did touch upon this topic of 'updated-ness', a longer period of time could be spent studying how the website is updated/modified over time. The aim of this would be to investigate if there are any meaning changes or semiotic potentials that are added and/or taken away.

English language was used throughout the research, and only India has its country's official language as English; therefore it is also advisable to apply this same research question but studying the websites in its original, national languages. The research believes that languages play a big role in meaning potentials. The website creator has a great responsibility in making meaning, especially with the words he/she chooses to use. Translator and interpreter practitioners would agree that there is always a need for alteration to the original meaning to get a message across but in another language.

The possibilities for further studies in the field of multimodality analysis are endless and paired with the increase of websites and World Wide Web interactivity and involvement, the researcher believes that this research field would be studied more and more. The world is becoming more mobile, perhaps the next study would be to investigate web content on mobile devices such as mobile phones!

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