Branding the Digital Nomad Lifestyle:

A genre analysis of coworking retreat websites

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Abstract

The concept of digital nomads – professionals who are able to use digital communication technologies to simultaneously earn an income while travelling the world – has become increasingly popular in the recent years due to news and social media coverage. Often portrayed as an everlasting vacation to exotic locations (Sutherland & Hossein-Jarrahi, 2017), the growing demand for this alternative lifestyle has motivated the emergence of new businesses such as coworking retreats. These retreats arrange work and travel opportunities for groups of digital nomads offering them opportunities to connect with a like-minded community. However, in advertising their services through website homepages, the coworking retreats appear to have appropriated the digital nomad concept and rebranded it for their own commercial purposes.

This study identifies the ways in which the digital nomad lifestyle has been capitalised by examining coworking retreat homepages as a novel genre. It seeks to understand how the branding of this particular lifestyle is socially constructed by drawing on theories of social constructionism, social identity, genre, and multimodality. The design of this study involves a multimodal genre analysis of the 45 most popular coworking retreat homepages. Through a mixed methods approach, I investigate the rhetorical structure, linguistic, and visual design elements that are employed on these homepages.

The key findings of this study show that a range of discursive strategies on these homepages construct an idealised and romanticised narrative of digital nomads, which become a key selling point to attract customers. I argue that coworking retreats have taken advantage of the original digital nomad concept, reshaped and promoted it as a more superficial and glamorous lifestyle for their own commercial gain. The homepage narratives identified in this study depict digital nomads as an elite group of Western individuals who lead privileged and socially exclusive lifestyles. This study concludes by suggesting that the original digital nomads are fast becoming an ‘endangered species’ through the commercialisation of their lifestyles by coworking retreats. As a consequence, a social identity divide appears to be forming within the wider digital nomad community, as to who is an authentic digital nomad and who is not.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Prasan.

Signature

25 September 2020

Date

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A decade ago, few people would have known the meaning of the term *digital nomad*. In recent times, however, this moniker has emerged with widespread use of Internet and mobile communication technologies – laptops, smartphones and mobile applications – providing individuals with the opportunity to lead a nomadic lifestyle where they can work and continue to earn an income without having to be located in an office or even a particular country (Reichenberger, 2018). This concept was made popular by blogs, online magazine articles and social media posts which recorded activities of digital nomads as adventurous vagabonds who get to work on the beach and travel around the world. The term digital nomad itself presents an attractive juxtaposition – “digital”, referring to the use of computer technology and “nomad”, describing a member of a tribe who travels from place to place with no fixed residence. The idea of living nomadically resonated with people, especially young professionals who were keen to escape from the confinement of traditional work structures and environments and drawn to the idea of incorporating more leisure into their lifestyle.

Interestingly, the concept of digital nomadism was coined nearly three decades ago by Makimoto & Manners (1997) in their book, *Digital Nomad,* where the authors envisioned a corporate utopia whereby employees would be able to work from non-traditional work environments such as the beach, free of “rigid work schedules set by demanding bosses” (p. 147). The concept of travelling while working from a beach or cafe and not being confined to the 9-to-5 obligations of traditional work (Adams, 2016) is indeed an appealing thought that has drawn many professionals to pursue this lifestyle (Mouratidis, 2018).

However, what is commonly known to be a digital nomad is also a “romanticised image”, perpetuated by popular media and advertising through hashtags like #nomadlife and #digitalnomad on Instagram, which typically display images of Western individuals exploring exotic destinations (Nash et al., 2018, p. 1, Driver, 2018). True-life digital nomads such as Wilson (2018) and Lee (2018) have rejected this representation, stating that the lifestyle is not all wanderlust and their personal experience has been to sometimes work up to 60-hour weeks in addition to daily responsibilities. Some digital nomads have also found that the cost of embracing this “hedonistic” lifestyle of leisure and location independence has resulted in experiences of “social isolation, distance from loved ones, and loneliness” (Thompson, 2018a, p. 28).

In more recent years, the concept of the digital nomadism has led to the rise of new businesses (MBO Partners, 2018) including those that refer to themselves as *coworking retreats*. These retreats appear to cater to digital nomads' desire for a more socially-inclusive experience by providing them with an exotic, resort-like location for both work and leisure pursuits which they can share with other like-minded individuals – all at a financial cost (Hargreaves, 2015). The coworking retreat websites, however, seem to leverage the lifestyle of digital nomads, commercialising and promoting it as an idealised and privileged experience, in order to advertise their own services. This raises the issue of whether the original digital nomads, as imagined by Makimoto & Manners (1997), has, in fact, become an 'endangered species'.

In this thesis, I present my investigation into the ways in which coworking retreats brand and commercialise the concept of digital nomadism, particularly since businesses are known to use promotional messages to embed their beliefs and communicate their ideology to potential customers (Klein, 2000). This study aims to establish a better understanding of the ways in which these homepages, as a specific novel genre, use linguistic and visual elements to construct the fantasy of a digital nomadic lifestyle for commercial purposes.

This first chapter introduces my study by backgrounding the increasing popularity of digital nomads over the past decade. I briefly describe the concept of coworking retreats, highlighting their website homepage as a particular promotional genre that capitalises the concept of digital nomadism to create an idealised lifestyle in order to attract and persuade potential customers to join their programmes. Following that, I will provide my research questions as well the significance of this study. Finally, I will present a brief outline of each chapter in this thesis.

1.1 The digital nomad lifestyle

Nearly twenty years after their publication, the concept of digital nomads as introduced by Makimoto & Manners (1997) has become more than a vision; it has inspired a new way of life that is being adopted by young professionals who value lifestyle flexibility and professional autonomy much more than career stability and security (Blanda, 2016). Some of the common professions held by digital nomads include IT developers, software engineers, creative professionals and ecommerce professionals (MBO Partners, 2018). While a single academic definition for digital nomadism has yet to be established, an increasing body of literature is emerging to gain insight and an understanding of this phenomenon.

In her pioneering study, Reichenberger (2018) attempted to define and examine the motivations of digital nomads by conducting a close analysis of online content and in-depth interviews with

22 digital nomads. The author found that at a basic level, digital nomads are individuals who conduct their work in an online environment, thus achieving location independence. However, her study also revealed a hierarchy of digital nomadism, depending on one’s commitment to travel and mobility, ranging from restricted mobility to full-time travel (Reichenberger, 2018).

Digital nomads are often mischaracterised as freelancers, remote workers and online entrepreneurs, even though Nash et al. (2018) argue that each of these work and lifestyles differ from one another. Bartosik-Purgat (2018) supports this argument, stating that constant mobility and travel is what distinguishes digital nomads from other types of location independent workers who might have a permanent place of residence. Digital nomads are also different to people on work-holiday programmes, because the former involves digital tools and internet connection to get their job done while the latter might require physical presence for the job (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018). Similarly, Kropp (2018) posits that some digital nomads can be considered freelancers and remote workers but not all freelancers and remote workers are digital nomads due to the differences in mobility (Kropp, 2018). Based on the different characteristics and definitions of digital nomads, this study chooses to define digital nomads as individuals who earn an income through digital means, while travelling from place to place for an extended period of time.

The 2018 State of Independent America research found that 4.8 million people identified themselves as digital nomads (MBO Partners, 2018). Although this study only covered American-based workers, more young professionals are starting to adopt this nomadic way of life for a number of reasons. According to Reichenberger (2018), digital nomads are motivated by three interconnected aspects, namely, professional, spatial and personal freedom. Professional freedom refers to work autonomy and flexibility that resists imposed work structures like specific working times and geographic dependence. This influences spatial freedom, which is the ability to travel and be immersed in new environments and culture.

Professional and spatial freedom result in personal freedom, which encourages the learning of new skills and self-development (Reichenberger, 2018). Mouratidis (2018) confirms this perspective, stating that freedom and flexibility are often cited by digital nomads as the best and most important parts of their lifestyle. Curiously, studies on traditional nomads and hunter gatherers reveal similar ideas. According to Charlton (2000), a minimalist lifestyle paired with the freedom to work when needed is what made hunter gatherer communities one of the happiest societies in human history.

Contrary to the lifestyle portrayed in the media, there are a number of unseen challenges that arise with being a digital nomad (Driver, 2019). Since many nomads take on short term or contract work with flexible arrangements via digital platforms (Nash et al., 2018), it can be difficult to find jobs, causing career instability for some (Basuthakur, 2017, Reder, 2018, Wilson, 2018). Those who do have jobs might find it challenging to stay productive in between continuous travel and settling into new environments (Taylor, n.d.). However, one of the biggest challenges faced by digital nomads, according to scholars, is loneliness and isolation (Nash et al., 2018, Thompson, 2018a, Reichenberger, 2018).

Studies have also found that being in new environments can cause digital nomads to feel overwhelmed and displaced when they first move to a new country, even facing culture shock every other month (Putra & Agirachman, 2016, Mouratidis, 2018). This is especially problematic for digital nomads who consider themselves introverts, since building connections and networking can be just as daunting and strenuous as work (Reichenberger, 2018). As a solution, digital nomads themselves would organise online communities, conferences or retreats to bring like-minded individuals who were keen to share their experiences together (Haking, 2017, Thompson, 2018a). These conferences and retreats eventually became a more commercially-focused exercise whereby digital nomads could benefit from “selling the dream” to others in order to support their own lifestyle (Thompson, 2018a, p. 38). This idea clearly captured the minds of entrepreneurs also keen to capitalise on this dream.

1.2 The rise of coworking retreats

The popularity of digital nomadism has influenced a growing industry of services that aim to promote and support the digital nomad lifestyle, including coworking spaces and coworking retreats. These businesses cater to the needs of digital nomads by taking care of logistical matters, leaving digital nomads to focus on their work (Amador de San José, 2018). The term *coworking* is synonymous with ‘working together’, but it also implies a new work concept that allows people from different professional backgrounds and organisations to collaborate, share opportunities and connect with one another (Johns & Gratton, 2013)

Gandini (2015) explains that coworking is the use of a shared workplace that is utilised by people of different professional backgrounds who share the same lifestyle goals. Coworking spaces aim to integrate social and leisure activities into a professional space, blurring the lines between work and play thus creating a highly productive yet collaborative environment (Putra & Agirachman, 2016). Coworking retreats, on the other hand, share similarities with coworking spaces but include more of a travel experience that enables digital nomads to meet like-minded individuals while on holiday. These retreats are usually held in popular, tropical locations including Bali, Chiang Mai, and Colombia and aim to provide a relaxing yet engaging environment for participants to work in (Putra & Agirachman, 2016, Haking, 2017).

To inform potential customers and attract them to the services provided, these retreats such as *Remote Year* and *Unsettled*, use websites which not only introduce and display information about their offers, but also persuade viewers to join their programme. As a persuasive technique, many of these retreats tend to feature digital nomads in an idealised light, especially on their homepages. This can be observed through the type of language on their websites such as "interesting community" and "beautiful environment" (Fahle, 2018) and choice of images such as someone using a laptop "overlooking a palm tree-lined beach" (Meier, 2019). Unfortunately, these experiences are not always carried out as advertised, according to previous participants.

In her blog post, Remote Year Is The Most Expensive Mistake I've Ever Made, Meier (2019) wrote that she was drawn to the "seemingly-tailor made opportunity" that was advertised on Remote Year's social media, only to be disappointed by the racism and misogyny within the community she encountered. The author quickly realised that the retreat experience was not like the "polished Instagram feed" she was attracted to and did not feel the inclusivity that she was promised. Meier's (2019) blog post shows evidence of the negative impact that idealising the digital nomad concept can have on individuals and is one of the factors that piqued my interest in this topic.

To understand how these coworking retreats create and disseminate their promotional messages by capitalising the lifestyles of digital nomads, I decided to examine coworking retreat homepages as a specific genre. Although coworking retreat homepages share similarities with promotional genres in that they use a combination of linguistic and visual elements to inform, attract and persuade viewers, the increasingly dynamic and complex nature of genres due to new technology and mass communication platforms requires more flexible approaches (Bhatia, 2004, Paltridge, 2012). Genre knowledge as Bhatia (2004) posits, is not only important for understanding the structural patterns and communicative purposes that exist within a text, but can also reveal socio-cultural patterns, attitudes and beliefs of text producers (Hyland, 2012).

While there is a wide body of literature on online promotional genres (see Pollach, 2006, Tomaskova, 2015, Leelertphan, 2017, Villanueva et al., 2018), academic literature has yet to investigate coworking retreat homepages as a genre since this concept is relatively new. In addition to the lack of research on the genre of coworking retreat homepages, there are only a few studies on digital nomads that focus largely on their work identities (Nash et al., 2018, Petriglieri et al., 2019, Prester et al., 2019) and lifestyle motivations (Reichenberger, 2018, Mouratidis, 2018, Thompson, 2018a, Orel, 2019). Despite the growth of digital nomadism, the branding of digital nomad lifestyles and how they are idealised for promotional purposes have not been explored in academic studies and thus becomes an objective of my research. The use of linguistic and visual elements on coworking retreat homepages requires more attention from genre analysts, as there has been no academic research focusing on the generic features of coworking retreat homepages as its own genre.

1.3 Aim of study and research questions

The objective of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the commercialisation of the digital nomad lifestyle. This study aims to investigate coworking retreat homepages as a genre and examine the ways in which they promote their services through linguistic and visual elements by crafting an idealised digital nomad lifestyle. Therefore, this study is driven by the following research questions.

Primary research question:

- In what ways has the concept of digital nomadism been commercialised by the coworking retreat industry?

Secondary research questions:

- What similarities exist in the structural patterns on the genre of coworking retreat homepages that brand the digital nomad lifestyle?
- In what ways do the linguistic and visual elements employed on coworking retreat homepages convey an idealised digital nomad lifestyle?
- How do coworking retreats promote their own services by crafting an idealised digital nomad lifestyle?

To address these questions, this study employs a mixed methods approach involving a genre analysis to identify the rhetorical structure and any common patterns across the homepage. A corpus linguistics approach is used to conduct a linguistic analysis while a multimodal approach is used to conduct a visual design analysis of the retreat homepages. These approaches will be discussed with further detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

1.4 Significance of study

Digital nomadism began as a simple concept – an attempt to achieve a more holistic lifestyle by combining elements of work and leisure in one's daily life (Reichenberger, 2018). This study intends to explore the ways in which coworking retreats have potentially shifted the original concept of digital nomadism. My analysis of coworking retreat homepages as a genre seeks to contribute new knowledge to the ways in which businesses use persuasive techniques through digital platforms to commercialise and brand socio-cultural phenomena. In this case, my research aims to highlight the idealisation of digital nomad lifestyles for commercial purposes by drawing attention to the linguistic and visual elements employed by coworking retreat homepages. Besides adding to knowledge on digital nomads and coworking retreats, this study hopes to generate awareness in potential customers who might be misled by the promotional messaging of these retreats.

1.5 Thesis overview

This study explores the branding of digital nomad lifestyles through a genre analysis of coworking retreat websites. In Chapter One, I provide a background of the digital nomad phenomenon and an overview of coworking retreats. Furthermore, I outline the objectives and research questions, and reveal the significance of this research.

Chapter Two presents a review of relevant scholarly literature that provides a context for my research. These include an outline of new economies and flexible working options that enable the digital nomad phenomenon. I also discuss the evolution of workspaces and the construction of digital nomad work identities. Finally, I present a background on branding and online promotional genres, with references to literature on tourism and hotel website genres.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the main theoretical approaches that inform my study. This thesis takes a social constructionism approach with regards to the shaping of social identity and the branding of digital nomad lifestyles on coworking retreat homepages. I discuss theories of genre and multimodality that help in the conceptualisation of coworking retreat websites which I argue is a specific genre.

Chapter Four explains the methodology and design choices adopted in this study, discussing the tools used for collecting my data of coworking retreat homepages and selection of homepages for my visual analysis. My method of data analysis is based on a multimodal genre approach, where I employ Bhatia's (1993) move structure analysis to examine the moves and steps of these homepages. A corpus linguistics approach to examine the lexico-grammatical features of coworking retreat homepages while Kress & van Leeuwen’s (2006) visual grammar framework is also drawn on to investigate how multimodal elements such as images and layout are used to portray an idealised digital nomad lifestyle.

The next three Chapters (Five to Seven) present the main findings of this thesis in response to the research questions put forth. Chapter Five details the outcome of the genre analysis that identifies and compares the move structures of coworking retreat homepages as a promotional genre. Chapter Six highlights the common linguistic elements that featured on the coworking retreat homepages, while Chapter Seven discusses the visual design elements located on three coworking retreat homepages selected as examples: *Remote Year*, *Unsettled* and *Hacker Paradise*.

In Chapter Eight, I review the findings from this study and discuss three key observations that contribute new knowledge to both the understanding of coworking retreats as a promotional genre and the representation of digital nomad lifestyles. I conclude by looking at the implications of the study, its limitations and make suggestions for further research on digital nomads and coworking retreats.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide further context for this study with a review of scholarly literature to gain a deeper understanding of the digital nomad lifestyle and how it is commercialised by coworking retreat websites. The first section presents a background perspective of how new economies have developed through technological advancements, making the concept of digital nomadism a reality. I then discuss the scholarly findings on the evolution of workspaces, as well as the emergence and use of coworking spaces and retreats to highlight the physical aspects that enable a digital nomad lifestyle. Following that, I explore the relationship between digital nomads and their work identity. To understand how organisations appropriate cultural phenomena for their own profit, I proceed to draw upon previous research on the commercialisation and branding of culture. Finally, I provide a brief outline on cybergenres and promotional genres to understand how coworking retreats use their homepages as a platform to promote their services by crafting an idealised digital nomad lifestyle.

2.2 The changing nature of work

The rapid development of digital technologies in the past few decades has prompted the emergence of new economies that prioritise knowledge and information skills, as opposed to agriculture and industrial manufacturing (Blok et al., 2012). It is believed that organisations are spending more time on *knowledge work*, which relies more on an employee’s skill set, creativity and expertise instead of focussing on repetitive formulas and processes. Knowledge workers are not bound to the “formal hierarchies of their organisations” and usually set their own targets and deadlines when undertaking assignments (Myerson et al., 2010, p. 8). According to Johns & Gratton (2013), most knowledge workers are mobile and able to take their work anywhere, but many tend to prefer working in the company of other like-minded individuals who are “engaged in the work that matters to them” (p. 68).

While the traditional model of work involved full-time contracts, rigid hours, regular salary and office hierarchy (Brandl et al, 2019), flexible ways of working have become increasingly common, particularly in developing countries (SHRM Foundation, 2014). A business report by The Economist Intelligence Unit (2018) found that advances in technology have created a demand for flexible working with the number of people working from home in the UK amounting to 5% of the country’s total workforce. Furthermore, analysis by Global Workplace

Analytics & FlexJobs (2017) stated that 50% of employees in the US already telecommute or work remotely while 85% would prefer to work from home. More employers are hiring self-employed individuals (such as freelancers, digital nomads & remote workers) as independent contractors through a new economy that encourages short term work with flexible arrangements via digital platforms (Nash et al., 2018).

According to Schor and Atwood-Charles (2017), the *gig economy* first emerged in 2008 during the financial crisis. A comprehensive study by Terzo & Giaconia (2018, p. 2) defines the gig economy as "a labour market based on the use of a digital (online) platform, provided by a specific company, which allows individuals to find a short-term job, which normally ends with the provision of a single work performance (very often without a contract), and on the front of which a modest profit is obtained". In short, the gig economy comprises of individuals who offer their services on a part-time basis without the assurance of job stability. That being said, a wide range of services are offered under this sector, including lodging, transportation and customer durables (Terzo & Giaconia, 2018).

The gig economy, also known as the *platform economy*, includes two categories of work, "crowd work" and "work-on-demand via app" (De Stefano, 2016, p. 473). Crowd work involves virtual services that are outsourced through online platforms to a geographically dispersed crowd, such as software development or content writing. Work-on-demand via app refers to physical services like transportation (Uber) or rental accommodation (Airbnb) that is subcontracted to people through apps but are managed by larger firms who are responsible for setting "minimum quality standards of service" (p. 472). The on-demand platform is not to be confused with the sharing economy, which is essentially about monetising one's own possessions when they are not being used (Mamonova, 2018). For instance, Uber is commonly thought to be a sharing economy company though this is incorrect because the driver has not lent his car to the customer to drive. A good example of a sharing economy company is the UK parking service, *JustPark* (Seright, 2018), which offers drivers a chance to rent out their parking space while vacant, therefore sharing a single resource while unlocking potential earnings.

Recent research has suggested that digital nomads rely heavily on both types of the gig economy to support their work lifestyle. They look to crowd work platforms like Upwork or Remotey to find freelance jobs that can be completed through digital platforms and provide location independence (Nash et al., 2018). Furthermore, Thompson (2018b) explains that digital nomads contribute to the sharing economy by utilising services such as Airbnb and Uber when they travel. Most websites offering gig work allow workers to bid for one-time jobs and permit clients to rate their work performance once the task is finished, encouraging workers to complete jobs below market rate, and sometimes for free (Thompson, 2018b).

Researchers believe that gig work provides a mutual trade-off for both businesses and digital nomads. On one hand, it provides flexible working options for digital nomads while allowing them to work remotely and control their own schedule, while on the other hand, employers do not need to provide employee benefits such as healthcare and operational costs (Thompson, 2018b; De Stefano, 2016). However, as the digitisation of work becomes increasingly popular and more people have access to the internet and digital tools, the costs of owning a start-up or being self-employed have decreased (Potts & Waters-Lynch, 2017).

That being said, being a digital nomad or a location independent knowledge worker comes with its own set of challenges. As Orel's (2019) study on digital nomads revealed, the lack of an organised workspace can lead to social isolation, causing psychological strain, which reduces productivity (Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2017). Although flexible workers are constantly connected through the internet and digital devices, it is possible that they fail to develop genuine and direct communication with colleagues and other like-minded individuals (Orel, 2019). Thompson (2018b) states that the emergence of new serviced workspaces – better known as coworking or co-living environments – are giving flexible workers opportunities to connect with each other by reshaping the office space to become more collaborative, innovative and engaging.

2.3 Reinventing the workplace

The idea of what a workspace is has evolved over time and is constantly influenced by technological change (Myerson et al., 2010). Nearly 100 years ago, inventions such as the typewriter, telephone and elevator were pivotal to the working environment and even shaped the meaning of office life. However, the rise of the Internet and personal computing has led to many organisations to reshaping employment and the workplace, offering more flexible alternatives such as telework and telecommuting (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Isaac, 2016). This has caused the number of mobile workers to increase, leaving the classic work infrastructure to be replaced by personal devices and cloud computing (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Isaac, 2016). More workers and digital nomads alike are taking their meetings online and file-sharing has never been easier. Although virtual work has increased employee productivity and created a more flexible lifestyle, organisations are noticing a lack of collaboration amongst teams (Johns & Gratton, 2013) and workers might miss the sense of community that they were exposed to in an office setting.

Although there is currently no single, academic definition of coworking, a growing body of literature on this phenomenon is surfacing as more academics and practitioners strive to find and understand it in depth. As a noun, ‘coworking’ is synonymous with ‘working together’, but it also implies a new work concept that allows people from different professional backgrounds and organisations to collaborate, share opportunities and connect with one another (Johns & Gratton, 2013). As Gandini (2015, p.194) describes, coworking spaces are similar to “office-renting facilities”, where professionals can pay a daily rate or membership fee to gain access to desk space, Wi-Fi connection, meeting rooms, extra amenities and networking opportunities such as events and social gatherings.

When Bernard Dekoven coined the term ‘coworking’ in 1999, he intended to explore how games and play could be used to break hierarchy in the workplace and facilitate a more open, collaborative space for professionals. Dekoven envisioned people working together as equals through the applicability of game design, which is slightly different to how the concept is interpreted today (Foertsch & Cagnol, 2013). Years later, the first coworking space was launched in 2005 by software engineer Brad Neuberg from San Francisco who wanted to create a space that would cater to independent knowledge workers while offering a place to work with others. Spinuzzi et al. (2019) argue that the last 12 years have seen an exponential growth in coworking environments worldwide. The Global Coworking Growth Study 2019 reported that 2,188 coworking spaces had been launched worldwide in 2018, out of which 1,000 spaces were in the United States. The report projected that the number of coworking spaces are expected to exceed 20,000 in 2020 and will most probably reach 25,968 by the year 2022 (CoworkingResources, 2019).

Some coworking spaces are exclusively created to accommodate specific professional communities such as female entrepreneurs, web developers or anyone who considers themselves an innovator (Johns & Gratton, 2013). For example, a coworking space in New Zealand, called The Workshop Auckland, promote themselves as a space for entrepreneurs with ‘purpose-led businesses’ – an organisation that stands for what they believe in and aims to make a positive impact on society instead of solely chasing profits (Dines, 2018). A study by Johns & Gratton (2013) found that when hubs are organised around a specific type of community, they are able to formulate a culture of their own, which creates clusters of talent professionals. For instance, the perks offered at The Workshop Auckland, such as yoga, meditation and shared lunches, are in line with a culture that the space intends to create through serving a purpose-driven community who prioritises wellness and sustainability.

While coworking might be a positive experience for employees, teleworkers, freelancers and entrepreneurs, one might wonder how it affects the digital nomad lifestyle. In asking this question, a study on coworking spaces by Orel (2019) found that 18 out of 21 digital nomads prefer to use coworking facilities to increase their productivity and evoke an innovative mindset. Many of the interviewees also mentioned that being in a community-based space helped them deal with their feelings of isolation and loneliness, especially when they were in a new environment. Since coworking spaces usually offer social activities and networking opportunities, a majority of the digital nomads interviewed said that these helped to improve their well-being as they felt emotionally supported by like-minded individuals which boosted their work morale too (Orel, 2019).

However, not all digital nomads appear to feel this way. Writer and digital nomad for 20 years, Nicholas Barang (2017) argues that coworking spaces are equivalent to offices that charge people rent. The author wrote in his article that coworking spaces are often not worth the cost, compared to working at home or at a café. Using the city of Chiang Mai as an example, Barang (2017) stated that people would spend $150 USD on coworking spaces and then proceeded to live frugally, when their money could have gone towards a better apartment for a more conducive workspace. The concept of coworking is not a practical one for digital nomads, especially because it can both be both a drain on money as well as a distraction of endless conversations (Barang, 2017). Nevertheless, this perspective has neither stopped the growth of coworking spaces, nor deterred similar businesses from leveraging the popularity and intrigue of the digital nomad lifestyle.

Since digital nomads are a small group and find it difficult to share their experiences, many reach out through online platforms to connect with other nomads (Thompson, 2018a). During her research, Thompson (2018a) discovered that digital nomads themselves would organise conferences, events and short retreats as an attempt to cultivate a digital nomad community. Other entrepreneurs took note of and saw business potential in the positive responses generated by these meetings. This gave rise to the major retreats referred to as coworking retreats, which claim to help digital nomads form friendships, network, and gain potential business opportunities (Thompson, 2018a).

Although the academic literature on coworking retreats appears to be limited, perhaps because of the newness of this industry, there exists a wide array of media articles and blog posts written on the subject. Coworking retreats or *workations* (Pecsek, 2018), as they are sometimes known, are working holidays that involve a mixture of leisure activities, work, travel and self-discovery alongside social and networking opportunities. These retreats usually take place in Asia, South America or countries with poor economies, which makes them more cost efficient to organise (Thompson, 2018a). Interestingly, these locations are also popular tourist destinations because of their beautiful environment, culture and people (Haking, 2017).

In his blog post, Fahle (2016) explained that “the combination of coworking, living and holiday” is an attractive offer for many nomads, entrepreneurs and workers who are looking to meet likeminded people while on vacation. He identified three types of coworking retreats: (i) temporary getaways that last for two weeks, (ii) year-round programs that allow people to join the retreat depending on where the group is, and (iii) fixed locations that arrange the entire retreat including workspace access and accommodation for months (Fahle, 2016). Since the boundaries between work and leisure are generally permeable for digital nomads, coworking retreats are not so much about travelling to beautiful locations but rather an attempt to create a more meaningful lifestyle by connecting with like-minded communities (Fahle, 2018). The author also noticed that many of these retreats would use similar language on their websites such as “interesting community” and “inspiring” to attract experienced and aspiring nomads. This is usually coupled with imagery of individuals working on their laptops overlooking a beach or exploring beautiful locations (Meier, 2019). Such observations are examples of how coworking retreat websites tend to leverage the idealised lifestyle of digital nomads to promote their own services.

While the response to coworking retreats have been largely positive based on news and media articles, (Hargreaves, 2015, Guppta, 2016, McGregor, 2015) researchers like Thompson (2018a) have criticised shared spaces and retreats as being a “constructed community” for nomads who wish to extend their comfortable, privileged, Western lifestyle to another country, while excluding the local people and their culture (p. 2). More on the privileges of the digital nomad demographic will be discussed later in section 2.3.1. In order to investigate the representation of digital nomads on coworking retreat websites, a deeper understanding of the blurred relationship between work and leisure is needed. The following section explores the literature on how digital nomads construct their work identity despite the absence of a work organisation.

2.4 Digital nomads and work identity

Scholars have theorised that an individuals' work identity is developed from the organisations and work environments that they have been involved in. (Bothma et al., 2014, Prester et al., 2019). Others, however, have argued that maintaining a stable work identity is difficult when one lacks a strong attachment to an organisation or workplace (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

In their quest to investigate digital nomads and their emerging identities, Prester et al. (2019) conducted an ethnographic study of 27 digital nomads over a period of nine months. The authors found that the digital nomad work identity was constructed by engaging in two practices: attaining professional freedom and preserving a stable work environment. As opposing as these concepts were, the "continuous interplay" between the two practices was what formed their identities, along with other material, spatial and temporal forces (p. 5). Although digital nomads strive for flexibility and professional autonomy, they also depend on fixed daily structures such as having a strict morning routine or specific desk setup (Prester et al., 2019). This study possibly makes significant contributions to identity work literature by understanding the work-related identities of digital nomads and examining how these work identities are constructed.

Albert & Whetten (1985) defined self-identity as stable characteristics that workers gain from their organisation. However, scholars have criticised this view for overlooking the ways in which identities are constantly changing and evolving based on the cultural norms that we are exposed to such as language, dress codes, beliefs and everyday interactions (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, Ashforth et al. 2008). Therefore, the notion of 'identity work' being used to describe the factors that influence and affect the construction of self-identity has become a focus for a number of academics.

Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) define identity work as "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (p. 1165). Further to this, Watson (2008) suggests that identity work is "the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social identities which pertain to them in the various milieus in which they live their lives" (p. 129). Both parts of this definition; shaping a coherent and distinctive identity and the struggle to form such identity, were impressively demonstrated in a study conducted by Petriglieri et al. (2019) who proved that independent workers experience conflicting emotions such as agony and ecstasy when trying to construct their identities in the absence of an organisation.

Petriglieri et al. (2019) conducted interviews with 65 independent workers residing in the United States and found that independent workers created their own work identities by forming connections to personal routines, physical places, significant people and a broader purpose. Despite not working at a physical office, nearly all participants said they had a deep connection to their physical workspace, whether it was a home office or a seat in business class. The authors explained that this was an example of how independent workers see their work as an "extension of the self" and how having a personal workspace makes them "feel at home in the work" (Petriglieri et al, 2019, p. 144). Having a strong sense of purpose was also a vital part of how independent workers cultivated a work identity since it allowed participants to "invest fully in their work" and reassess their struggles (p. 148).

However, Petriglieri et al. (2019) did not mention if feeling a deeper sense of purpose was correlated to leaving an organisation and becoming an independent worker. The authors concluded that in the absence of stability and restraints offered by organisations, independent workers were left to redefine their work identities; allowing them to produce fulfilling work at the cost of emotional turbulence at times. This study also contributed to identity work literature by establishing that "emotional tension may be necessary to do personalised work" (p. 155). Seeing as this study was only conducted on participants from the United States, the development of personalised work identities in the absence of an organisation or traditional employment could prove to be different for independent workers from other nationalities. This study also did not place much focus on occupational identity, which can be seen as an extension to organisational identity (Ashcraft et al., 2012).

Kielhofner (2008) who coined the term 'occupational identity', defines it as "a composite sense of who one is and wishes to become as an occupational being generated from one's history of occupational participation" (p. 106). Since digital nomads are a subset of independent workers often with no permanent ties to a single organisation, they are likely to be shaped more by their occupational identity rather than organisational identity. According to Phelan & Kinsella

(2012), four theoretical assumptions contribute to the construction of occupational identity: “individual at the core of identity formation, choice, productivity and social dimensions” (p.86). While all four perspectives are important, this study will focus on the two perspectives most relevant to my research on the branding of digital nomad lifestyles on coworking retreat websites, which are how the choices of individuals and their social dimensions play a role in their occupational identity construction.

2.4.1 Choice in occupational identity context

Christiansen (2004) suggested that a chosen occupation that is controlled and goal-directed allows us to express ourselves, thus largely contributing to one’s identity. Choosing a specific occupation might be an individual’s way of striving to be their imagined self and avoiding social rejection, although the matter of choice depends on other factors such as gender, race, socioeconomic status, culture, etc (Christiansen, 2004). The freedom of choice to work while travelling is a core part of the digital nomad identity (Mouratidis, 2018), similar to the significance of choosing leisure occupations when constructing an occupational identity (Phelan & Kinsella, 2012).

However, the theoretical perspective on autonomous occupational choice is largely influenced by the privilege of “white, middle class, American and European culture” (Phelan & Kinsella, 2012, p.87); which is demonstrated through the study participants in most literature involving digital nomads and independent workers (Reichenberger, 2018, Petriglieri et al., 2019, Prester et al., 2019). It is possible that this skewed participant group excludes the perspectives and experiences of digital nomads from different cultures, and at the same time highlights the privileges and inequality that is present in the Western nomadic demographic (Thompson, 2018a).

In her study, Thompson (2018a) discovered that digital nomads usually work from locations such as Thailand, Colombia, Lisbon that endorse Western demographic privileges and enable them to live like tourists by ignoring culture and traditions while distancing themselves from the locals. Through qualitative interviews, the author compared “racially white” nomads to those of colour and deduced that the latter had “more potential awareness of social inequalities and cultural exchanges during their travels” (p. 9). Most of the interviewees did not put much effort into including themselves in the local culture; for instance, many did not attempt to learn another language and rarely ventured far from English-speaking countries (Thompson, 2018).

Based on my literature review, most of the participants interviewed in digital nomad studies tend to be of Western descent, implying that digital nomad demographics are privileged in their upbringing, socioeconomic status and opportunities – which is perhaps what allows them to pursue this professionally autonomous lifestyle in the first place. Sherwin (1998) used a feminist perspective to consider that seemingly autonomous choices in identity construction might be heavily influenced by power differentials in society. The author proposed a relational autonomy approach instead which states that a person should have the "opportunity to develop the skills necessary for making the type of choice in action" (p. 37). In short, Sherwin's (1998) work suggests that individuals should not be given unlimited free choice based on their privilege nor be oppressed with the illusion of choice governed by society, but rather the chance to practice and exercise the skills needed for achieving autonomy.

2.4.2 Social dimensions in occupational identity context

According to Phelan & Kinsella (2012), society is also significant in influencing identities by deciding what occupations are acceptable. For instance, a child who wants to become a doctor is likely to form a positive identity because his chosen occupation is highly approved of by the greater society. Other scholars in this area (Christiansen, 2004, Unruh, 2004) have also claimed that social relationships not only have the power to influence identities but can even shape or produce them. This perspective relies on Social Constructionism Theory, which states that our social and interpersonal interactions influence our knowledge and construct of reality (Galbin, 2014). Neimeyer & Levitt (2001) explained that social constructionism is the meaning given to objects by a society that creates broad systems of discourse and cultural contexts; for example, establishing which occupations are 'socially valued' (Phelan & Kinsella, 2012) and "adaptive to cultural narratives about what is expected of people" (Unruh, 2004, p. 292).

In her study about how individuals construct occupational identity, Unruh (2004) explored the question "So, what do you *do*?", which is usually asked about one's occupational productivity. Unruh asserts that productivity occupations "may be central to occupational identity for many people because so much time, energy, and resources are given to them" (p. 293), adding that young adults are moulded to produce meaningful work. The author narrated the experiences of her research participant, John, whose occupation was gardening but did not want to be defined as a gardener. Unruh (2004) also emphasises that while occupational identity can be shaped or produced by societal influence, individuals may be able to conform or reject the social norms in constructing identity.

Thompson's (2018a) study corroborated Unruh's (2004) claim, stating that digital nomads prefer to define themselves based on their "leisure interests and orientation" - yoga by the beach and hiking through rainforests – rather than their specific profession, such as web developer, photographer, blogger, etc. (p. 29). This prioritisation of leisure in identity construction can be understood by studying the concept of *serious leisure,* which Stebbins (2001) introduced as activities that require more skills, effort and training compared to everyday casual leisure activities that offer no career and are pleasurable for a short duration. Serious leisure activities are comprised of six characteristics: career options, perseverance, strong identification, tangible rewards and a set of beliefs and subculture (Stebbins, 2001). For instance, everyday activities such as watching television, reading and napping are considered casual leisure whereas serious leisure are activities that include amateurism, hobbyist pursuits, self-development and volunteering (Christiansen, 2004). When it comes to digital nomads, leisure and work are inseparably connected (Reichenberger, 2018, Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2017) and their work-leisure balance is what curates their occupational identity, even if their professions have high social value.

By viewing digital nomads through the lens of identity research, one is able to understand how digital nomads might construct their work and lifestyle through professional autonomy, choice, daily structure, leisure, privilege and a strong sense of self-identity. However, misconceptions about an occupational identity can occur and this has been the case with digital nomads who have been perceived as having a lifestyle that represents a "constant vacation" (Sutherland & Hossein-Jarrahi, 2017, p. 97:6). Such a representation can be found in the glorification and commercialising of the digital nomad lifestyle by brands and businesses for marketing and promotional purposes. This topic will be addressed in the section below by examining a holistic approach to branding literature and reviewing studies surrounding the representations of people in promotional materials.

2.5 Commercialising and branding culture

According to O'Reilly (2005), brands often commercialise social and popular culture, representing them in a symbolic manner in order to appeal to viewers and "naturalise their presence" (p. 583). The author explains how analysts have found an increasing trend of organisations, known as "commercial corporates", appropriating culture and cultural phenomena to develop their brands (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 583). These brands not only focus on selling tangible products and services but also carry ideologies and promote a way of life. This section reviews the literature on how brands commercialise lifestyles and socio-cultural phenomena in order to promote their own products and services. These studies are considered here to situate this research about the commercialisation and branding of digital nomad lifestyles on coworking retreat homepages in the wider body of branding literature.

2.5.1 Commercialising culture

In its basic meaning, commercialise means to “manage on a business basis for profit” or to “exploit for profit” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). While economic studies focus optimistically on commercialisation as a process that grows the market of consumerism, Laurell (2014) states that sociologists have focused on the social and moral consequences of commercialisation. For instance, Plasketes (1992) argued that the commercialisation of rock music forced artists who wished to be a part of a cultural expression to become integrated into a highly professionalised, fast-paced industry. Similarly, Laurell’s (2014) study discussed how fashion bloggers in Sweden have commercialised social media, assuming the role of a middleman between fashion organisations and consumers. Over time, these fashion bloggers who started as a group of consumers, have integrated products and brands into their social media spaces, becoming a marketing agent of sorts for existing fashion brands which the author refers to as *co-commercialisation* (Laurell, 2014).

Another example of social life being commercialised is demonstrated by Podemski (2005) who discussed this issue with regards to the tourism industry. In his study, the author explored how the tourism industry has commercialised countries such as India, by constructing their own narratives about the foreign culture, traditions and people and to sell as an experience. For instance, India is often portrayed as a spiritual haven, where people go to ‘find themselves’. Such a myth might cause a mental clash between expectations and reality, resulting in a rejection of the real India. Podemski’s (2005) work highlights the risks of idealised representations, stating that “the knowledge possessed before the travel and gained in a particular environment has a tremendous impact on both what you see and how you see it” (p. 14). While Podemski’s (2005) study focused more on how the tourism industry commercialises India, there is evidence that the tourism industry can turn people into objects of entertainment and distort the image of places, distracting others from the issues that commercialised identities might face.

The Western tourism industry have long been criticised by scholars for their poor representation of local people in promotional and branding materials, especially immigrants and homosexual social groups (Jaworska, 2016). The author sought to investigate the discourse of promotional texts describing 16 popular tourist destinations from countries that had been colonised. By comparing the corpora of popular tourism websites and local tourism boards, Jaworska (2016) discovered that the former often positioned local people as inferior, uncivilised and homogenous without any sense of individuality. Although local boards resisted these representations, they sometimes reinforced them by portraying women in low-status occupations. Supporting Podemski's (2005) study, Jaworska's (2016) analysis of places such as Bali, Thailand, and Dominican Republic found that "indicators of modernity and dynamism are conveniently erased to fit the stereotype of exotic faraway destinations" (p. 104). These studies While my study on coworking retreat websites concentrate on the idealised branding of digital nomadism, instead of local people, it is important to acknowledge that the commercialisation and branding of culture can cause issues of privilege and inequality for the people involved.

Situated between individual bloggers and large economic industries are *commercial corporates* who commercialise social culture to brand their businesses (O'Reilly, 2005). The next section provides a background on branding and how businesses use their brands to promote and commercialise certain lifestyles for their own profit.

2.5.2 Branding culture and lifestyles

While early economic theories suggest that individuals use rational logic to make purchasing decisions, Saviolo & Marazza (2013) argue that the goods people consume are tools that promote self-recognition and attract others who share the same values. Put simply, the human desire to be relevant, have a sense of belonging or stand out from the crowd is the root of all branding activity. In 1960, the American Marketing Association was one of the first organisations to define branding as "a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (Ringold & Weitz, 2007). Since then, there have been many scholarly contributions to this subject with varying perspectives. Some academics state that branding is a way we identify a product, service or business (Aaker, 1995) while others explain that it is how businesses convey messages to their consumers (Morgan & Pritchard, 2002).

Jones (2017) poetically described branding as a concept that "connects ordinary things with a larger idea" (p. 6). By this definition, one can deduce that branding is not only limited to selling tangible products and services but can carry ideologies and promote a way of life. These are referred to as ‘symbol-intensive brands’ or brands that hold higher meanings and value to the consumer instead of just functionality, such as lifestyle brands (Saviolo & Marazza, 2013). In their landmark attempt to understand brands that contribute to a specific lifestyle, Saviolo & Marazza (2013) conducted an in-depth analysis of lifestyle branding.

These authors characterised Lifestyle Brands as brands that “promote social benefits through a point of view on the world that a significant number of people adhere to by becoming customers, because they are represented in terms of attitudes, opinions and interests” (p. 61). Frequently cited examples of brands that sell a lifestyle are usually top tier luxury products such as Gucci, Hermes or Abercrombie & Fitch. However, even more affordable brands such as Nike, Adidas and Virgin Airlines have appealed to customers through their emotional, memorable and engaging branding. Williamson (1978) explained that when a brand signifies a certain lifestyle or promises a new way of life, individuals become linked to the product as it takes on new significance to them. To illustrate this perspective, Goatly & Hiradhar (2016) analysed a print advertisement for AGA cookers in an issue of the Good Housekeeping magazine from 1987. The positioning of a dreamy-looking woman sitting alongside a cooker (as if it was a constant and reliable companion, much like a human partner would) in the simplistic setting of a country cottage suggests a more natural way of life with AGA as a partner.

However, one might wonder how this relates to coworking retreats and their branding of the digital nomad lifestyle. In his blog post, Lifestyle Branding: Engagement and the Total Experience, marketing strategist Roumeliotis (2012) argued that some companies become lifestyle brands when they associate their product with a certain group, such as the digital nomad movement. As an example, the author described how hospitality pioneer Ian Schrager used his knowledge of 80’s pop culture lifestyle to express that hotels were a ‘home away from home’. Later on, Schrager also introduced the concept of boutique hotels and urban resorts, which revolutionised the hospitality industry and remains popular even today (Roumeliotis, 2012).

Businesses have branded their products and services since before the Second World War (Bastos & Levy, 2012), but branding really took off after the growth of mass media such as radio and television. Recent technological developments during this last decade have seen an even bigger expansion of branding through digital means like websites and social media. Apart from leveraging the lifestyle branding of digital nomads, coworking retreats use their websites as a platform to inform, attract and persuade potential customers. To better understand the ways in which coworking retreats use linguistic and visual elements to brand the digital nomad lifestyle, the following section discusses literature and existing studies on online promotional genres.

2.6 Cybergenres and promotional genres

The term *genre* is often associated with the categorisation of different styles of books, movies and music, although genres represent the conventions of writing in any type of text including political speeches and educational material such as textbooks (CanLit Guides, 2016). According to Bhatia (1997), genres are “the use of language in conventionalized communicative settings” (p .630). Genres provide a frame for individuals to understand, interpret and respond to particular communicative events (Paltridge, 2004). Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995) explain that genres influence how we act in certain contexts and social settings such as in a classroom or professional conference room. The rise of the Internet and new communication media has led to the emergence of new genres such as the *cybergenre* (Shepherd & Watters, 1998), which is a genre that exists online. The authors distinguished between two types of cybergenres; *extant*, which are based on existing genres such as newspapers and dictionaries that are being adapted to a digital medium and *novel*, which have developed from cybergenres and do not exist in any other medium, such as the homepage (Shepherd & Watters, 1998). In fact, Dillon & Gushorowski (2000) assert that the personal homepage (PHP) might be the first true digital genre.

While Shepherd & Watters (1999) consider the corporate homepage (CHP) and personal homepage part of the same subgenre of homepages, Marco (2002) argues that CHP and PHP are two distinct genres since the former has multiple purposes including building a company image and providing information in addition to persuading viewers to purchase products while the latter is more for self-promotional purposes and for providing biographic information. In her work, Marco (2002) studied the generic characteristics of CHPs to understand what makes it a unique genre. The author found that CHP is a complex genre which utilises various elements, either borrowed from other genres (slogans, headings, graphics) or completely new (interactive ‘shopping cart’). However, Marco (2002) acknowledges that although the CHP genre is a distinct genre, it shares features with promotional genres such as sales promotion letters and brochures.

As Bhatia (2005) states, promotional genres present a shared communicative purpose of "promoting a product or service to a potential customer" (p. 217). Promotional genres include job applications, sales promotion letters, and advertisements, although they may be realised through more specific distinctions (Bhatia, 2005). For instance, the advertisement genre can be distinguished through the medium of communication such as print advertisements, social media advertisements and television commercials. However, Bhatia (2005) also notes the complexity of promotional genres through the different persuasive strategies used to promote a product or service, using the comparison of straight-line and image-building advertisements, whereby the former rely on product appraisals and the latter aim to persuade customers by establishing credentials (p. 218).

Since coworking retreats are a new and emerging industry, it is not surprising that there is a dearth of scholarly literature in this area. This necessitates me to turn to studies on the hotel and tourism industry to see what can be learned from their investigations of how retreats and other types of lifestyle accommodation are promoted. One such study is Leelertphan's (2017) research on the webpages of boutique hotels in Thailand and New Zealand as a genre. In addition to analysing the lexico-grammatical and visual features of the boutique hotel webpages, the author also applied ethnographic methods by interviewing web designers and hotel operators. The author also took on an ethnographic approach to examine the conventions used by webpage producers from two different cultural backgrounds and compare the similarities and differences between their promotional discourse.

Although both the Thai and New Zealand hotel webpages shared similarities in their communicative purpose (to inform and promote their services), the study found that there were several differences in how the information was structed and presented to viewers. The author also discovered that both used different strategies to achieve their communicative purpose. Whereas New Zealand webpages highlighted the benefit of their services and aimed to build a relationship with guests, Thai webpages focussed more on promoting their facilities and services to viewers. Although this study focusses on the cultural differences and promotional discourse of Thai and New Zealand webpages, Leelertphan's (2017) comprehensive genre analysis provides an insight into how web designers structure their content on a digital platform to inform, attract and persuade viewers. Understanding the ways in which hotel webpages use linguistic features and the professional practices to communicate their purpose could be useful in my investigation of coworking retreat homepages, which share features with cybergenres and promotional genres.

2.7 Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to situate my study by presenting an overview of the existing literature related to the flexibility of work, evolution of workspaces, the construction of work identity, the branding and commercialisation of culture and cybergenres and promotional genres. While many studies have looked at these areas individually, little attention has been paid specifically to the branding of digital nomad lifestyles on websites such as *Remote Year, Unsettled* and *Hacker Paradise* that offer coworking retreat services to location independent workers. Although digital nomads are not the only target audience for these retreats, many of these websites use their homepages to portray an idealised version of digital nomads to attract potential customers. As Müller (2016) stated, academic literature has yet to understand the "emerging social figure of the digital nomad" (p. 346), a gap that my study intends to fill by examining coworking retreat homepages as a specific genre to investigate the ways in which digital nomad lifestyles are branded and idealised.

To date, researchers have studied the genres, visual layouts and lexico-grammatical features of promotional webpages but they have yet to examine how these elements are employed specifically on coworking retreat homepages. This study seeks to identify any patterns that exist within or between these elements in order to answer the primary research question of how digital nomadism has been commercialised by the coworking retreat industry.

Following the pioneering frameworks of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), this study employs genre analysis to examine the linguistic features of coworking retreat websites. Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework is also drawn upon to focus on how the retreats visually present their homepages to create persuasive effect and build a brand relationship with viewers. This study takes on a social constructionism approach by viewing the digital nomad identity and branding as artefacts constructed by society. The next chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks that underpin my research and which shape and inform its method and design.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach

3.1 Introduction

While Chapter 2 provided a contextual background for the research topic, this chapter presents the theoretical concepts that underpin this research about coworking retreat websites. As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of my study is to examine these websites as a specific genre in an attempt to understand how they brand and commercialise the digital nomad lifestyle. The first part of this chapter outlines the social constructionism perspective that I take, indicating how it relates to social identity and branding, both of which are significant in understanding the digital nomad phenomenon and its constructed lifestyle. The second part presents the theories that support the analytical framework that I apply in this study. I start with discussion of genre theory and its origins but then go on to review it in terms of the more recent context of the internet and the rise of new digital genres such as social media platforms, emails and websites. Finally, I consider theory relating to social semiotics, multimodality, and specifically, the grammar of visual design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006) which help inform the design of this research examining the genre of coworking retreat homepages.

3.2 Social constructionism

Galbin (2014) defines social constructionism as "a theory of knowledge of sociology and communication that examines the development of a jointly constructed understanding of the world" (p. 82). In essence, social constructionism focuses on examining how our social and interpersonal interactions influence our construct of reality. According to Clark (2018), this theory was formed partly from Russian psychologist Lee Vygotsky's social development theory which states that people find better and deeper meaning in new information when social interactions are involved. While social constructionism and constructivism are closely related, in the sense that both theories believe that people construct artefacts, there is an important distinction to be made (Galbin, 2014). Constructivism concentrates on an individual's "meaning-making efforts" because of their interactions within a group, whereas social constructionism focuses on the broader systems and cultural contexts that are created through social interactions in a group (Neimeyer & Levitt, 2001, p. 2653).

Language itself, is considered a social construct because, as Bo (2015) argues, its primary function is communicate with other people. Drawing on Lakoff (1987), the author explains that linguistic meaning is derived from the social interaction that humans have with each other, since language is not only constructed by individual experiences, but rather the collective experiences of communities (Bo, 2015). This view was also shared by critical discourse researchers such as Fairclough & Wodak (1997) who view discourse as a practice that is shaped and conditioned by society. These authors, prominent in the field of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), analyse discourse at both a ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ level whereby the former studies the construction of language through written, verbal and visual text and the latter studies the social and cultural ideologies that have influenced discourse.

Although constructivism methods are suitable for studies that focus on an individual’s perception of reality, Neimeyer & Levitt (2001) argue that social constructionism is a more radical approach for studies that aim to “uproot oppressive and marginalising forms of thinking and speaking” (p. 2653). The authors point out that the social constructionism approach can be applied to discourse analysis studies that investigate the persuasive arguments of texts and examine how writers influence others by positioning themselves advantageously (Neimeyer & Levitt, 2001, p. 2653).

My study draws upon the social constructionism approach as it is more suitable for carrying out the research aim which is to examine the persuasive strategies used on coworking retreat homepages to commercialise digital nomad lifestyles. However, some understanding of constructivism is necessary, especially since it was an approach adopted in Reichenberger’s (2018) work on digital nomadism.

To unpack the definition of digital nomadism and the motivations behind their lifestyle involving work and travel, Reichenberger (2018) applied a constructivism approach with qualitative methods. As I mentioned earlier in section 2.1, the author used semi-structured interviews to understand how digital nomads construct and interpret their identity through their own experiences. While Reichenberger’s (2018) research concentrates on how digital nomads perceive their own reality as individuals, this research focuses more on how broader social systems such as coworking retreat businesses profit and promote their services by idealising digital nomad lifestyles.

The social constructionism perspective is valuable in my study’s attempt to uncover what the possible impacts of branding and commercialising of digital nomadism are. In the next section, I discuss related theories in social identity to understand the identity construction of digital nomads.

3.2.1 Digital nomads and social identity

Applying the concept of social identity assists in understanding how people or groups such as digital nomads, are constructed based on certain characteristics and attributes. Social identity theory (SIT) was first introduced by psychologist Tajfel (1978) and later developed by Tajfel & Turner (1979). This theory proposed that individuals categorised themselves as belonging to certain groups based on their knowledge of that group and their emotional attachment or sense of belonging to that group (Trepte & Loy, 2017).

SIT explores the concept of ‘ingroups’ and ‘outgroups’, the former being one that individuals self-categorise themselves as belonging to and the latter being one that individuals do not see themselves as a member of (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, Trepte & Loy, 2017). For instance, Benwell & Stokoe (2006) explain that in an academic setting, a group of teachers may perceive themselves to be members of an ingroup but view their students as the ‘out-group. Individuals strive to make favourable comparisons between their ingroups and outgroups to maintain a positive social identity, which can increase self-esteem (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) whereas a negative social identity “is followed by ongoing competition, social mobility behaviours, or cognitive strategies to create a more positive image for the in-group” (Trepte & Loy, 2017, p. 1).

Social identity theory and its sub-processes such as social categorisation and social comparison have often been used to discuss media effects (Trepte & Loy, 2017). The self-categorisation theory (SCT) proposed by Turner (1999) is closely linked to SIT, the difference being that SCT focuses on individuals who categorise themselves into groups in a given context where a sequence of values and interpretations are shared. On the other hand, SIT depends on an individual’s group membership association (Trepte & Loy, 2017, Trimoldi, 2018).

Trepte, Schmitt & Dienlin (2016) introduced the social identity model of media effects which posits that when individuals are exposed to media content, they automatically categorise themselves into an in-group then proceed to compare themselves to boost their self-esteem. This instance is exemplified in Weaver’s (2011) study of why movies with Black cast members often performed poorly with large audiences. The author found that most race-neutral roles in movies were portrayed by White actors, whereas Black actors were usually cast in films with race-related themes. Therefore, White regular movie viewers might not have interest in watching such movies because they consider those themes irrelevant to their in-group whereas nonregular viewers might not make that association. Interestingly, Weaver (2011) discovered that the casts' skin colour had no influence on interest, rather the movie themes were what influenced White viewers.

Research that explores the concept of social identity with regards to digital nomads have only recently emerged. In her study, Trimoldi (2018) conducted qualitative interviews with digital nomads in order to examine the self-categorisation and characteristics of digital nomads. Her study found that digital nomads categorised themselves based on their shared values, lifestyles and struggles but also created subcategorizations based on goals and priorities such as generating a passive income (Trimoldi, 2018). This is interesting, considering that the digital nomads interviewed in Reichenberger's (2018) study categorised their identity based on their commitment to mobility.

However, scholars are observing the commercialisation of the digital nomad identity as an escape from the traditional Western work life and is frequently used in advertising as Mouratidis (2018) stated. This is proved by the fact that more people are interested in pursuing this lifestyle and being part of the digital nomad community (Mouratidis, 2018). Furthermore, new businesses such as coworking spaces, co-living environments and coworking retreats are selling the digital nomad lifestyle, or the idealised version of it to aspiring nomads for a profit (Thompson, 2018a). With regards to this perspective, this study focuses on how identity can become part of the branding process through commercialisation and advertising. The idea that the digital nomad identity can be socially constructed as a 'brand' is discussed in the next section.

3.2.2 Branding and commercialising social identities

As stated earlier in section 2.4, branding presents the identity of a product, service or business but can also be a way of communicating with customers (Aaker, 1995, Morgan & Pritchard, 2002). In doing so, Benwell & Stokoe (2006) suggest that it is common for advertisers to commodify identities through acts of consumption, a process commonly used to convey a message to their audience. The authors referenced scholars such as Bauman (1993) and Baudrillard (1998) in proving that individuals show their belonging to a particular social group through their consumption practices and eventually become what they consume. These accounts view consumers as social groups that are controlled and subjected to the forces of advertising, although it is important to consider that consumers are active, smart and autonomous in their decisions, especially with the easy accessibility to technology and media (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

While the perspective that consumers have little control over their consumption and commodified identities is debatable (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), it is important to recognise that in a sense, all brands are socially constructed texts which “mediate meanings between and amongst consumers and producers” (O’Reilly, 2005, p. 582). Producers of these texts include what O’Reilly (2005) refers to as commercial corporates, who use and exploit social culture for business and promotional purpose. These commercial corporations embed their beliefs and ideology through branding and marketing messages to “naturalise their presence” until their products or services become part of the culture (Klein, 2000).

For instance, brands such as Coca-Cola and McDonald’s have used their products to put their mark on their producers and consumers by branding what people consume during their everyday activities such as eating and drinking. In doing this, O’Reilly (2005) suggests that branding is not merely the exchange of relationships, but rather an “ideological myopia which operates in the service of capital” (p. 586). Branding goes beyond a product or service to promote a way of life or even brand the type of customer that advertisers are interested in targeting. It has been observed that the owners of coworking retreats purposely construct an idealised version of digital nomadism on their homepages to promote their own programmes and services. These idealisations often reinforce the myth that digital nomads work from the beach, holidaying from one exotic destination to the next and living a life with full of excitement and adventure (Sutherland & Hossein-Jarrahi, 2017, Didier, 2019).

However, there is very little scholarly literature that explores the promotional nature of the homepage genre. I believe that it is through investigating the commonalities among the persuasive techniques employed on these homepages that insights into how digital nomad lifestyles are branded can be revealed. This also requires consideration of genre theory and its key concepts, which I discuss in the following sections.

3.3 Genre Theory

Genres traditionally focused on “the study of situated linguistic behaviour” and genre analysis arose from identifying and exclusively categorising structural patterns of texts (Bhatia, 2002, p. 4, Johns, 2002). However, other scholars challenge this perspective by viewing genre analysis as not only the study and classification of texts but rather as "typified acts of communication" (Hyland, 2013, p. 1) or “typical forms of utterances” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 63) that are formed by social constructs (Leelertphan, 2017). Genres reflect the texts and speech influenced by social contexts while providing a frame for individuals to understand, interpret and respond to particular communicative events (Johns, 2002, Paltridge, 2004, Hyland, 2013). They also provide writers with a "socially recognizable way to make his or her intentions known" (Miller, 1984, p. 157). Genre theory, however, views genre as a way to reflect or respond to recurring situations (Hyland, 2013). As Bhatia (2002) declared, genre knowledge is important for:

> "investigating instances of conventionalised or institutionalised textual artefacts in the context of specific institutional and disciplinary practices, procedures and cultures in order to understand how members of specific discourse communities construct, interpret and use these genres to achieve their community goals and why they write them the way they do." (p. 6)

The main difference between CDS and genre analysis is that the former concentrates on the "properties associated with the construction of the textual product" whereas the latter emphasises the "interpretation or use of such a product" (Bhatia, 2015, p. 10). Genre theory can be applied to demystify the way professional communities use linguistic strategies to achieve their institutional purpose and could potentially reveal socio-critical and cultural issues of typical institutional practices (Bhatia, 2002). Knowledge on genre theory is significant to carrying out my research on the ways in which coworking retreats use their homepages as a platform to promote their services by commercialising the digital nomad phenomena. Before discussing how the Internet and new communications media have led to the rise of new digital genres, I first provide more detail about the main traditions of genre theory and its origins.

3.3.1 Genre traditions

There are three main approaches to genre analysis, namely English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS). While each of these genre traditions have distinct purposes and focus, the boundaries between them have gradually overlapped (Leelertphan, 2017). This study draws on the ESP and SFL traditions, as they are most relevant to examining the communicative purposes and textual elements featured on coworking retreat homepages. While the RGS tradition considers the experiences and motives of text producers and communication experts (Leelertphan, 2017), its ethnographic approach could not be carried out due to the scope of my study, which is limited to understanding the structure, linguistic and visual elements of coworking retreat homepages.

The ESP approach, based on Swales' (1990) genre theory, was introduced to identify the main grammatical elements of scientific communication. According to Swales (1990), genres are "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (p. 58). Communicative purposes are important to identify within a text because they influence the choice of language that writers use to execute their intentions and shape the strategies applied to make the writing more effective (Swales, 1990, Bhatia, 1993).

ESP prioritises the relationship between rhetorical structures and their lexico-grammatical features (Dudley-Evans, 2000) as it mainly focuses on genre in language learning and has been applied to health and medical texts (Suhardja, 2008). An example of the ESP approach used in genre studies can be observed in Swales' (1981) identification of the move structure in scientific articles. Moves are referred to as "functional components or semantic units" which are used to identify the writer's purposes (Upton & Connor, 2001, p. 5) and steps are used to express each move (Dudley-Evans, 2000). According to Swales & Feak (2003), a move is "a defined and bounded communicative act that is designed to achieve one main communicative objective (p. 35).

The move structure model, Creating A Research Space (CARS), presented by Swales (1990) was initially proposed for academic genres, although other researchers have since adapted and found variations to suit different disciplines depending on their rhetorical purpose (Dudley-Evans, 2000). In his attempt to identify the communicative purpose of promotional genres, Bhatia (1993) drew inspiration from the CARS model to create his own move structure framework for sales promotion letters and job applications. Later on, Bhatia (2004) produced another variation of his model to define rhetorical moves that are usually used in hard-sell print advertisements.

As another genre tradition, the SFL approach was pioneered by Halliday (1985), who considers the social context within which language is used. Halliday (1985) views language as a number of systems that "constitute human culture" (p. 4) and is similar to the ESP approach in the sense that both believe that language is concerned with situational contexts and functions (Suhardja, 2008, Leelertphan, 2017). Since the ESP and SFL traditions tend to place greater emphasis on the communicative purpose of genres through the investigation of structural patterns and grammatical features (Leelertphan, 2017), this thesis employs both of these traditions to identify the rhetorical structures and linguistic elements of the genre of coworking retreat homepages.

The SFL approach recognises three metafunctions[1]; the ideational metafunction, which conveys ways to reflect on our experiences and reality, the interpersonal metafunction, which describes the relationships among language users and communicative events and the textual metafunction, which refers to the cohesion and organisation of writing (Imtihani, 2010, Manca, 2016). These metafunctions, it is argued, work simultaneously to establish a relationship between language use or register and its social context. Register refers to the “configuration of semantic patterns” or lexico-grammatical patterns that are used to define the characteristics of texts, which are based on social contexts (Halliday, 1978, p. 23, Leelertphan, 2017).

Furthermore, Halliday (1978) draws parallels between the three metafunctions and the register variables, known as field, tenor and mode. Field is connected to the ideational metafunction and refers to the symbolic activity that is taking place within a social context whereas tenor shares similarities with the interpersonal metafunction as both explore the relationship between participants and their roles. Lastly, mode refers to the rhetorical channel of communication and determines the relevance of language to its environment (Suhardja, 2008, Imtihani, 2010, Leelertphan, 2017, Manca, 2016).

SFL has previously been applied to the lexico-grammatical analysis of scientific writing as conducted by Halliday & Martin (1993) in which the authors identified the textual features that were specific to scientific discourse and found that the complexity of scientific articles was not only due to the technical jargon, but also the grammar that was used (Suhardja, 2008). Apart from scientific research, the SFL genre analysis approach has also been extended by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) and been applied to their influential multimodal framework, which focuses on the visual design of various images including textbooks, advertisements, websites and so on.

The final school of genre theory to note, RGS, reconceptualises genre as a social action and is inspired by Miller (1984) who posited that genre is “typified actions based in recurrent situations” (p. 151). In this tradition, genre is explored as the “social dynamics and social constitution of non-literary forms of writing and speaking” (Artemeva, 2004, p. 6). This means that rather than focussing primarily on the text, RGS aims to present the relationship between the text and the intentions of the writers and readers (Suhardja, 2008). RGS theorists often use ethnographic methods such as interviews to understand how texts influence and are influenced by social actions and situations (Hyland, 2002, Artemeva, 2004). However, as I mentioned earlier, this study does not take on this approach due to the scope of my research.

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[1] Metafunctions are a group of interconnected semantic systems that explain how language works (Halliday, 1985).

3.3.2 Hybridisation of genres

While early studies of genre examine the more quantitative aspects of language through the frequency of lexico-grammatical features within a text (Leelertphan, 2017), later scholars began viewing genre as increasingly dynamic and complex, thus requiring more flexible approaches (Bhatia, 2004, Paltridge, 2012). The rise of the Internet has caused a plethora of new genres to emerge and made it possible for scholars to apply genre analysis to electronic texts (Villanueva et al., 2018). In his book *World of written discourse: A genre-based view* (2004), Bhatia describes genre as the

> "…language use in a conventionalized communicative setting
> in order to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of
> a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural
> forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical
> as well as discoursal resources" (p. 23).

Bhatia (2004) asserts that social factors heavily contribute to the construction of genres and believes that it is important to go beyond the structural and linguistic study of texts in order to fully comprehend the socio-cultural aspects of genre. In recognizing that genres are susceptible to adjustments and constant evolution, Bhatia (2004) put forth the concept of "genre hybridization" (p. 10).

Genre hybridization highlights the versatility of genres by acknowledging that there may be an overlap of communicative purposes between certain genres (Bhatia, 2014). An example of this is the Corporate Home Page (CHP) genre, which Marco (2002) states is a

> "…multi-purpose genre used to construct the company's identity and image,
> by giving selected information related to the company, and to persuade
> potential consumers to use the company products or services" (p. 41).

Since my study seeks to identify the features that establish coworking retreat homepages as a specific genre, it is important to acknowledge that this genre shares similar features with cybergenres and promotional genres. Bauman (1999) defines Internet genres or cybergenres as "electronic texts which are implemented on the Internet" and explains that they have three interconnected features. Firstly, Internet texts can be accessed by anyone with a browser and password, second, these texts can be accessed immediately by both reader and writer and lastly, Internet texts are highly collaborative and invite real time engagement (Bauman, 1999). Unlike most non-digital genres, cybergenres also consider the functionality and medium on which texts are produced, rather than solely focussing on the content and form of texts themselves (Shepherd & Watters, 1998). As I mentioned earlier in section 2.5, Shepherd & Watters (1999) distinguished between extant and novel genres, asserting that novel genres will continue to emerge as the Internet and technology develop over time.

On the other hand, promotional genres present a shared communicative purpose of "promoting a product or service to a potential customer" (Bhatia, 2005, p. 217). Promotional genres include job applications, sales promotion letters, and advertisements, although they may be realised through more specific distinctions (Bhatia, 2005). For instance, the advertisement genre can be distinguished through the medium of communication such as print advertisements, social media advertisements and television commercials. However, Bhatia (2005) also notes the complexity of promotional genres through the different persuasive strategies used to promote a product or service, using the comparison of straight-line and image-building advertisements, whereby the former rely on product appraisals and the latter aim to persuade customers by establishing credentials (p. 218).

Some scholars state that the core attribute of a genre lies in its communicative purpose, and that particular purpose influences the genre structure, style and content (Swales, 1990, Bhatia, 1993, Bateman, 2004). Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) observe genres as "dynamic rhetorical forms" that should consider the recurrent social situation and discourse community that owns the genre (p. 4). On the other hand, Fairclough (1992) believes that genres should not only be limited to specific texts but should consider the mode of which texts are produced, distributed and consumed.

Coworking retreat homepages may share similar communicative purposes with the CHP genre, which Marco (2002) suggests are: building a positive image of the company; introducing and offering products; strengthening the relationship with the customer; asking and giving information about the page itself. However, the retreat homepages also exist to promote a product or service, much like promotional genres (Bhatia, 2005). As Bhatia (2014) states, "genres cut across disciplines" (p. 36) and are versatile, which allow them to shape and generalise different discourses, including promotional discourses. Therefore, as a novel genre that shares similar features with promotional genres and cybergenres, I propose that coworking retreat homepages aim to achieve three communicative purposes: (i) building a relationship with potential customers, (ii) introducing and promoting services, and (iii) persuading potential customers.

The development of the digital age has influenced the rise of new, hybrid genres which also offers opportunities to advance the theoretical concepts of genre theory. This is especially so when it comes to the multiple new modes of communication made possible through the affordances of the internet which can contribute to the social construction of identities and lifestyles for example. This study focuses on the coworking retreat homepage as a novel genre that brands digital nomad lifestyles to achieve its promotional purposes. Therefore, the following section introduces multimodality, and its related aspects of social semiotics and visual grammar as an important aspect when investigating this genre. This is relevant as the analytical design of my study incorporates a visual as well as linguistic analysis (see Chapter 5).

3.4 The concept of multimodality

The multimodal phenomenon, outlined by Bateman (2008, p. 1) as "the simultaneous orchestration of diverse presentational modes" utilises the social semiotics theory introduced by Halliday (1978) as a theoretical basis to explore the relationship between language and its contextual meaning. Social semiotics stems from Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach which operates from the premise that language is systematically organised and related to social contexts (Imtihani, 2010). However, the social semiotics approach later developed by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) does not limit itself to the interpretation of language, but rather explores how meanings are derived from various modes including pictures, music and interactive elements (Tomaskova, 2015, Manca, 2016).

Kress (2009), who defines mode as "a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning" (p. 54), uses this approach to not only provide a general distinction between verbal, visual and audio resources, but to treat specific characteristics of modes such as gestures and layout as individual features. The multimodal approach aims to fulfill the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions based on the SFL perspective by analysing modes in their capacity to represent the reality of the world, the relationship between communicative participants and the organisation of both as a cohesive message (Kress, 2009, p. 59).

As Tomaskova (2015) posited, technology has shifted the way genres are structured by accelerating the application of multimodality in communication and integrating multimodal forms in an increasing number of texts. The notion of social semiotic multimodality has been adopted by researchers studying online promotional genres such as tourist brochures, (Hiippala, 2012): tourism websites, (Manca, 2016): boutique hotel webpages (Leelertphan, 2017). In my study, I examine the persuasive efforts of coworking retreat homepages by exploring elements of multimodality such as the linguistic elements and visual design. While interactive features and user functionality are usually considered in homepage genres, the scope of this thesis does not enable me to investigate the user experience. However, there is potential for this to be included in future research. The next section explains the social semiotic framework proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) which informed the analytical design of my study when it came to my visual analysis of coworking retreat homepages.

3.4.1 Theorising image as visual grammar

Images in online advertising are just as important as verbal text, in the sense that both play a role in promoting the product by attracting and persuading the target audience (Leelertphan, 2017). According to Najafian & Ketabi (2011), a social semiotic analysis of multimodal communication can help researchers reveal the hidden ideological values behind advertisements and increase the critical awareness of readers. The authors believe that the linguistic and visual choices made by advertisers are purely intentional and emphasise that critical studies of promotional materials are important to "improve individual's control over the messages they send and receive" (p. 6).

Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) describe social semiotics as a way to understand how text producers communicate meaning within specific social settings. Social semiotics focuses on "sign-making rather than sign use" and posits that individuals rely on their social environment and cultural resources to express meanings in their verbal and visual communication (Kress, 2010, p. 54). Based on this theory of the Hallidayan school, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) argued that visual structures are similar to linguistic structures in the sense that both display forms of social interaction and contain cultural interpretation. This led them to propose their pioneering multimodal framework, *The Grammar of Visual Design*, which includes a comprehensive analysis of contemporary visual design elements from Western cultures and has widely impacted scholarly research and literature. Employing the Hallidayan social semitoic approach as a framework, the authors focus on three models for understanding visual images: *representational meaning, interactive meaning* and *compositional meaning* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The representational meaning refers to the visual role of the image in terms of what is being represented and how the depicted participants are being portrayed (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). These participants may be people, objects, places or animals and may perform actions to create meaning in the images (Leelertphan, 2017). It is important to note that in semiotic acts, there may be two types of participants, namely represented participants and interactive participants. The represented participants refer to the "subject matter" that is being represented in the images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 48) whereas the interactive participants are those who view the images.

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) identified two types of images with reference to the representational meaning: narrative patterns and conceptual patterns. Narrative images are realised by elements that are performing a particular action or featuring a change of events. Vectors are elements "that form an oblique line, often a quite strong, diagonal line" and can be represented by humans or objects performing an action (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 59). Narrative images may be realised by four types of processes, namely action process, reactional process, speech and mental process, and conversion process (Manca, 2016).

Conceptual images, on the other hand, lack the use of vectors to create action and often feature no interaction between the visual elements (Yang & Zhang, 2014). For instance, a static image of a telescope in a textbook would be considered a conceptual image due to its timeless and static representation. Conceptual images are usually more generalised and static and may be realised by three processes: classificational, analytical and symbolic process (Manca, 2016).

In understanding the interactive meaning of visuals, the focus lies in observing the relationship and interactions between the represented participants and viewers (Leelertphan, 2017). Three concepts can be used to characterise the degree of interactive meaning in visual images, namely contact, social distance and perspective. Contact refers to the gaze shared between represented participants and can be considered a demand image or offer image. The former occurs when participants make direct eye contact with the viewer and the latter takes place when there the represented participants have contact with each other (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The interactive meaning of visuals can also be established through social distance, which addresses "how close the participants are depicted in relation to the viewers" (Leelertphan, 2017). Social distance can be established through close up, medium and long shots. Manca (2016) suggest that close up shots convey a sense of intimacy with viewers, whereas medium shots are more objective and represent social interactions. In contrast, long shots can make participants seem detached and are usually used to portray strangers or landscapes (Leelertphan, 2017).

The last concept of interactive meaning, perspective, explores the attitude of the represented participants through the positioning of angles that are vertical, frontal or oblique (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). These aspects are important to consider during a visual analysis as they can reveal power relations between the images and viewers (Leelertphan, 2017). Stoian (2015) suggests that vertical angles can either be shot low, to assign power to the represented participants, high, to give power to the viewers or at eye level to represent equality. Horizontal angles that are frontal usually indicate involvement, while oblique angles indicate detachment (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Finally, the compositional meaning analyses the layout of information, saliency and framing of visual structures. This visual meaning displays the importance of information positioning and contributes to an understanding of how text producers persuade their viewers through their promotional messaging. The compositional meaning is established through three characteristics: information value, framing and saliency (Stoian, 2015). Information value refers to the organisation of visual elements in a composition and concentrates on three aspects, namely left and right, top and bottom, and centre and margin. Meanwhile, the framing of visual elements can be distinguished through real or imaginary lines that separate or unite visual features (Moerdisuroso, 2014). Finally, the system of salience as a compositional meaning "creates a hierarchy of elements in the composition" and is generally achieved through size, colour contrasts, sharpness of focus and more (Manca, 2016, p. 33).

Based on the theory of visual design that I have outlined above, it is evident that the study of visual elements in a promotional context is just as relevant as analysing language because both can play a persuasive role, albeit from a different medium (Manca, 2016). As a multimodal platform of communication, websites have the potential to manipulate various types of linguistic, audio-visual and interactive elements to influence potential customers into real clients (Cheng, 2016). Therefore, the framework of visual grammar becomes integral to this genre study in understanding how coworking retreat homepages visually construct their idealisations of digital nomad lifestyles for promotional purposes.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the theories that both guide my research design and provide a theoretical context for this thesis. The social constructionism approach that this study adopts views on the notion that reality is constructed and that this applies to the construction of group and individual identities of digital nomads. I also outlined how this approach is used to explain that socio-cultural influences play a part in branding through texts, which themselves are socially and culturally constructed for commercial purposes. These discussions therefore strengthen the notion that verbal and visual texts play a powerful role in not only identity categorisation but also the beliefs and attitudes held by communities.

Key concepts of genre theory, with emphasis on the ESP and SFL genre traditions were then discussed to highlight the importance of communicative purpose and linguistic analysis in genre, which has been widely applied in scholarly research on linguistic and branding studies (see Pollach, 2006, Tomaskova, 2015, Leelertphan, 2017, Villanueva et al., 2018). Furthermore, this chapter explored the emergence of new genres such as cybergenres as well as promotional genres, both of which share features with the coworking retreat homepage genre. Finally, I drew on theories of visual grammar, social semiotics and multimodality in genre, as developed by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), including a brief description of the three metafunctions: representational, interactive and compositional meaning to further inform the multimodal nature of this study. In the next chapter, I proceed to discuss the methodological and research design tools that I use to conduct the multimodal genre analysis of coworking retreat homepages.

Chapter 4: Method and Design

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a description of the methodological approaches and research design that I use to address the research questions. As indicated in Chapter 1, these questions are concerned with the genre of coworking retreat homepages and the ways in which they commercialise the digital nomad lifestyle. This chapter is divided into four sections, based on the order in which these decisions were made: methodological approaches, data collection, analytical frameworks and limitations and strengths of my methods. The methodological approaches provide a brief outline of corpus linguistics and multimodal analysis, explaining why they were selected for this genre study. Next, I will then describe the process of data collection, including the ways in which co-working retreat website data was selected to build a corpus for analysis. I then illustrate the details of the three analytical frameworks employed in this genre study: move/step analysis, lexico-grammatical analysis and visual design analysis. This chapter concludes by evaluating the strengths and limitations of these approaches.

4.2 Methodological approaches

This study adopts a genre analysis approach in order to invesitgate the ways in which coworking retreats as professional communities use textual artefacts to promote their services, and in doing so, commercialise digital nomad lifestyles. Coworking retreats often use websites, specifically homepages, to carry out their communicative purposes which I propose are: (i) building a relationship with potential customers, (ii) introducing and promoting services, and (iii) persuading potential customers. Due to the complex and multimodal nature of many emergent cybergenres such as coworking retreat homepages, this study requires a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. These methods include corpus linguistics and a multimodal approach.

First, a corpus-based approach is employed to empirically gather data and analyse the linguistic characteristics of the coworking retreat homepage genre. According to Tognini-Bonelli (2001), the corpus-based paradigm can be used to explore a hypothesis or claim by using data to validate, refute or refine it. The main reason for choosing this approach in my study is to detect frequent patterns of language within a number of texts that identify the common promotional strategies used by coworking retreat homepages. These strategies might also reveal any ideologies or socio-cultural issues embedded on the homepages. Rather than relying on my observations that coworking retreats brand digital nomad lifestyles for their own commercial purposes, I follow Baker’s (2006) view that the empirical aspect of a corpus approach may also help in reducing researcher bias by offering an objective viewpoint.

Since this study examines the retreat homepages as a novel genre with many modes of communication, it is necessary to employ a multimodal approach The multimodal approach in cybergenres not only incorporates an analysis of communicative purposes and linguistic features in a text, but also considers the role of the medium in characterising a particular genre (Askehave & Nielson, 2005). For instance, the medium of cybergenres which enable the mode of *hypertexts*; texts with hyperlinks that allow viewers to navigate and access the other contents of the website through internal links (Askehave & Nielson, 2005). This approach was selected to inform my move/step analysis whereby I discuss the role of digital multimodal elements such as hypertexts in the genre of coworking retreat homepages. Additionally, the multimodal approach was used in the study of visual design elements such as images and homepage layout to examine the branding of digital nomad lifestyles.

4.2.1 Corpus linguistics

Corpus linguistics is a methodology that can be utilised by scholars to provide a certain outlook on language (Lindquist, 2009). More specifically, corpora are large, electronically encoded text samples that are used to measure a language, “revealing linguistic patterns and frequency information” (Baker, 2006, p. 2). The use of corpora first started around the early 1960s, but only became an increasingly prevalent method after the emergence of personal computers during the 1980s. Since then, corpus linguistics has become widely popular and increasingly influential to genre studies, as demonstrated by Biber et al. (1998), who used corpora to suggest that genres contain variations within themselves and could be defined in terms of degree of complexity. Scholars such as Hiippala (2014) have also used corpus tools to identify the generic structure that exists in tourist brochures. Furthermore, corpus-based techniques not only offer insight to general lexical and grammatical features of language, but also assist in analysing the cultural context in which these texts are produced (Upton & Connor, 2001). Therefore, this study employs corpus linguistics to identify any frequent or unique words that may appear on the coworking retreat homepages to investigate the branding of digital nomad lifestyles.

4.2.2 Multimodal approach

This approach, known as multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) studies the various ways in which individuals create meaning and interact with one another beyond the medium of spoken and written language (Leelertphan, 2017). These include multimodal texts such as images, sound, music, gestures and symbolism (Prini, 2017). As I mentioned in section 3.4, MDA draws upon Halliday’s (1978) social semiotics approach and was built upon by Kress & van Leewen (2006) in their principles of visual design analysis, which I employ as an analytical framework in this research. With the rise of digital communication technologies, MDA studies have extended to examining communicative role of other types of modes such as hypertexts (Askehave & Neilson, 2005). There are two types of multimodal texts, according to Francesconi (2014): space-based texts, such as writing, paintings and postcards, which convey meaning through visual and verbal texts and time-based texts, such as commercials and dance, which combine other modes to convey a message over time. Hypertexts are a combination of both (Manca, 2016). The genre of coworking retreat homepages combines various semiotic resources including language, visuals and hypertext to achieve their promotional purposes. Therefore, I decided that a multimodal approach was best suited to examine how digital nomad lifestyles are branded on coworking retreat homepages. The following section discusses my data collection process and for building the corpus and conducting a visual design analysis.

4.3 Data collection

This research analyses the homepages of 45 coworking retreat websites. Homepages were the focus of my analysis because as the introductory page of websites, they function as the “central point of access for visitors” (Grodach, 2009, p. 184) and are usually the first point of contact for the viewers. Homepages also aim to present an overall identity of the brand and are where most businesses attempt to attract potential customers. Therefore, analysing the retreat homepages would enable me to identify the persuasive techniques used to convey an idealised digital nomad lifestyle in order to promote the retreat services.

These coworking retreat websites were identified following an extensive Google search, using keywords such as “coworking retreats”, “digital nomad retreats” and “nomad retreats” and selecting the top results. I also referred to websites such as LaunchParty (https://launchparty.org/) and Nomadpick (https://www.nomadpick.com/) that curate content for digital nomads, including a list of the most popular and well-rated retreats. Due to the fact that coworking retreats are a relatively new concept, only 50 could be identified at the time of my search. Of these, 45 retreats were found to have their own websites while the other five operated through social media pages such as Facebook or through informational websites dedicated to digital nomads such as Nomadlist (https://nomadlist.com/). To obtain as much data as possible at the time of study, coworking retreat websites from all over the world were selected for this study with the only criteria being that the default copy must be written in English. A majority of these retreats were located in Southeast Asia and South America, while some were organised in regions of European and South Africa. Following Fahle’s (2016) observation, the retreats can be sorted into three types:

1. Temporary getaways that hosted up to 30 people for a duration of one to two weeks.
2. All-year programs that allow people to choose a destination and join as they please, depending on where the group is.
3. Fixed locations coupled with coworking spaces that organise accommodation as well as activities for the group.

Naturally, this led to a different pricing method for each retreat depending on what they offered; most retreats charge participants based on the length of the retreat programme, some use membership or package deals, and others charge participants per programme. However, on average the cost of most retreats is a minimum of $2000USD per month, excluding the cost of food and other expenses such as entry tickets at tourist attractions. Although these retreats mainly cater to digital nomads, they do not discourage other location independent workers such as freelancers, entrepreneurs and start-ups from applying. There are also retreats that are specifically organised for women, or people over the age of 50 (I will elaborate more on the niche of coworking retreats later on in Chapter 6). It is also important to point out that genres, especially cybergenres, are fluid and with the affordances of digital technologies constantly undergo development which makes them prone to change (Tomaskova, 2015). Therefore, it was necessary for me to collect and save the data for my analysis for the specific time period between September 2019 and December 2019. A list of the coworking retreat websites that were identified and selected for this thesis is presented, along with their web addresses and year that they were founded in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1.

List of coworking retreat websites that were identified and selected for this dataset.

Coworking Retreat Websites	Web Address	Year Founded
Project Getaway	www.projectgetaway.com	2012
DNX Camp	www.dnxcamp.com	2012
Coworkation	www.coworkation.com	2016
Hubud	www.hubud.com	2012
Unsettled	www.beunsettled.co	2016
WiFi Tribe	www.wifitribe.co	2016
Remote Year	www.remoteyear.com	2014
The Remote Life	www.theremotelife.com	2016
Wifly Nomads	www.wiflynomads.com	2017
Nomad Academy	www.nomad.academy	2016
Institute of Code	www.instituteofcode.com	2015
Coworking Camp	www.coworking.camp	2013
Refuga	www.refuga.com	2012
Adventurous Life	www.adventurouslife.io	2018
Pangea Dreams	www.pangeadreams.com	2016
The Remote Trip	www.theremotetrip.com	2016
B-Digital Nomad	www.b-digitalnomad.com	2016
Venture with Impact	www.venturewithimpact.org	2016
Digital Nomad Girls	www.digitalnomadgirls.com	2015
Nomad House	www.nomadhouse.io	2015
Nomad Cruise	www.nomadcruise.com	2015
Coboat	www.coboat.org	2015
Live Work Fit	www.liveworkfit.com	2016
Edumadic	www.edumadic.com	2016
Unleash Surf	www.unleashsurf.com	2017
Sunny Office	www.sunny-office.com	2013
Be Remote	www.be-remote.com	2018
Pandora Hub	www.pandorahub.co	2015
Coconat	www.coconat-space.com	2017
Remote Explorers	www.remoteexplorers.com	2017
Copass Camps	www.copass.camps.org	2014
Outsite	www.outsite.co	2015
Sun and Co	www.sun-and-co.com	2015
Work Wanderers	www.workwanderers.com	2018
Bright Tribe	www.brighttribe.net	2018
Alpine Coworking	www.alpinecoworking.com	2015
Digital Outposts	www.digitaloutposts.com	2015

Cowork Paradise	www.coworkparadise.com	2015
Hacker Paradise	www.hackerparadise.org	2014
Roam	www.roam.co	2015
Mokrin House	www.mokrinhouse.com	2016
Surf Office	www.surfoffice.com	2014
Active Workation	www.activeworkation.com	2016
Cofounders Retreat	www.cofoundersretreat.com	2016
Tribe Wanted	www.tribewanted.com	2014

4.3.1 Building the corpus

The coworking retreat homepage corpus (henceforth CRH), built from the texts of 45 coworking retreat homepages, comprised of 29,224 tokens[2]. As indicated earlier, since this study intended to examine the specific use of language on the genre of coworking retreat homepages, only English texts from this genre were selected between a specific duration of four months. According to Baker (2006), this is referred to as a ‘specialised corpus’, a corpus which includes texts that conform to specialised criteria in order to study a specific subject. A specialised corpus is useful for “examining a particular genre of language” and it helps to be selective in choosing corpus texts that contain relevant content to the subject matter (Baker, 2006, p. 28). In this case, my investigation on the branding of digital nomad lifestyles led me to choose corpus texts from coworking retreat homepages instead of tourism homepages because the former contains content that is significant to my study. Furthermore, the topic of investigation did not have enough references, thus the need for building a specialised corpus (Baker, 2006).

Once the 45 homepages were identified through the internet search methods that I have outlined in section 4.3, the textual data was manually collected and cleaned, removing any images, menus, titles and links to other pages (Baker, 2006). Images were stored on a separate Word document to be covered in my visual design analysis. Relevant texts were then saved individually in plain text format and given a file name based on the website name which allowed the texts to be identified in *AntConc 3.5.8* (Anthony, 2005). AntConc is a corpus analysis software that organises and processes the corpus data to produce linguistic patterns through corpus instruments such as collocates and concordances (see section 4.4.2). Before the analysis took place, a pilot study was conducted to ensure there were no mistakes in the CRH corpora such as hypertext, colour, font or size issues (Baker, 2006).

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[2] Tokens are the number of words, punctuation, digits, abbreviations, etc. within a corpus (Sketch Engine, 2020)

When using a corpus based approach, it can be useful to compare it with reference corpora to provide a good “benchmark of what is ‘normal’ in language” (Baker, 2006, p.43), which is particularly useful for this study as it allowed me to identify any salient words or textual patterns that the retreats might use to construct their idealisations of digital nomad lifestyles. Apart from that, Baker (2006) explains that since reference corpora large enough to represent a genre of language, they are useful for discovering evidence in certain discourse. Two reference corpora were used in tandem with the CRH corpus, in order to calculate the keywords from the specialised corpora and examine the lexico-grammatical features. These corpora were the British National Corpus (hereafter BNC corpus) and the American National Corpus (hereafter ANC). I chose both of these reference corpora because the retreats either use British or American English, sometimes a combination of both.

Produced by Oxford University, the BNC consists of 100 million words of text samples from a wide range of genres including spoken dialogue, magazines, newspapers, academic papers and fiction (University of Oxford, 2015). Originally created in 1991, the BNC uses samples of spoken and written language of British English from the later part of the twentieth century. 10% of the spoken language samples consist of transcribed unscripted conversations in various contexts whereas 90% of the samples consist of written language extracts from periodicals to school essays. Additionally, the ANC contains 11.5 million words and uses samples of American spoken and written language, following the framework of the BNC. Created more recently than the BNC, the ANC contains similar categories and genres, but also includes electronic texts such as email, webpages and chatroom texts (Reppen & Ide, 2004).

4.3.2 Data selection for visual design analysis

While data from 45 retreat homepages were selected to build a corpus for the linguistic analysis of this research, a separate collection of data was required for the second part of this study which involved a closer analysis of visual design elements. When it came to visual analysis of coworking retreat homepages for this study, the number of images from the 45 homepages was impractically large. Therefore, I decided to narrow my focus down to three retreats: *Remote Year, Unsettled,* and *Hacker Paradise* due to the scope of this study. These particular retreats were chosen for two reasons; the frequency of mentions in media and variation in reviews or electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explain that e-WOM include positive or negative communication about a product, service or brand that is publicly available on the internet and written by former, current or potential customers. All three retreats were featured on well-known news websites such as CNN (Hargreaves, 2015, O'Brien, 2016, Springer, 2017), Forbes (Guppta, 2016, Norris, 2017, Martin, 2018) and The Washington Post (McGregor, 2015, Plunkett, 2018) to name a few.

It is possible that some news media features are a form of 'brand journalism', whereby advertisers or brands work with journalists to produce content that informs, persuades and encourages positive engagement with the brand (Arrese & Perez-Latre, 2017). Since studies have showed that brand journalism can improve message credibility and positive attitudes towards a brand (Cole & Greer, 2013), I also considered the reviews and e-WOM from previous participants for a more balanced perspective. Although studies on the credibility of e-WOM have presented conflicting arguments, it is possible that e-WOM allows customers to make informed decisions about the product or service based on the experiences of others (Karakaya & Barnes, 2010).

The reviews and e-WOM that I considered were based on blog articles and the Reddit thread r/digitalnomad. Interestingly, the reviews for *Remote Year* were mostly negative as many participants complained of the services, the expensive price and poor emphasis on work. One participant in particular, Meier (2019) mentioned that her experience was vastly different from what was portrayed on *Remote Year'*s website. In contrast, the e-WOM surrounding *Hacker Paradise* were largely positive with many previous participants such as Sarbogast (2019) commending the retreat for their "community and facilitation".

Finally, many of the reviews and e-WOM for *Unsettled* were mixed, which provided a balance in terms of credibility and brand reputation. A previous participant, for instance, stated that during her *Unsettled* journey, she noticed that 70% of the participants were in between jobs or on sabbatical resulting in most of the group going sightseeing every day, while the rest (including herself) were left behind (Reddit, 2019). Blogger and social media influencer, Halpern (2018) also wrote that she experienced feelings of being left out during her *Unsettled* trip when she had to work during the retreat. However, some previous participants also had positive comments *Unsettled*, stating that they decided to go back because of the travel experiences and close connections that were made (Hopcian, 2017, Halpern, 2018). The next section provides an outline of each analytical framework used in this research.

4.4 Analytical frameworks

4.4.1 Move/step analysis

Following Swales (1990) perspective of genres as a group of events that use a similar language to convey a shared communicative purpose, this study conducted a move-step analysis to highlight the promotional discourses that were portrayed on 45 coworking retreat homepages. As I mentioned in section 3.2.1, moves refer to a segment of text that represents a writer’s purpose while steps are the detailed options that writers select to achieve the move. In essence, steps are the different strategies used by writers to realise a certain move (Bhatia, 1993). The distinction between the two is that moves contain a higher structure to them, for example one move could have eight different steps for writers to choose from (Leelertphan, 2017).

This study drew upon Bhatia’s (2004) rhetorical move structure that was typically used to analyse hard-sell print advertisements. Although I employed this framework to promotional material of a different communication medium, coworking retreat homepages and print advertisements have overlapping communicative purpose, and therefore share similar features with promotional genres (Bhatia, 2004). It is important to point out that multimodal aspects commonly found on cybergenres such as hypertexts were also examined during this analysis. Table 4.2 below presents Bhatia’s (2004) rhetorical move/step structure for typical advertisements.

Table 4.2
Bhatia’s (2004) move structure for typical advertisements.

Bhatia’s Move/Step Structure for Advertisements
1. Headline (for reader attraction)
2. Targeting the market
3. Justifying the product or service
• by indicating the importance or need of the product or services and/or
• by establishing a niche
4. Detailing the product or service
• by identifying the product or service
• by describing the product or service
• by indicating the value of the product or service
5. Establishing credentials
6. Celebrity or typical user endorsement
7. Offering incentives
8. Using pressure tactics
9. Soliciting response

Note. Reproduced from *Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-Based View* (p. 65) by V. K. Bhatia, 2004, London: Continuum. Copyright 2004 by Continuum.

It is important to note that Bhatia's (2004) move structure for typical advertisements (see Table 4.2) was used mainly as a guide in this research, therefore some of the moves and steps were altered depending on the content that was presented on coworking retreat homepages. For instance, in contrast to print advertisements, coworking retreat websites rely heavily on "image-building" strategies such as establishing credibility with viewers and using visual inputs as a persuasion tactic (Bhatia, 2004, p. 6).

Once the move structure had been identified, the frequency of occurrence of each move was considered. This component is important as it allows for the identification of sufficient similarities, which can help establish typical moves within a structure (Mulken & van der Meer, 2005). Since there is no definite criteria to identify the frequency of moves (Leelertphan, 2017), previous genre studies have established their own methods and justifications of which moves are optional and obligatory. For instance, a study by Rasmeenin (2006) on the genre of MA (Master of Arts) thesis discussion sections classified moves as either obligatory, conventional or optional, based on how frequently they occurred in the dataset. The author justified this classification by setting cut-off frequencies based on the occurrences, meaning that obligatory moves were those that occurred in 100% of the texts, conventional moves occurred in 66% to 99% of the texts and optional moves occurred in less than 66% of the texts (Rasmeeenin, 2006). This classification was later adopted by Nodoushan (2012) in his genre study of book reviews, although the author did not specify why he applied this particular classification for his paper. Similarly, to analyse the similarities and differences between research articles in Thai and English contexts, Kanoksilaphatham (2007) proposed that obligatory moves occur more than 60% of the time and anything less is considered an optional move.

Apart from this classification, Mulken & van der Meer (2005), in their study of customer inquiry texts from Dutch and American companies, proposed their own cut-off frequency for moves. The authors stated that moves occurring in more than 75% of the text would be considered obligatory but labelled optional if they occurred in less than 75% of the text (Mulken & van der Meer, 2005). This move demarcation was later adopted by Leelertphan (2017) in her genre analysis of hotel boutique webpages. The author justified using this particular method of move demarcation as it best suited the communicative purpose of her dataset. Although many of these studies used models and processes to classify their move analysis, many did not explain how or why they arrived at a certain frequency, indicating that "the notion of typicality of moves is arbitrary" (Leelertphan, 2017, p. 46).

Following Leelertphan's (2017) study, my analysis also employed the 75% cut-off frequency proposed by Mulken & van der Meer's (2005) as it best served the communicative purposes of my dataset and did not limit the scope of move frequency in my dataset of 45 coworking retreat homepages. Before conducting the analysis, a preliminary move analysis was done to test if the 75% cut-off frequency suited my study and the results were discussed with my supervisor. The moves were identified based on the overall communicative purposes and intentions of coworking retreat homepages as well as the lexico-grammatical features used to realise their purposes. I discuss my findings of this analysis in Chapter 5.

4.4.2 Lexico-grammatical analysis

As Baker (2006) asserts, a corpus on its own is only a passive archive of text. In order to analyse the words and investigate linguistic patterns, corpus instruments such as frequency, keywords, concordances and collocations were used cyclically and generated through the corpus programme, AntConc 3.5.8. The use of these tools allowed data to be extracted empirically instead of personally, which reduced human subjectivity and error (Touri & Koteyko, 2014). Although my interpretation of the data was still necessary, the analytical corpus process provided more reliable quantitative evidence compared to a manual coding approach.

First, a frequency list was compiled by simply calculating the number of times a word appeared in the corpus, then displaying the words from most to least frequent (Bennett, 2010). Frequency lists are one of the most basic tools used by corpus linguists and used with the right corpus, have the ability to "reveal trends across texts" and provide a better understanding of how certain words and phrases are used within a particular context (Baker, 2006, p. 47). However, Baker (2006) cautions that the functionality of frequency analyses alone is limited as they run the risk of overgeneralising language and might only reveal isolated words without proper context. With this in mind, I used a simple a frequency analysis as a starting point and guide for this study but focussed more on keyword data and concordances.

For this study, the top 15 most frequent words were applied to the frequency analysis. Similarly, the top 15 words with the highest keyness value were examined during the keyword analysis, as were the strongest 15 collocates of the collocation analysis. Although using the strongest top keywords can be viewed as a subjective part of the analysis, this technique worked best with my corpus data and applying the same measure throughout the study was necessary to maintain "internal consistency (Baker, 2006, p. 179). A keyword list was then generated to identify the most unusually frequent words that appeared in a corpus by comparing it with a reference corpus using a cross-tabulation method (Vaughan & O'Keeffe, 2016).

Following Baker (2012), this study used keyword analysis as a technique to identify areas for examination and to "account for patterns" that I had not considered, in addition to forming and testing hypotheses. Keywords were calculated using a statistical log-likelihood measure of $p < 0.000001$ and only one third of the keywords that appeared were investigated further.

This study also considered the concordances and collocates of the keywords to identify any textual patterns. As Sinclair (1991) noted, concordances are "a collection of the occurrences of a word-form, each in its textual environment (p. 32). Often cited as one of the most central tools used in corpus software, including AntConc, a concordance programme enables researchers to conduct a close examination of a specific search term within its linguistic context by exploring the words on the right or left of a selected search term, (Anthony, 2005, Baker 2006). Although concordances are helpful in revealing the discourses within text, they can be limiting especially since the relationship between two words are not always presented clearly (Baker, 2006). Therefore, a collocate analysis is also necessary.

Collocates are words that have a statistical tendency to occur alongside each other in order to form a phrase, including metaphors or idioms (Bennett, 2010). There are different approaches to measuring collocations, but this study employed the Mutual Information or MI algorithm which computes the probability of collocates by "comparing the product of their relative frequencies in the corpus with the observed frequencies of their co-occurrences" (Jiejing, 2016, p. 43). For instance, if two words are searched and tend to occur near one another, they will have a high MI value whereas if they only occur near each other by chance, the MI value will be low. Krishnamurthy (2006) asserted that MI values tend to favour collocates that are low-frequency and high-attraction, using the example of *dentist* being associated with words like *molar* and *hygienist* instead of high-frequency words like *your* and *chair*. This is useful for trying to identify significant words that could reveal more nuanced discourses. Collocates with the MI value of 3 or higher were examined and the collocation span was set to 5 to the left and 5 to the right which allowed content words including nouns, verbs and adjectives to be studied. These measures were kept the same and used throughout the analysis to avoid any inconsistency in the results.

Based on the keyword list generated by my corpus data, I chose to conduct a lexico-grammatical analysis of the three most prevalent features, namely pronouns, imperatives and rhetorical devices. Aside from the fact that these features occurred commonly in my dataset, they are also common features that have been studied in literature on promotional language (Leech, 1966, Viskari, 2008, Leelertphan, 2017). The findings of this analysis appear in Chapter 6.

4.4.3 Visual design analysis

Finally, in order to examine how images were presented on the three selected coworking retreat homepages (Remote Year, Unsettled and Hacker Paradise), I also drew on Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework. I applied the three comprehensive metafunctions these authors proposed– representational, interactive and compositional meaning – to describe and interpret both static and moving images featured on the homepages.

In this study, representational meaning refers to the visual role of images, establishing what was depicted in the images and how the social actors were represented. As I mentioned earlier in section 3.4.1, the representational meaning is realised through narrative and conceptual images. Narrative images represent the process of change or events that are taking place through vectors. According to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), vectors represent the action of someone performing an action or something happening. Narrative images can be characterised through four processes: action process, reactional process, speech and mental process, and conversion process (Manca, 2016).

Action processes are usually formed by an Actor and may be transactional or non-transactional, depending on whether the Goal is present or not. A Goal represents what the action is being 'done to' or 'aimed at' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 63). In the reactional process, the vector is formed by an eyeline and the direction of gaze. Reactional processes are transactional if the Reactor (subject) makes eye contact with the Phenomenon (object) and non-transactional if the Phenomenon is not displayed (Yang & Zhang, 2014). The next process, speech and mental process, is usually portrayed through speech bubbles in comic strips and textbook quotes to represent the dialogue between participants or inner thoughts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Finally, the conversion process conveys the "representation of natural events" and can usually be found in life-cycle or food chain diagrams (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 69).

However, due to the lack of speech bubbles or diagrams on the coworking retreat homepages, my study mainly focussed on analysing the action and reactional processes that were observed.

The next representational meaning that I studied were conceptual images. Conceptual images do not contain vectors, are usually more static and may be realised by three processes: classificational, analytical and symbolic process (Manca, 2016). The classificational process displays participants in a taxonomy or flowchart to reveal any hierarchical organisation of elements, whereas analytical processes connect participants in terms of a part-whole structure. This process was observed in the display of participant testimonials on the retreat homepages, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 7.

The analytical process, as Yang & Zhang (2014) point out, usually involves two elements, the Carrier (the whole) and the Possessive Attributes (the part). This process can be exemplified through the use of clothingand can be displayed using a map of the United States, whereby the entire map of the country acts as the Carrier, and the names and borders of individual states are the Possessive Attributes. Lastly, the symbolic process focuses on what a participant represents or means and can be exemplified through statues of significant people.

This study also considered the interactive meaning of visuals, observing the imaginary relationship between the image participants and viewers, analysing aspects such as contact (eye contact), social distance (framing of image actors) and perspective (creating viewer involvement through angles). These components are able to reveal the power relations and interactions created between the viewer and image subjects (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). For instance, Leelertphan (2017) who examined the visuals of boutique hotel webpages found that most hotels did not make much contact with the viewers, although the represented participants would interact with each other to tempt viewers with a great hotel experience. The relationship between represented and image participants of coworking retreat homepages was also examined based on the social distance and perspective of the shots. Aspects such as intimacy with viewers and the positioning of angles were considered in my attempt to understand how the genre of coworking retreat homepages presented the idealisation of digital nomad lifestyles.

Finally, the compositional meaning looked at how the information was organised, in this case an examination of the homepage layout. Although many website genre studies often overlook this perspective, the structure or flow of a page is one of “the most important semiotic modes at work” (Bateman, 2008, p. 175). As Manca (2016) states, the compositional meaning is realised through three characteristics, namely, information value, framing and saliency.

Information value refers to the organisation of visual elements in a composition and concentrates on three aspects, namely left and right, top and bottom, and centre and margin.

According to Leelertphan (2017), content placed on the left side represents something familiar to viewers and is known as given, whereas the right side represents something new and displays content that is not yet known to viewers. Persuasive information, known as ideal information, is typically placed at the top of a page, especially in magazine or online advertisements to connect viewers with the promise of a product (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This means that practical information about the product will be placed towards the bottom. Leelertphan (2017) suggests that the compositional meaning of visuals can also be identified by the centre placement, which contains the most important part of the image and the margin, which displays the supplementary elements.

The framing of visual elements is referred to by Moerdisuroso (2014) as the real or imaginary lines that separate or unite visual features. In my study, I not only applied the framing process to individual images, but also to the homepage layout in order to observe any similarities in the way retreats presented their information. Lastly, the system of salience as a compositional meaning can be achieved through visual elements such as size, colour contrasts and sharpness of focus (Manca, 2016). However, due to the scope of this study, my visual analysis did not include this aspect in order to focus on the aspects that were more significant to my research questions. I will present the findings of this analysis later on in Chapter 7.

4.5 Limitations and strengths of multimodal genre analysis

Despite being widely applied in scholarly literature, the multimodal genre analysis has come under some criticism due to a lack of empirical research and analytical methods (Hiippala, 2012). This study aims to address this criticism by adopting a mixed method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A corpus-based approach for examining the lexico-grammatical features on coworking retreat homepages. Consulting a corpus can also help to reduce researcher bias since the frequent and significant linguistic patterns were identified empirically through computational software. While we might not be able to remove bias completely, using a corpus restricts cognitive bias and the tendency to be selective (Baker, 2006). However, a corpus-based method might be exposed to certain limitations as Bennett (2010) and Baker (2006) argue, corpus linguistics can only present the data, leaving it up to the researcher to make sense of the patterns and interpret the reasons for their existence. These limitations to corpus linguistics were addressed by conducting a move structure analysis, drawing on Bhatia’s (2004) promotional move structure to identify the general sequence and rhetorical categories of text placements. For a more holistic approach, this study also acknowledged the multimodal aspect of cybergenres by applying a visual design framework to the visual elements of the coworking retreat homepages.

4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the method and research design of this study in order to answer the research questions as set out in Chapter 1. The methodological approach and research design presented here provide the opportunity for a comprehensive analysis of various promotional cybergenre elements found on the coworking retreat homepages. The mixed methods approach within an overarching multimodal genre analysis of the 45 coworking retreat homepages was described. This included discussion of Bhatia’s (2004) promotional move structure to identify the rhetorical move structure of the retreat homepages, which share features of cybergenres and promotional genres; a lexico-grammatical analysis conducted through an empirical corpus-based approach using the tool AntConc 3.5.8, where three main linguistic categories were chosen for analysis, namely, pronouns, imperatives and rhetorical devices. Finally, this study adopted the three metafunctions of Kress & van Leeuwen’s (2006) visual design framework – representational, interactive and compositional meaning – to study the static and moving images presented on three coworking retreat homepages: Remote Year, Unsettled and Hacker Paradise. The following three chapters discuss and present the findings of these analyses that were performed on the retreat homepages, starting with the move/step analysis.

Chapter 5: Move/ Step Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of the move/ step analysis that was conducted on 45 coworking retreat homepages based on Bhatia’s (2004) proposed move structure for advertisements. Due to the promotional nature of coworking retreat homepages, Bhatia’s (2004) structure offered ways in which to identify the generic moves and steps featured on the retreat homepages. In recognising that the homepages are also part of a cybergenre, Bhatia’s (2004) structure which focusses on print advertisements was used as a guide for this analysis and adapted for the communicative purposes of coworking retreat homepages which include: (i) building a relationship with potential customers, (ii) introducing and promoting services, and (iii) persuading potential customers. The first part of this chapter presents the moves and steps of the retreat homepage structure, including classifying which moves are obligatory and which are optional. Following that, I discuss my findings of each move.

5.2 Identification of moves and steps

The move structure proposed by Bhatia (1993, 2004) is not rigid, and it is common to find “hybridity or omissions of certain moves” (Garcia-Yeste, 2013). Therefore, I defined the move structure in my analysis, based on the communicative purposes that they fulfil, drawing on Leelertphan (2017). Although some variation occurred in the orientation of the moves, I selected the most common move sequence used by a majority of the websites. I also employed Mulken & van der Meer’s (2005) characterisation of obligatory and optional moves based on the frequency of occurrence of each move on the homepages.

Based on Table 1 (as seen below), a total of seven moves and 16 steps were identified in my dataset of 45 coworking retreat homepages. Following Mulken & van der Meer’s (2005) move categorisation, moves which occurred in more than 75% of the homepages, 34 time were classified as obligatory moves whereas moves which occurred below 34 times were regarded as optional. This classification was only conducted on the moves since some retreats included two or more steps within a single move.

Table 5.1

Move/step structure of coworking retreat homepages

Move/ Step Structure		**Frequency of Occurrence /45**	**Obligatory/ Optional**
Move 1: Introducing the retreat		45	Obligatory
	Step 1: Website Header		
	Step 2: Headline		
Move 2: Targeting the market		33	Optional
Move 3: Establishing credentials		43	Obligatory
	Step 1: Through media recognition		
	Step 2: Through participant testimonials		
	Step 3: Through company background		
	Step 4: Through social media		
Move 4: Introducing the services		45	Obligatory
	Step 1: Identifying the offer		
	Step 2: Detailing the retreat		
	Step 3: Indicating the value		
Move 5: Justifying the retreat		40	Obligatory
	Step 1: Indicating importance or need		
	Step 2: Establishing a niche		
Move 6: Persuasion techniques		27	Optional
	Step 1: Offering incentives		
	Step 2: Pressure tactics		
	Step 3: Newsletter sign up		
Move 7: Soliciting Action or Response		45	Obligatory
	Step 1: Contact information		
	Step 2: Links to other pages		

The following section includes a discussion and exemplification of the communicative purpose of each move based on my understanding of the texts and lexico-grammatical data. Although all the moves will be discussed, I have only selected relevant steps to focus on due to the scope of this study.

5.3 Move 1: Introducing the retreat

This move is an obligatory move that appeared in 100% of the homepages in my dataset and is an especially important aspect of homepages. According to Askehave & Nielson (2005), the homepage is meant to present information in an attractive manner and functions as the “official gateway of the website” as it allows readers to branch off into other pages of the site by providing additional navigational links (p. 2). In essence, the homepage is meant to captivate viewers’ attention and lure them to explore more of the website with accessible navigational tools. This move can be realised by two steps as shown below which are followed by an explanation and examples.

Step 1: Website Header

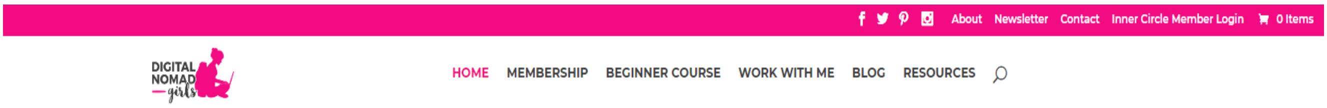
Step 2: Headline

Move 1 Step 1: Website Header

All the retreat homepages use this step because apart from being an “inherent property of the web medium”, the website header also performs a number of functions (Askehave & Nielson, 2005, p. 5). Firstly, it contains the brand name and logo which enable viewers to identify the brand. The website header also contains the navigation menu which are a series of hyperlinks that present the website contents and give viewers access to the rest of the site. The navigation menu provides shortcuts to other pages so viewers can easily access them and often consist of one or two words to identify the following webpages. It is also important to note that the navigation menu is a static element of the website that appears consistently on all the website pages, aside from the homepage. The examples below demonstrate the various type of logos and navigation menu placements of the respective coworking retreat homepages.

Figure 5.1.

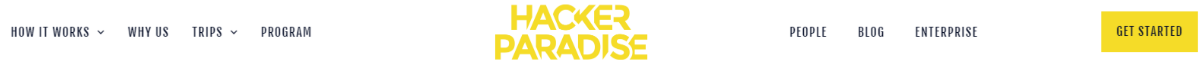
Logo placement on Digital Nomad Girls website header



Note. Website header. From Digital Nomad Girls. (www.digitalnomadgirls.com). Copyright 2018 by Digital Nomad Girls Ltd.

Figure 5.2.

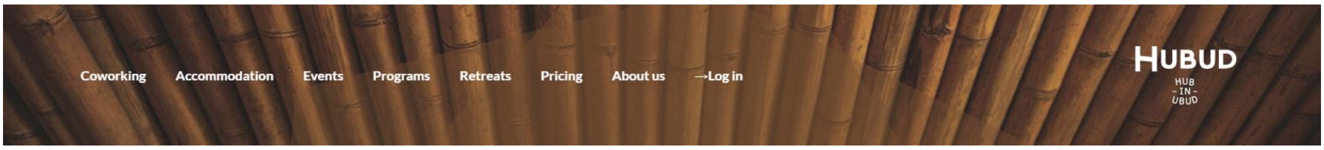
Logo placement on Hacker Paradise website header



Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

Figure 5.3.

Logo placement on Hubud website header



Note. From Hubud. (www.hubud.org). Copyright 2018 by Hubud.

The images in Figures 5.1 to 5.3 above present examples of different logo types and placements. Although there is no correct procedure of logo placement, most retreats in my dataset placed their logo on the top left-hand corner of the homepage with a few exceptions of retreats placing their logo in the middle and only one retreat, Hubud, placing their logo in the top right-hand corner. Apart from being the most typical logo placement, Chen & Wu (2016) explain that the left-hand logo placement is the most attractive and natural to viewers because the reading process of many languages, including English induce a "left-oriented oculomotor tendency" (p. 18) Some retreats, however, might have adopted different logo placements to stand out from their competition, although Barron (2017) claims that right-hand and centre-aligned logos actually affect viewers' ability to navigate around the website. This is because people are already conditioned to expect a left-hand logo placement so other logo placements might cause confusion (Barron, 2017), which could lead to a negative browsing experience.

Apart from the logo placement, there is a clear visual distinction between each of the images above, through the variations of colour, symbol, shape and font. The collective use of these four elements is known as *visual equity*, which can contribute to brand recognition and recall (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). These elements essentially work as a cohesive unit to give viewers an idea of the brand personality. For instance, the logo by the retreat Digital Nomad Girls (see Figure 5.1) contains a combination of feminine visual elements, including the use of the colour pink, which females are conditioned to find appealing from a young age (Imtiaz, 2016). The icon of a female using her laptop and a cursive font of the word *girls* in the logo also gives viewers a clear idea about what the retreat brand represents and who their main target audience is. Similarly, the colour yellow, which generally represents “happiness, friendliness and optimism” (Imtiaz, 2016, p. 15) might be used in the Hacker Paradise logo (see Figure 5.2) to convey their brand as welcoming while Hubud, which uses an image of brown bamboo as a website header background (see Figure 5.3) might intend to convey their brand’s affinity with nature. All of these elements fulfil the function of not only introducing the brand identity but building a relationship with the viewer.

Move 1 Step 2: Headline

The next step of this move which was also carried out by all the homepages is the headline. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the promotional genre (Bhatia, 1993), the purpose of a headline is to tempt or intrigue readers to read further and persist in their memory (Garcia-Yeste, 2013). However, headlines are also a useful tool to describe and provide information in a concise way about the services offered by the brand (Suhardja, 2009). Most of the retreat homepages attempted to achieve this objective with a headline that is accompanied by visual components or written in bold with a bigger font compared to the rest of the homepage text (Suhardja, 2009).

Since many advertisers in this age are tasked with persuading consumers who are either cynical or bored with too much information (Myers, 1994) they rely on linguistic strategies which often include patterns of textual choices, interpersonal metadiscourse and figurative language (Fuertes-Olivera, 2000) such as metaphors and hyperboles. Based on my observation, the retreats in my dataset indeed used metaphors and hyperboles in their headlines to capture viewers’ attention, as shown in Extracts 5.1 – 5.4 below.

The most common rhetorical device used in headlines were metaphors:

5.1) The world can be your office (The Remote Trip, n.d)
5.2) Work where your heart takes you (Alpine Coworking, n.d)

Next were hyperboles, to exaggerate on the quality of the retreats:

5.3) Life-changing courses in Bali (Institute of Code, n.d)
5.4) The ultimate entrepreneurial experience (Cofounders Retreat, n.d)

Although I present a more in-depth discussion of the use of these linguistic features in Chapter 6, I will briefly explain the figurative headlines employed by the retreats. Metaphors can be viewed as a linguistic comparison between two different objects, whereby the aspects that normally apply to one object are compared with the second object (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). For instance, in using the metaphor *The world can be your office,* the retreats compare the aspects of an office as a space where people conduct their work with the world. This implies that individuals who attend the retreats would not be confined to a conventional workspace, rather they would be able to work wherever they like.

Hyperboles, which are exaggerations used to emphasise a certain benefit were also observed on some of the retreat homepages, perhaps to accentuate the advantages of their retreat services (Cuddon, 2013). For instance, Institute of Code used the phrase *life-changing* to describe the great quality of business courses offered during their retreat to Bali, even though it might not significantly change an individual's life. Creative or figurative headlines are often powerful because they create tension by intentionally leaving out information, which induces curiosity and encourages people to continue reading, similar to the concept of cliff-hangers in books and movies (Lakhani, 2008).

Aside from figurative headlines, other retreats took on a more direct approach to describing what the retreats were about and who they were for since coworking retreats are a relatively new concept to many people. Extracts 5.5 and 5.6 provide examples of the more straightforward and informative headlines.

5.5) Coliving & coworking for digital nomads & online entrepreneurs (DNX Camp, n.d)
5.6) Coworking holidays with like-minded entrepreneurs (Sunny Office, n.d)

Many of these headlines read more like sentences rather than slogans and present more of a sales pitch style which gives viewers an overview of the homepage and services instead of trying to sound persuasive. Unlike figurative headlines which are able to evoke emotions in viewers, these headlines serve a more functional purpose in trying to convey information about the retreat to viewers. While these headlines (see Extract 5.5 and 5.6) might assist in informing viewers about the retreat, their sentence-like format is often long and uninteresting, which might not captivate viewers and could even cause confusion.

Persuasive headlines are also often examples of 'disjunctive style' (Leech, 1966) or 'block language' (Quirk et al., 1985). According to Christianto (n.d.), block language uses "shortened syntactic structures in a restricted communicative text" (p. 2), meaning that the headlines are written as phrases or a few nouns and verbs rather than full grammatical sentences. This allows viewers to take in concise information about what the retreats are without being overwhelmed.

This headline structure is commonly found on the retreat websites, as seen below in Extracts 5.7 – 5.9.

5.7) Work differently. Live differently (Outsite, n.d)
5.8) Work smarter. Live better (Sun and Co, n.d)
5.9) Keep your job. See the world. Leave the planning to us (Remote Year, n.d)

Many of the retreats tend to pair the words *work* and *live* together, perhaps as it conveys the work-life balance that is offered through their services. I will also discuss how these words are used as a persuasive strategy later in Chapter 6. The coworking retreats have recognised that headlines play an important role in both introducing their services to viewers, and persuading viewers to take an interest in finding out more about their services.

5.4 Move 2: Targeting the market

Although some authors might argue that the headline is the most important move in promotional discourse because it can attract the reader (Garcia-Yeste, 2013), targeting the market is an equally essential yet often overlooked move. Lhotáková & Klosová (2009) suggest that segmenting a target audience is important when it comes to creating product differentiation in a highly competitive market because it can help businesses reach their ideal consumers (those who are most likely to purchase the product). However, my analysis showed that less than 75% of the retreats included this move, regarding it an optional move. Since this move is relatively important, I will discuss examples of retreats that did include it on their homepages.

Most of the retreats carried out this move through pronouns such as *you* and *your* which directly addresses the viewers although there were some that specified their target market on the homepages by using monikers such as *digital nomad, entrepreneurs, business owners, remote professionals* and *freelancers*. The retreats who label their target market upfront might have done so to prevent other types of holiday-goers who are not digital nomads from being redirected to the retreat websites as these are not the customers they are after. Extracts 5.10 – 5.12 demonstrate some examples of the target market being mentioned explicitly in the copy.

5.10) Enjoy hassle-free travel while staying productive on our coworking/coliving retreats for remote workers, freelancers and entrepreneurs (Work Wanderers, n.d.)
5.11) Join other entrepreneurs for adventures across the world (Refuga, n.d.)
5.12) A surf retreat for digital nomads (Unleash Surf, n.d.)

Since coworking retreats are still a new phenomenon, it helps to keep the target market in mind to ensure that the message appeals to the right viewers and achieves its persuasive effect. The retreats also used phrases that might appeal to viewers who wish to attain the digital nomad lifestyle. Examples of this can be seen in Extracts 5.13 and 5.14 below.

5.13) Live and work in different cities around the world as part of an immersive cultural and community experience (Remote Year, n.d.)

5.14) Copass Camps are gatherings of amazing people in great places all over the world to live, work, share and have a great time together (Copass Camps, n.d.)

The use of phrases such as *immersive cultural and community experience* and *amazing people in great places all over the world* are examples of aspirational language, which uses emotive words to appeal to viewers' desires (Luntz, 2007). The retreats might employ these phrases, outlining aspects such as the freedom to travel and accessibility to a like-minded community, engaging with some of the factors that are important to digital nomads. Apart from targeting actual digital nomads, this persuasive strategy could also attract viewers who wish to become digital nomads by promising them an adventurous lifestyle through the retreat services. I will discuss more on the use of aspirational language on coworking retreat homepages further on in Chapter 6.

5.5 Move 3: Establishing credibility

The next obligatory move, establishing credibility was included by 96% of the retreats and can be expressed through a number of different steps. Credibility is a widespread issue for digital media since customers have no way of knowing if a brand is real or just another scam (Pollach, 2006). Therefore, coworking retreats might include this move on their homepage to construct a positive image of their organisation and showcase the brand's authenticity. Similar to sales promotion letters, most of the retreats featured this move in the beginning of the website to attract readers with a well-known reputation in the market (Bhatia, 1993). This move can be viewed as a way to build a relationship with viewers which, I propose, is one of the communicative purposes of the genre coworking retreat homepages. This move was illustrated by four steps but due to the scope of this study, I will only discuss steps 1 and 2 as they are the most significant.

Step 1: Through media recognition

Step 2: Through participant testimonials

Step 3: Through company background

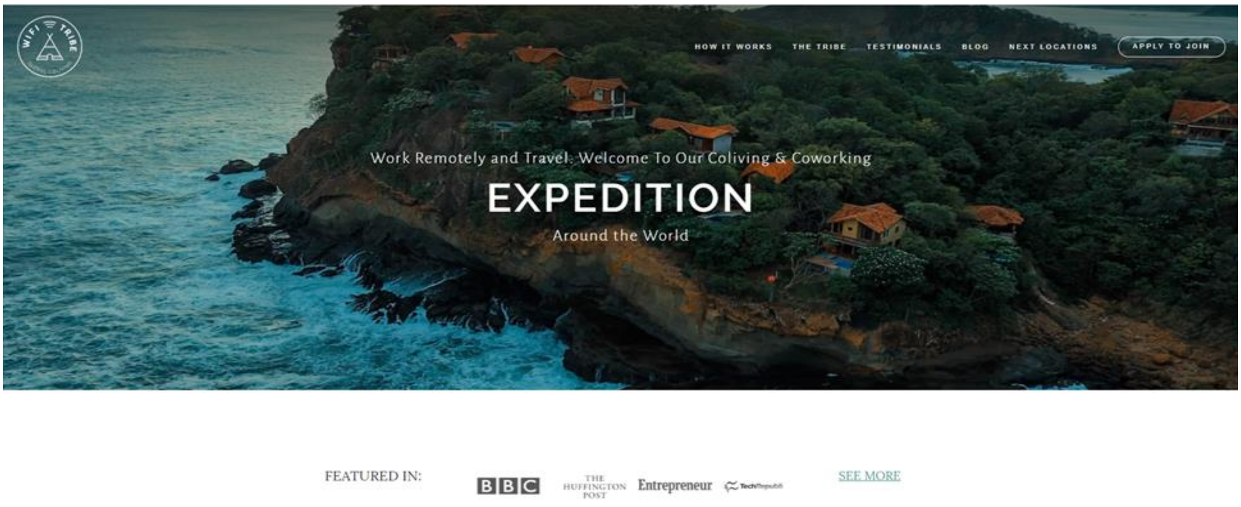
Step 4: Through social media

Move 3 Step 1: Through media recognition

This step demonstrates how the retreats features their mentions in news articles, press releases and blogs on the homepages to establish their credibility as a brand. This type of media recognition is known as brand journalism, a type of content marketing whereby brands employ a journalistic technique to share information and promote a product or service to readers (Arrese & Perez-Latre, 2017). Brands often use this technique to increase their legitimacy or favourability with potential customers (Baetzgen & Tropp, 2015). As seen below, most of the coworking retreats feature the logos of well-known media organisations such as BBC, CNN, Forbes and Entrepreneur in a banner beneath the website header, implying that they have been recognised as an authentic brand by these organisations. As a new type of industry, the coworking retreats might have decided to display these logos in the top half of the page to gain the trust of viewers so that they do not think of the programmes as a scam. Based on how prestigious the news organisation that they were featured in is, some retreats may have wanted to show off their recognisable status. It also suggests that these retreats are portraying themselves as a notable experience that should not be missed. Visual examples of this step are displayed in a similar manner below in Figures 5.4 – 5.6.

Figure 5.4.

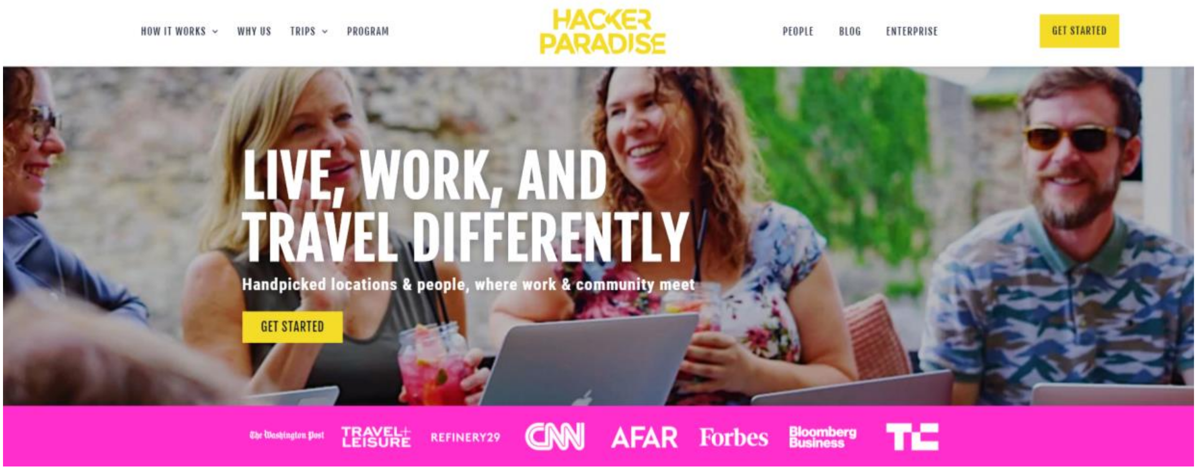
Media recognition featured on WiFi Tribe homepage


WIFI TRIBE
HOW IT WORKS
THE TRIBE
TESTIMONIALS
BLOG
NEXT LOCATIONS
APPLY TO JOIN
Work Remotely and Travel. Welcome To Our Coliving & Coworking
EXPEDITION
Around the World
FEATURED IN:
BBC
THE HUFFINGTON POST
Entrepreneur
TechRepublic
SEE MORE

Note. From WiFi Tribe. (www.wifitribe.co). Copyright 2019 by WiFi Tribe Co.

Figure 5.5.

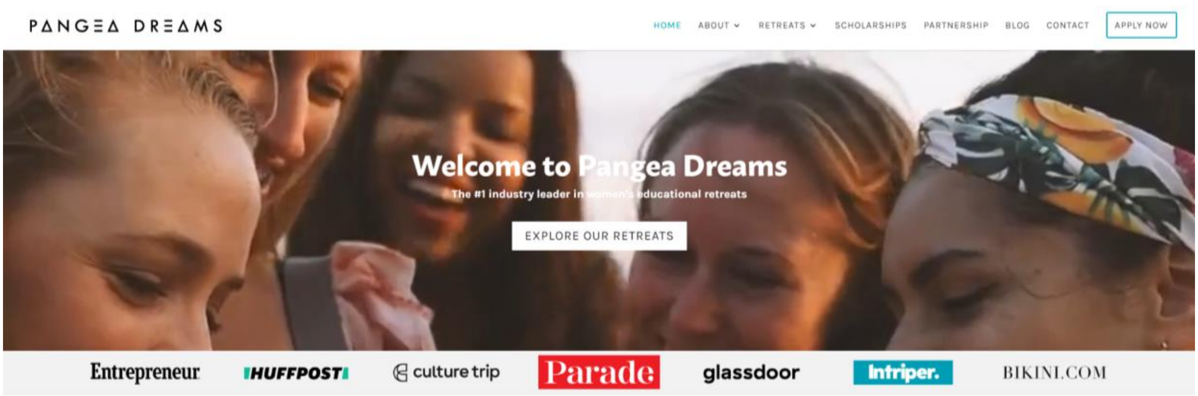
Media recognition featured on Hacker Paradise homepage


HOW IT WORKS
WHY US
TRIPS
PROGRAM
HACKER PARADISE
PEOPLE
BLOG
ENTERPRISE
GET STARTED
LIVE, WORK, AND TRAVEL DIFFERENTLY
Handpicked locations & people, where work & community meet
GET STARTED
The Washington Post
TRAVEL+ LEISURE
REFINERY29
CNN
AFAR
Forbes
Bloomberg Business
TC

Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2019 by Hacker Paradise.

Figure 5.6.

Media recognition featured on Pangea Dreams homepage


PANGEA DREAMS
HOME
ABOUT
RETREATS
SCHOLARSHIPS
PARTNERSHIP
BLOG
CONTACT
APPLY NOW
Welcome to Pangea Dreams
The #1 industry leader in women's educational retreats
EXPLORE OUR RETREATS
Entrepreneur
HUFFPOST
culture trip
Parade
glassdoor
Intriper.
BIKINI.COM

Note. From Pangea Dreams. (www.pangeadreams.com). Copyright 2019 by Pangea Dreams Inc.

Move 3 Step 2: Through participant testimonials

Testimonials from past participants were perhaps the most popular step that the retreats used to establish their credibility with viewers, as 30 out of 45 retreat homepages performed this step. Testimonials usually comprise of ordinary customers discussing their experience with the brand and are considered influential to readers especially if the purchasing risk involved for the readers are high (Pollach, 2006). Since most of the retreats cost a minimum of $2,000 USD per month, might consider it a high-risk purchase and would therefore want to consider the opinion of past participants before making a decision. It is important to point out that testimonials are different from electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), because the retreats might have specifically chosen testimonials that favour their brand to be featured on their homepage, whereas e-WOM may include positive or negative reviews and are often publicly available to viewers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

This step was usually presented on the homepage in quotation marks, because it is a direct quote from a participant and could appear to sound more authentic as it is straight from the source. The testimonials were also accompanied by the name, profession and company of the participants. Since it can be hard for viewers to identify whether a comment is authentic or a fabrication by the retreats who have chosen to feature them, (Aramendia-Muneta, 2017) some retreats addressed this problem by attaching hyperlinks to another webpage where viewers could browse the social media pages or personal profiles of past participants.

5.15) "Sunny Office was a priceless experience to share time with great entrepreneurs, get their valuable feedback and have lots of fun together. The nice evenings and our trips to Barcelona and Sitges completed the unforgettable adventure of a comfortable environment, delicious food, perfect organization, concentrated work, good conversations and easy-going holiday feeling." Sylvia Ewerling (Germany) Owner / Consultant – Digital Designmanagement

(Sunny Office, n.d.)

5.16) "Highly recommended! I joined TRT for the first five months in different destinations all over the world, and I can honestly say it has been an unforgettable and character defining experience. TRT did a great job picking the best facilities, managing a seamless experience during the trip, and creating a positive vibe in the community. It's hard to choose, but if I had to pick one, I'd say Bali was definitely my favourite." Nathan M., Founder @ Infocus SEO

(The Remote Trip, n.d.)

Based on Extracts 5.15 and 5.16, the common attribute among these testimonials is the use of positive adjectives which describe the experiences of past participants. Viskari (2008) states that positive language is generally more persuasive and more likely to be remembered by readers. Interestingly, both the testimonials above even use similar words like *unforgettable* and *great*, despite being from different retreat homepages. While the retreats might not have fabricated their testimonials, it is possible that they have carefully selected the 'right review' that includes positive feedback for their services in order to persuade viewers of their quality and value (Appiah, 2007).

5.6 Move 4: Introducing the services

After establishing their credibility, the retreat homepages proceed to the next move, introducing the service to viewers. All 45 of the retreat homepages in my dataset feature this obligatory move in their own way. This move is essential because it enables viewers to familiarise themselves with the retreats including what is offered, how much it costs and how it can benefit them (Bhatia, 1993). It is also the first time that viewers are properly introduced to the concept of coworking retreats, including a brief background on what the retreats provide. This move realises the second communicative purpose of the coworking retreat homepage genre, which is introducing and promoting services, and can be realised in three steps, as shown below.

Step 1: Identifying the offer
Step 2: Detailing the retreat
Step 3: Indicating the value

Move 4 Step 1: Identifying the offer

As stated in section 5.3, most of the retreats had already briefly identified their services in the headline or sub-headline of the homepage copy. However, this step is repeated, this time with more detail and specifications of what is offered to potential customers. This step usually includes a summary of what the retreat is about, who it is for, how long it goes for and what participants can expect. Similar to sales promotion letters, it is usually positioned in a paragraph of copy after the website header and headline. Examples of this step are presented in Extract 5.17 and 5.18 below.

5.17) LiveWorkFit is a series of one month business mastermind retreats for online business owners - entrepreneurs, freelancers, digital nomads - who want to work hard, be healthy and explore new places. Our trips are focused around coliving and coworking, as well as ensuring mind and body are in peak performance by giving gym access, organising weekly activities and building a community of friends – with everyone have the goal of maximising business and personal potential.

(LiveWorkFit, n.d.)

5.18) What is DNX Camp?

> Our CAMPS take place all year long, all around the globe. We know the locations and also take you to yet undiscovered coworking places like Brazil and Greece. We travel sustainable and choose our locations carefully. 10 days of working on brilliant business ideas, networking with like-minded people, countless hours of great conversations, personal development, tons of fun and many salty adventures!
>
> (DNX Camp, n.d.)

From the examples above, we can see a slight pattern in how the retreats identify their offer. Most of them start by telling viewers that their retreats focus on coworking or coliving, whereby groups of digital nomads work and live together in shared spaces. After that, some retreats might give viewers an idea of how long the retreats run for (one month or 10 days) or where their locations are based (Brazil and Greece). Lastly, they list some of the benefits that potential customers might get from attending the retreats such as networking with a community, a chance to develop their business and of course, the opportunity to travel to new locations. For instance, the retreats above use words like *new* and *undiscovered*, implying that this experience can offer digital nomads something that they have not yet come across before. They also use specific, emotive phrases such as *community of friends* and *hours of great conversations* to emphasise the community aspect of these retreats and perhaps persuade viewers who are searching to build relationships with other digital nomads. Essentially, these retreats offer individuals a shared working environment where they can meet like-minded people but within an exotic setting.

Move 4 Step 2: Detailing the retreat

Once the retreats have identified the offer, they move on to describing details about their services. Bhatia (2005) argues that this is an essential element of the promotional genre because it provides readers with evidence of product differentiation. In essence, product differentiation is used by customers to make a choice on which product to purchase based on the variation in their characteristics. 62% of the retreat homepages carried out this step by displaying the itinerary of the upcoming retreats or describing a summary of the pricing and retreat details.

5.19) Upcoming Mastermind Retreats

> We are now accepting applications for our February, March and May 2020 retreats.
> 3-Week Business Mastermind Retreat
> Price: €4,495

> This includes the mastermind program with 10 like-minded successful entrepreneurs, private accommodation, excursions, food, and 24/7 access to a high-end coworking space.
>
> 2-Week Business Mastermind Retreat
> Price: €3885
> This includes the mastermind program with 10 like-minded successful entrepreneurs, private accommodation, excursions, food, and 24/7 access to a high-end coworking space.
>
> (Cowork Paradise, n.d.)

5.20) What You Need To Know
Location: Bali, Indonesia
Duration: 5-day Intensive Experience
Investment: $3,997
Next Program: June 17-21, 2019

(Wifly Nomads, n.d.)

Extracts 5.19 and 5.20 above show that the retreat details are often displayed in short sentences or bullet points for viewers to read easily in order to get the information they need. Although the examples show otherwise, many of the retreats did not feature pricing details on the homepage. This might be because they wanted to maintain the luxury and exclusivity of the retreats instead of shifting the focus towards the price (Seringhaus, 2005). Another reason might be to avoid scaring off potential customers with high pricing before they are convinced of the intended value that the retreat might bring them. Therefore, most of the retreats have hyperlinks that lead to a separate webpage for the pricing details and more in-depth information about the retreats.

Move 4 Step 3: Indicating the value

Following Bhatia’s move structure (1993), the final but perhaps most important part of this move is indicating the value of a product or service. The purpose of this step is to indicate how the retreats aim to fulfil the needs of their target audience and potential customers. Since the first two steps start out by informing and making promises to viewers, this final step completes the selling process with an emphasis on how the retreats can provide value to those who attend their programme. 93% of the retreats performed this step on their homepages through the body copy of the text, as seen below in Extract 5.21 and 5.22.

> 5.21) Getting you into the flow state
>
> When you arrive at our villa in Bali, you'll immediately understand how we're different -- we take our students away from the stress and distractions of everyday life and take care of every little detail so that you can focus on one thing - learning. From the beautiful environment of our campus, to the chef prepared meals and the one-to-four mentor ratio every decision we make is based around how we can create the best possible environment for learning.
>
> (Institute of Code, n.d.)

> 5.22) Become a Wanderer
>
> When you join a retreat, you join a community of digital nomads, entrepreneurs and freelancers from all over the world. Explore a new city together, learn from each other and share the skills you've attained that allow you to live this lifestyle. Meet friends that will last a lifetime, find that co-founder you've been searching for and grow your network of connections that span worldwide.
>
> (Work Wanderers, n.d.)

Once again, the extracts above display a pattern in how the retreats convey the value of their services to viewers. Both the retreats tend to describe the atmosphere of the retreat experience for viewers in an attempt to create a desire for their services (Leelertphan, 2017). The retreats use an emotional appeal as a persuasive strategy by describing the personal and professional value that viewers will receive from attending their programmes. For instance, in Extract 5.21, instead of highlighting their strong Wi-Fi or quality desks, the retreat uses words such as *focus* and *best possible environment* which appeal to the desire of individuals who are looking for a conducive space to work or learn new things. Similarly, in Extract 5.22, the retreat highlights how potential customers can make lifelong friends and might even meet their future business partner, implying that their retreats provide participants with the value of companionship. Since digital nomads can often feel lonely and isolated (Reichenberger, 2018), it is not surprising that they might find this offer tempting or persuasive.

Another stark observation was the use of the modal auxiliary *will* which is often used in advertising discourse to make a promise and convey a sense of certainty to viewers (Leech, 1966). It is possible that the retreats employ this linguistic method to persuade viewers with the promise of an ideal lifestyle of learning and working with a friendly like-minded group from beautiful and exotic locations. I will discuss more on the use of modal auxiliary verbs later in section 6.3.1.

5.7 Move 5: Justifying the retreat

Once the retreats have introduced their services to viewers, they proceed with the next move, justifying the retreat. Although this move is stated in Bhatia's (2004) move structure, it is not an obligatory move for promotional genres. For instance, Tomaskova's (2011) study on the promotional discourse of university websites discovered that this move was not essential since people already acknowledged the importance of a university education. Instead, any justification of the product was embedded in the previous steps, introducing the product or service and detailing the product. However, the newness and novelty of coworking retreats is perhaps why 89% of the retreat homepages included this move to provide further justification for potential customers. Some retreats even incorporate both the steps of this move, as described below.

Step 1: Indicating a need
Step 2: Establishing a niche

Move 5 Step 1: Indicating a need

This step seems quite similar to Move 4 Step 3 (M4S3) of indicating the value, but the main difference is in how the retreats distinguish the two. While M4S3 describes *how* the retreats provide value to potential customers in terms of perks and benefits, this step features the retreats indicating *why* viewers should choose their retreat in particular. In this step, the retreats usually justify how their retreat is special or different compared to others and what they hope to achieve by organising such a venture.

5.23) A different view on the world. Updated daily.
Collaborate, innovate and create with fellow Coboaters aboard one of the most inspirational coworking environments in the world. Detach from land. Free your mind. Immerse yourself in nature. Boost your productivity on the high seas. Life aboard Coboat is all about achieving balance and creating a life to love: When you

> need a break from work, get unplugged, connect with others or dive into the crystal clear blue water.
>
> (Coboat, n.d.)

5.24) Why should I join DNX Camps?

> WE ARE DIGITAL NOMADS OURSELVES
>
> We are living the digital nomad lifestyle since years, fulltime 24/7. We know how important it is to meet with like-minded, positive, and productive people on the road. That’s why we started to organize the DNX CAMPS, where you can expand your network, grow your business, and have lots of fun in the process.
>
> (DNX Camp, n.d.)

As seen in Extracts 5.23 and 5.24 above, the retreats continue to highlight the three main themes of coworking retreats: professional growth, community and new travel experiences. Professional growth includes emphasis on *productivity* and *growth* while community is addressed through mentions of *connecting with others* and *like-minded people*. Finally, the retreats emphasise having *authentic experiences*, *lots of fun* and *inspirational environments*. By frequently promoting these three aspects on the homepages, the retreats seem to imply that potential customers and digital nomads need their services in order to be productive and live a well-balanced lifestyle. This step also shares certain similarities with Move 3, establishing credibility, in the sense that the organisers claim themselves to be digital nomads too, thus gaining the trust of potential customers by demonstrating their expertise on the digital nomad lifestyle.

Move 5 Step 2: Establishing a niche

Friedman & Friedman (2007) defined niche marketing as a strategy that focusses on small, hyper-differentiated market segments instead of larger, more general ones. The authors asserted that the existence of websites has made it possible for brands to create products using micro-niches for target markets that are already small (Friedman & Friedman, 2007). Although only 35% of the retreats in my dataset justified the retreats by establishing a niche in the market, I was curious to understand the types of niche that the retreats offer, especially since the concept of coworking retreats might be considered a niche of its own in the coworking industry.

Based on my analysis, there were three main niche groups that I observed and categorised: demographics (gender and age), interests (lifestyle sports and social impact) and type of retreat (education-centred and leisure cruise). The retreats carried out this step by including their niche within the retreat name or in sub-headline of the homepage. Due to the scope of this study, I will only discuss the most popular niches that were observed, as seen in Extracts 5.25 – 5.29 below.

5.25) The #1 industry leader in women's educational retreats (Pangea Dreams, n.d.)
5.26) That's what DNG is all about: we help you connect with like-minded women! (Digital Nomad Girls, n.d.)
5.27) A retreat for women digital nomads (Remote Explorers, n.d.)

The first demographic niche targets digital nomads who are women, providing them with opportunities to connect and grow their business with other women. According to Thompson (2018a), these retreats aim to support women and minorities such as the LGBTQIA community who often feel like they do not have a voice and are not represented enough in the digital nomad community. The next niche category that stood out in my findings were two retreats that included social work:

5.28) Venture with Impact enables diverse professionals to work abroad while making a difference where they live and travel (Venture with Impact, n.d.)
5.29) Social entrepreneurship programs that activate rural areas (Pandora Hub, n.d.)

Unlike most retreats which selectively travel to the exotic locations of poorer countries and often maintain a distance from locals communities (Thompson, 2018a), both these retreats also focussed on giving back to the rural communities in parts of Spain, Thailand and Mexico. Finally, I also observed the niche of cruise retreats such as Nomad Cruise and Coboat which, unlike the social impact retreats above, are completely based on leisure and professional development as they travel around the coasts of Europe and the Caribbean Islands. The cruise retreats, which are priced around $1600USD per week might even exude a sense of social exclusivity as they cater to a different socio-economic group of digital nomads who wish to prioritise leisure in a more elite environment.

Ultimately, the retreats use their niche as a marketing strategy referred to as *resonance marketing*, which involves creating products or services that give a small number of customers exactly what they are looking for (Clemons & Spitler, 2004). The use of niches in such a unique industry can be powerful as customers might be willing to pay premium prices just to experience the type of retreat that they are interested in (Friedman & Friedman, 2007). If customers truly resonate with the retreat, it might even generate brand loyalty, which could persuade them to return for another programme.

5.8 Move 6: Persuasion techniques

This next move, the use of persuasion techniques, is optional as it was only included by 60% of the retreat homepages. This move is usually found towards the end of the homepage, where the retreats might employ certain selling methods that could persuade and encourage viewers to apply for their programmes. While this move can be realised by three steps, I will only discuss Step 3 due to the scope of this study.

Step 1: Offering incentives
Step 2: Pressure tactics
Step 3: Newsletter sign-ups

Move 6 Step 3: Newsletter sign-ups

Muller et al. (2008) found that newsletters or brand magazines not only provide valuable content for the viewers, but also enhance brand loyalty and increase favourable attitudes towards the brand over time. Based on my dataset, 56% of the retreats included this step of encouraging viewers to sign up for their brand newsletter towards the end of the homepage. Compared to price incentives and pressure tactics, which are hard-sell methods (Bhatia, 1993), newsletters take on a softer marketing approach. The retreats might use this nuanced persuasion technique to encourage a brand-customer relationship which may evolve into brand loyalty over time (Muller et al., 2008). The newsletters may also serve as a point of knowledge for viewers who are not ready to make a purchase decision but are interested in understanding more about the digital nomad lifestyle and retreat experience, as seen in the extracts below.

5.30) FOLLOW US
Sign up for humorous monthly updates and surf travel tips. We promise we won't swell-up your inbox.
(Unleash Surf, n.d.)

5.31) Curious?
We'll send you all the juiciest news from our coworking world. Don't worry, we'll only send you the good stuff.
(Hubud, n.d.)

Newsletters not only enable businesses to build a relationship with customers, but also have the potential to improve brand recall as they become a “trusted, daily source of category information” (Flores, 2004, p. 27). In order to intrigue and encourage viewers to sign up for their newsletter, the retreats tend to use evocative adjectives such as *humorous* and *juiciest* (see Extracts 5.30 and 5.31) to describe their brand content. These adjectives can have a “heightening effect” on the nouns that are being modified, which could persuade viewers that what is being offered is important and necessary (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001, p. 1302). The retreats also acknowledge that viewers might be hesitant to provide their email information because of spam, therefore the retreats use phrases like *we promise* and *don’t worry* to gain viewers’ trust and assure them that only relevant content will be shared.

5.9 Move 7: Soliciting action or response

In this final move, the retreats prompt viewers to take a number of actions through call-to-action (CTA) buttons or hypertext on the homepage, which navigate them to other pages of the website. Lucaites et al. (2017) argue that call-to-action buttons represent “the ultimate goal of the website” as they provide readers with navigational cues and encourage responses (p. 1). Hypertexts, on the other hand, are texts with hyperlinks that provide viewers with access to the other contents of the website through internal links (Askehave & Nielson, 2005). Hypertexts enable the genre of homepages to be more effective for promotional purposes since the viewers can browse other pages for more details and descriptions of products or services (Marco, 2002). All 45 retreats included this move, making it obligatory and manifesting it through three steps:

Step 1: Submit an application
Step 2: Contact organisers
Step 3: Browse other webpages

Although each of these steps perform different functions, they share similar linguistic features through the use of imperative verbs, as seen in Extracts 5.32 – 5.34 below.

5.32) Sign up for a 2-week, 1-month or 2-month experience today (Digital Outpost, n.d.)
5.33) Join our VIP Email List to receive latest news, retreat info, and exclusive discounts & giveaways! (Pangea Dreams, n.d.)
5.34) Check out our next events here (Sunny Office, n.d.)

Imperative verbs are commonly used in promotional language to ask the target audience to take action (Myers, 1994). Aside from instructing the audience to make a purchase decision, imperative verbs can fulfil other objectives such as instructing viewers to fill up a form or directing them elsewhere for more information (Viskari, 2008). The retreats use imperative verbs like *sign up*, *join*, and *check out* (see Extracts 5.32 – 5.34) to prompt, invite and direct viewers to complete certain actions. The CTA buttons on the retreat websites also feature imperatives such as *learn more*, *view more* and *read more* that direct viewers to other parts of the website, perhaps to keep them engaged with their brand and website. This may be yet another strategy to build a relationship with viewers as exposure to a brand website can improve the perception of brand trustworthiness and authenticity (Muller & Chandon, 2003). I continue to discuss the use of imperative verbs with further detail on coworking retreat homepages in Chapter 6.

5.10 Summary

The purpose of conducting a move/step analysis on the coworking retreat homepages was to explore any pattern similarities that might exist in the structure of this genre which contribute to the overall branding of the digital nomad lifestyle. The findings of my move/step analysis of coworking retreat homepages show that the retreats use a number of similar rhetorical moves and steps to realise the communicative purposes of this genre, which are: (i) building a relationship with the viewer, (ii) introducing and promoting the services, and (iii) persuading viewers to apply for the retreats. The move structure of this genre shares a likeness with Bhatia’s (1993, 2004) promotional move structure but also contains certain differences. For instance, many of the retreats include the first half of Bhatia’s move structure in terms of establishing credibility and introducing the services and their benefits to viewers. However, the majority of retreat homepages did not employ the use of hard sell persuasion techniques such as offering incentives or pressure tactics. This is likely because the retreats are still a new industry and wish to gain their viewers’ trust before promoting their services. Therefore, the homepages are careful with how they construct their messaging and tend to employ subtle persuasion strategies such as figurative headlines, aspirational language and adjectives to convey their communicative purposes. The use of hypertexts also enables retreat homepages to take on a softer marketing approach in appealing to viewers, since most of the retreat details and information can be hosted on separate webpages. In the next chapter, I present the findings for the next stage of my study - the keyword analysis and lexico-grammatical features that I identified on the coworking retreat homepages, which contribute to the branding of digital nomad lifestyles.

Chapter 6: Lexico-grammatical Analysis

6.1 Introduction

In order to investigate how the coworking retreat homepages convey an idealised version of digital nomad lifestyles in their commercialisation of this phenomenon, this study examined the linguistic content used to appeal to the target market. A register analysis was conducted to examine the distinctive lexico-grammatical features found across 45 coworking retreat homepages. These linguistic elements include the use of 1) pronouns, 2) imperative verbs and 3) persuasive rhetorical devices. Furthermore, a collocate analysis of the noun *community* was conducted as the notion of fostering connections is one of the main focuses of coworking retreats (Thompson, 2018a). The first section of this chapter will describe the use of promotional language in marketing and advertising materials, followed by results of the keyword analysis and then a detailed discussion of the findings from the linguistic analysis.

6.2 Promotional language

Promotional language is described as a sub literary genre in Leech's (1966) extensive study in which the author argues that most writers employ unique strategies and creative use of linguistic patterns to attract the reader's attention and prompt appropriate action. This may include advertising discourse to compel people to buy a product or apply for a service. As Bhatia (2005) puts it, advertising is considered a "dynamic and versatile genre" because of the inventive lexico-grammatical choices and rhetorical strategies that are employed (p. 2). There are numerous choices and strategies that can be looked at, therefore, when it comes to the promotional language used on coworking retreat homepages. The frequent use of personal pronouns and imperatives, for example, are common linguistic approaches that writers use to sound friendly while prompting action from readers (Pitchinee, 1995) while rhetorical devices can be used to evoke the imagination and interest of viewers (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

While coworking retreat homepages are not based on previously existing genres, it is important to note that they share features with other promotional genres such as sales letters, print advertisements and television commercials (Bhatia, 2005). The promotional nature of coworking retreats share similarities with tourism advertising which, according to Leelertphan (2017), aims to persuasively inform viewers of the destinations and hotel facilities through promotional materials. Instead of hotels, however, coworking retreats use their homepages to promote the retreat experience, service and benefits that their programmes provide to digital nomads. In this study, I draw attention to the top 15 keywords that were generated through a corpus analysis using the programme AntConc 3.5.8. These words included lexico-grammatical choices such as pronouns, imperative verbs and persuasive rhetorical devices.

6.3 Keyword analysis

Table 6.1 and Table 6.2 below display a list of the top 15 keywords from the CRH corpus after being referenced against the ANC and BNC corpora. Although a frequency analysis is a useful starting point, it can be limiting to the study as it only describes the lexical words and does not provide an interpretation of the language in use (Baker, 2006). In order to measure the saliency or keyness of the corpus data in addition to the frequency, a keyword list was compiled. This list contained words that were statistically classified as key or unique for examination which Scott (1999) argued included three types of words: 1. proper nouns 2. lexical words such as verbs, adjectives and adverbs 3. high frequency grammatical words such as modal verbs.

As mentioned in section 4.3.2, the CRH corpus that was generated by AntConc 3.5.8 consisted of 29,224 tokens. Results from the keyword list were used to guide the register analysis, including collocation and concordance analyses. Since negative keywords were not examined in this study, any discussion about keywords and keyword lists refer to positive keywords only.

Table 6.1
List of top 15 keywords in the CRH corpus, when referenced against ANC corpus

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Effect	Keyword (ANC corpus)
1	343	+915.9	0.0223	your
2	121	+751.16	0.0085	remote
3	91	+651.62	0.0062	coworking
4	98	+622.32	0.0067	retreat
5	130	+500.75	0.0088	community
6	253	+489.98	0.0164	our
7	85	+489.26	0.0058	digital
8	474	+482.9	0.0275	you
9	67	+479.71	0.0046	nomad
10	129	+445.77	0.0087	experience
11	195	+442.58	0.0129	work
12	365	+434.23	0.0222	we
13	62	+433.68	0.0042	bali

14	92	+422.77	0.0063	travel
15	85	+415.34	0.0058	join

Table 6.2
List of top 15 keywords in the CRH corpus, when referenced against BNC corpus

Rank	Frequency	Keyness	Effect	Keyword (ANC corpus)
1	343	+844.84	0.0222	your
2	125	+777.59	0.0085	remote
3	98	+654.32	0.0067	retreat
4	91	+649.85	0.0062	coworking
5	253	+484.4	0.0164	our
6	129	+480.24	0.0087	experience
7	67	+468.04	0.0046	nomad
8	85	+461.72	0.0058	digital
9	130	+452.96	0.0088	community
10	474	+449.31	0.0273	you
11	62	+418.55	0.0042	bali
12	365	+404.37	0.0221	we
13	85	+399.1	0.0058	join
14	195	+395.85	0.0128	work
15	92	+386	0.0063	travel

During this analysis, I observed that the top 15 keywords for both lists were similar, with slight variations in the keyness and effect when referenced against the ANC and BNC corpora. The following sections in this chapter highlight the distinctive lexico-grammatical features that were identified in the keyword analysis.

6.4 Pronouns

The use of pronouns, that include *we* and *you*, are a linguistic strategy that is often used in promotional genres to have a persuasive effect on people (Myers, 2010) because they engage with the audience. Brands that are able to address their readers directly by creating a sense of personalisation generally foster a more positive response from consumers (Garcia, 2017). However, it is not possible to tailor each piece of promotional messaging to individual consumers, therefore writers make use of pronouns to form an impression of intimacy and personal acknowledgement (Viskari, 2008). As the discourses of marketing and advertising become more casual, the use of pronouns is regarded as the logical step to create a familiar tone that readers can identify with (Gardelle & Sorlin, 2015). According to Aaron & McArthur (1998), pronouns can be characterised as personal, possessive, reciprocal and reflexive.

This study looked closely at the pronouns that were most frequent and salient in the corpus. These were possessive pronouns such as *your* and *our* and personal pronouns such as *we* and *you.* Based on Table 2 and Table 3, *your* ranked top in both the corpora while *our* ranked 6th against the ANC corpus and 5th against the BNC corpus. Meanwhile, *we* ranked 12th in both the corpora while *you* ranked 8th in the ANC corpus and 10th in the BNC corpus. Although there are differences in the keyness of these pronouns, perhaps due to their usage in an American and British context, there are still similarities in the frequency of occurrence within the homepage texts which bears significance to my analysis.

In a study examining how the use of pronouns could enhance consumer involvement and brand attitude, Garcia (2017) discovered that collectivism influenced the effectiveness of pronouns in brand messaging. The authors defined collectivist consumers as people who identified themselves based on their social relationships and environment. Their study showed that consumers with high levels of collectivism responded better to brand messaging that promoted group benefits, whereas consumers with low to moderate levels of collectivism were positively affected by the use of second person pronouns (Garcia, 2017). By applying this correlation to my own study, the use of second person pronouns should positively enhance attitude towards the brand since digital nomads possess high levels of individualistic values but also long to be part of a community (Mouratidis, 2018).

The most frequent pronouns found in my dataset were consistent with Michalik & Michalska-Suchanek's (2016) analysis which found that writers often use the "second person singular or plural pronoun *you* or its possessive form *your* as well as the first person pronoun *we* or its possessive form *our"* to make the audience feel valued and heard (p. 52). In order to study these pronouns in context, I explored the collocations and concordances that appeared in tandem with these words. Furthermore, I describe how the use of pronouns on the homepages carried out the communicative purposes of coworking retreats by examining their relation to the different Moves presented in Chapter 5. In the following sections, I proceed to discuss the second person pronoun *you* and its possessive form *your* as well as the first person pronoun *we* and its possessive form *our*.

6.4.1 *You* and *your* in context

According to Janoschka (2004), the use of pronouns in online advertising is meant to replicate an interpersonal dialogue while addressing the readers individually. Furthermore, Henderson (2019) argues that the pronouns *you* and *your* are commonly used by copywriters to direct the messaging towards the reader instead of focussing on the brand or company. The use of *you* and *your* on the coworking retreat homepages refer to viewers who are interested in potentially attending or being a part of the retreat.

To understand the word *your* in context, I first looked at the collocates in the CRH corpus within a -5/+5 span and found that the most salient phrases were *widen, visualise, supercharge, spurt,* and *monetize.* The most noticeable aspect of these collocates were that they were indicative of concepts regarding growth or development. This revealed how coworking retreats appealed to the motivations of viewers by emphasising that by joining the retreats, they have an opportunity to expand their business ventures. In financial or business discourse, *grow* is often used as a positive metaphor to describe concepts that are not necessarily eco-friendly for the planet (Halliday, 1990). A study that examined the use of metaphors during banking conference calls in Brazil discovered that the word growth occurred most frequently (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009) while an analysis of a print advertisement for an insurance company revealed that the growth messaging implied attractive yields and big returns (Tanaka, 1994).

When I examined the collocates within the context of their use on the homepages, I found that they formed metaphorical phrases such as *widen your horizon*, *visualise your future* and *supercharge your company*, implying that the retreats would help location independent workers gain more business opportunities through their programme. These phrases can be used to realise the obligatory Move 5, justifying the retreat, as it allowed the retreats to demonstrate their awareness of viewers' needs and justified the relevance of their services (Luntz, 2007, Young, 2017).

The concordances that co-occurred with *your* were also observed by sorting them one place alphabetically to the left, then one place to the right, then two places to the right. The arrangement revealed that *your* was often used in relation to the notion of freedom and flexibility. Phrases like *launch your own thing,* and *on your own terms* and *running your own business* reflected how coworking retreats make the promise of achieving professional autonomy, appealing to individuals who desire such a lifestyle. This language pattern reinforces the popular narrative that is often used to idealise the digital nomad lifestyle:

escaping from the rigidity of corporate life and redefining their professional life with the freedom to work from anywhere with flexible arrangements (Thompson, 2018b, Nast et al., 2018, Mouratidis, 2018).

Another interesting discovery was how the word *own* was also used with *your* in phrases such as *build your own itinerary* and *on your own schedule*, which reflected the flexibility of programmes offered by these coworking retreats in how participants could arrange their travel plans in accordance with the programmes. For instance, Fahle (2016) stated that some retreats allow participants to choose their preferred destinations and travel duration. Since one of the major attractions to this lifestyle is "the freedom to explore the world and working on a custom schedule" (Mouratidis, 2018, p. 37) the retreats use phrases that associate their services with professional freedom, financial security and lifestyle flexibility. According to Luntz (2007), this persuasion technique, known as *aspirational language,* is commonly used by advertisers to "tap into people's idealized self-image" and appeal to their hopes and dreams (p.19). I will present more instances of aspirational language employed by the retreat homepages in the following sections discussing imperative verbs and persuasive rhetorical devices.

While the collocates for the pronouns *you* did not disclose any significant findings, examining its context through a concordance analysis with the same arrangement revealed another pattern – the phrases *help you, guide you* and *support you.* Nearly every website featured at least one of these phrases, which again suggested that these retreats would help improve the lives of their participants – both professionally and personally. More importantly, these phrases in context: *help you connect with* and *support you every step* are a feature of self-representation, a persuasion technique used to "present the company as a friend or advisor" (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019, p. 62).

According to Romanova & Smirnova (2019), brands employ persuasion techniques based on three main principles: logos or the appeal to rationality; pathos, an appeal to emotions; and ethos, the ethical appeal or establishing the speaker's credibility. The linguistic pattern above is an example of the writers employing the self-representation technique classified under ethos to present the coworking retreats as trustworthy organisations that have the best interests of their customers in mind. This strategy exemplifies the obligatory Move 3, establishing credibility, as the retreats use pronouns to not only convey a sense of intimacy, but to build trust with potential customers through assuring phrases.

In addition to looking at collocates, other concordance lines revealed that the homepages often used modal auxiliary phrases such as *can* and *will* (as well as the contraction *'ll*) in tandem with *you*. As Leech (1966) explained, the use of these verbs in advertising "can be summed up in the words 'promise' and 'opportunity'" (p. 125). In my dataset, most of the modal auxiliary phrases were regarding the retreat experience or skills that might be gained by participants. By featuring phrases such as *you can expand your network* or *you can improve productivity*, the retreats illustrate an opportunity for viewers to improve their work and lifestyle, thus getting one step closer to the digital nomad lifestyle. Additionally, the future auxiliary *will* expresses a promise to potential customers through phrases such as '*you'll experience beautiful destinations*' and '*you will have 24/7 access*'. The use of future tense in these sentences is meant to convey a sense of certainty to the reader by assuming that they would or already have purchased the product or service (Leech, 1966). These statements might intend to empower viewers to believe that they can gain various benefits including networking and increased productivity and are guaranteed a good experience if they sign up.

However, previous participants such as Riachi (2017) and Jlengstorf (Reddit, 2017) have argued that the element of structure in these retreat programmes tend to hinder the freedom and control that digital nomads want in their daily schedules.

6.4.2 *We* & *our* in context

The first person pronoun *we* and its possessive form *our* also made a significant appearance in my dataset. Much like second person pronouns, brands often use *we* to create a sense of closeness and establish a relationship with the reader, although Harwood (2005) proposed that *we* could be either inclusive or exclusive. An 'inclusive' *we* refers to both the writer and reader whereas an 'exclusive' *we* only refers to the writer and other parties associated with them. According to Viskari (2008), we is inclusive when advertisers are creating a "sense of solidarity with the customer", but the exclusive form is more commonly used (p. 24).

Based on the concordances, the most frequent usage of *we* was in its exclusive form, referring to the coworking retreat brands and the services they offered. In some instances, the exclusive *we* was used by retreat participants themselves through testimonials that were featured on the website homepage. Although present, it was rare to see the retreat websites use both inclusive and exclusive versions of *we* in their body copy. This can be seen in Extracts 6.1 and 6.2 below from the homepages of The Remote Trip and Digital Nomad Girls.

6.1) Feel like life is slipping away in your 9-to-5 office cubicle? … No worries – we felt the same! This year, we're on a mission to help MORE people make the leap from an office job to working remote.

(The Remote Trip, n.d.)

6.2) The nomad lifestyle can be pretty lonely, we totally get it. That's what DNG is all about: we help you connect with like-minded women!

(Digital Nomad Girls, n.d.)

In the extracts from both homepages, the retreats start by using the inclusive *we* to establish a connection with viewers but immediately switch to the exclusive *we* when introducing their services in the next sentence. By using phrases such as '*we felt the same*' and '*we totally get it*', the brand suggests that they are in the same boat as customers, taking on an intimate and friendly environment (Vaičenonienė, 2006). According to Harwood (2005), academics often employ similar inconsistencies in their pronoun selection to involve the reader before presenting their argument. In his study, Harwood (2005) observed that academic writers used the inclusive *we* to create an imaginary dialogue with the reader to promote a sense of partnership, even though it is actually the writer who is spearheading the conversation. The retreats might have employed this writing technique as a persuasive strategy by including themselves in the narrative, implying that they once shared the same desires and concerns of digital nomads. This can be perceived as yet another strategy used by the retreats to establish trust with viewers by asserting their knowledge and shared experience of the digital nomad lifestyle.

Studies on political discourse found that using the inclusive or collective *we* in political speeches or texts can be a powerful persuasion tool (Bull & Fretzer, 2006, Gocheco, 2012), while advertisers are more likely to use the exclusive *we* to establish their authority while building a relationship with their target audience (Leelertphan, 2017). While the inclusive *we* was used on the homepages to convey friendliness and establish trust, the retreats also employed this pronoun to imply their authority through the usage of exclusive *we.* This connotation of authority was observed in both the collocates and concordances of the CRH corpus. Words such as *teach, organize, launch, applications* and *select* implied a spirit of authority and credibility from the retreats, as seen in Extracts 6.3 – 6.6. below.

6.3) We are now accepting applications (Cowork Paradise, n.d.)

6.4) We screen all applications (Remote Explorers, n.d.)

6.5) We pay attention to select participants from (DNX Camp, n.d.)
6.6) We select 25 young participants from (Cofounders Retreat, n.d.)

Based on these extracts, the retreats announce to viewers that they have the power to choose and vet applicants before determining if they are eligible to attend the retreats. While the retreats do not specify their criteria for choosing participants, Meier (2019) stated that her application included a phone interview from someone at the Remote Year team about her professional status, personal life and most importantly, whether she could afford the programme. Although this step might ensure the safety, group dynamics and suitability of potential customers, it could convey a sense of social exclusivity or elitism, in that the programme is designed for digital nomads from a certain socio-economic background.

The selection of participants displays one of the main differences between travel agencies and coworking retreats. While there are elements of tourism advertising featured on the homepages, the retreats are primarily professional trips that aim to provide digital nomads and entrepreneurs with the opportunity to work remotely. That being said, the concordance analysis that I conducted also found that *we* was frequently associated with *take care* and *provide,* phrases often used in the hospitality industry to assure guests of a good experience and emphasise the quality of service (Leelertphan, 2017). The retreats use *we* on their homepages to assume two different roles; one being the organiser or event coordinator and the other being a host or service provider.

Finally, the possessive pronoun *our* was mostly used in its exclusive form to describe their roles and types of facilities offered through the retreats. According to Leelertphan (2017), hotel websites from Thailand and New Zealand used *our* followed by a noun to symbolise their ownership of property or resorts. In this context, *our* referred to three categories: property, people, and services. Property described physical spaces such as *rooms, hotels, resorts, camps, coworking space* and *villas* whereas people were described as *community, groups, team, staff, students and alumni.* Next, were services organised by the retreats such as *courses, events* and *itineraries*.

Aside from a way to signify possession or define their roles with viewers, words such as *we* and *our* "can be powerful markers of identity" (Pennebaker, 2011, p. 213). For example, Pennebaker (2011) explained that people who use *we* or *our* pronouns when speaking about their company embrace their organisation as part of their identity and are more fulfilled in their work lives compared to people who call their workplace "that company" or refer to their colleagues as “they”. The usage of *our* on coworking retreat homepages could be a persuasive technique employed to convey brand unity and represent togetherness. This might be how the retreats establish their expertise on the organisation of these retreats, proving that they foster digital nomad communities by representing themselves as a cohesive group. In the next section, I present my findings on the usage of imperative verbs on the coworking retreat homepages.

6.5 Imperative verbs

Another linguistic strategy often employed in advertising discourse are the use of imperative verbs, which prompt readers to take action (Vaičenonienė, 2006). According to El-Sakran & Maklai, (2019), imperatives are a class of verbs that are generally used to express commands or orders, although they may also serve other functions such as giving instructions, issuing warnings and making invitations. In academic writing, Swales et al. (1998) found that imperatives were rarely used in the bulk of the text, except for presenting the argument, but existed mainly in the footnotes. However, the authors argued that while imperatives are perceived as a harsh way to communicate, most writers use them to grab the reader’s attention and add a personal touch.

When advertisers use imperatives, they intend to convey that they are acting for their audience’s benefit, not their own (Viskari, 2008). Myers (1994) stated that writers prefer to use imperatives in advertisements because it “creates a personal effect, a sense of one person talking to another” (p. 47) and might even be made to sound polite by using questions or expressions like *please*. In his work, Leech (1966) categorised imperatives into three verb groups based on their usage in advertising discourse. The first group involves acquisition of the product by urging consumers to make purchasing decisions with verbs such as *get, buy* and *choose*. The next group includes verbs like *have, try, enjoy* and *use* which involve the consumption of the product. Lastly, the third group is meant to attract the viewer’s attention and consists of verbs such as *look, see, remember* and *make sure*. This classification will be used as the basis for my analysis on the usage of imperative verbs on coworking retreat websites.

Based on the top 15 keywords in my CRH corpus, the most frequent and salient words that could be used as imperatives were *experience, join, work* and *travel*. However, upon a closer examination of the concordances in context, I found that the words *experience, work* and *travel* were also used as nouns to describe the retreat. For this analysis, I will be discussing these words in their imperative form and reviewing some imperative verbs that are commonly found in cybergenres such as websites. Table 6.3 below demonstrates the verbs in the CRH corpus when compared against Leech's (1966) imperative clauses.

Table 6.3

Most frequent and key verbs in the CRH corpus against Leech's (1966) imperative clauses

Imperative Clauses	Verbs
Acquisition of product/service	Join
Consumption of product/service	Experience, Work, Travel
Appeals for notice	-

In my dataset, imperatives were mainly used as suggestions or invitations instead of direct commands. For example, the main imperative used to encourage viewers to take action was the word *join* which was used in tandem with the collective pronouns *us* and *our*. *Join* collocated with two main patterns: the people and the experience. The phrases *join a community*, *join our journey* and *join us for an adventure* were frequently used, adopting a more suggestive and inclusive tone rather than a demanding one. In using the verb *join*, the retreats not only invite viewers to sign up for their programme, but also idealise the digital nomad lifestyle by framing it as an exciting journey filled with adventures, one that is not to be missed. Furthermore, the retreats position themselves as an exclusive group, which is a common persuasive method used by businesses to create a 'cult following' from their viewers (Lakhani, 2008). Lakhani (2008) explains that this is a powerful technique because people are often comforted by the idea of belonging to a group and being around like-minded individuals.

The next group of imperatives, *experience, work* and *travel*, were used with regards to how consumers should experience the coworking retreat. *Experience* collocated with adjectives such as *great, adventurous, amazing, new* which described the retreat benefits and the type of nomads who participated. On the other hand, the verbs *work* and *travel* frequently occurred with words such as *anywhere, remotely* and *world*, which emphasises the freedom of space and location independence that comes with being a digital nomad. The retreats might highlight these words to persuade viewers with the offer of living and working from their dream location as a unique opportunity that can be achieved through their programme. Table 6.4 below outlines the collocates of these words.

Table 6.4.
Collocates of work and travel in the CRH corpus

Verbs	Collocates
Work	anywhere, flexibility, remotely, freedom, live, passion, travel
Travel	adventures, meet, locations, live, world, work, life

Interestingly, *work* and *travel* also collocate with each other because they were often used sequentially in the copy to urge viewers to take action. This is highlighted in Extracts 6.7 – 6.11 below.

6.7) Travel, work and forge meaningful connections (Outsite, n.d.)
6.8) Travel, work and live anywhere in the world (Remote Life, n.d.)
6.9) Travel, work and meet other nomads (Work Wanderers, n.d.)
6.10) Live, work and travel differently (Hacker Paradise, n.d.)
6.11) Work Remote, Travel The World (The Remote Trip, n.d.)

By pairing *travel* and *work* with another verb phrase, the retreats are able to create suggestive sentences that offer the reader two to three options of how they could experience the retreat. As Leelertphan (2017) pointed out, the use of experiential verbs is useful in promotional genres as they not only steer the viewer, but also provide them the freedom to decide on which decision to make. Another significant observation is how the retreats use phrases such as '*live anywhere*' and '*travel differently*', once again conveying aspirational language which focuses on selling a better version of the consumer, instead of the product itself (Luntz, 2007). These sentences encourage viewers to desire a better lifestyle and then urge them to act on their desires by applying for the retreats.

The words *differently* and *anywhere* also make social identity comparisons between digital nomads and traditional workers, idealising digital nomads as individuals who have managed to escape their strict work regimes and uninspiring work environments while traditional workers are stuck in their mundane routines. These comparisons tend to influence positive distinctiveness in viewers, which involves perceptions that favour the ingroup over the outgroup (Trepte & Loy, 2017). Therefore, these aspirational sentences achieve two functions: to encourage the viewer to seek out their dream lifestyle and to create positive distinctiveness in viewers by comparing the freedom of digital nomads to the 'imprisonment' of traditional workers.

Although the imperative verb *get* is regarded as the most frequent imperative used in advertisements (Leech, 1966), it was not in my list of top 15 keywords. In fact, the sporadic use of imperatives such as *book, visit* and *contact* in my dataset was surprising. These are verbal items typically employed on websites to prompt the reader to get in touch with the organisation (Viskari, 2008). Instead, the more frequent verbs were those that fulfilled Leech's (1966) third imperative clause, appealing to the reader's attention with verbal items such as *learn more, view, connect read more* and *check out.* These phrases are used on the retreat homepages to encourage viewers to engage with further information about the retreat services instead of urging them to buy their packages. These phrases can be seen as a realisation of the optional Move 6, persuasion techniques, a persuasive strategy which was also used to prompt newsletter sign-ups. This suggests that the retreats consistently use a soft persuasive approach on their homepages to gain favourability and build trust with the viewers since it is a fairly new concept. It may also suggest that the retreats take on this approach as it might work better for their services which aim to sell a lifestyle rather than a one-time holiday package.

6.6 Persuasive rhetorical devices

One of the most significant findings in my lexico-grammatical analysis was the occurrence of rhetorical devices which were especially apparent in the headlines and sub-headlines of the coworking retreat websites. McQuarrie & Mick (1996), defined rhetorical figures as "an artful deviation in the form taken by a statement" (p. 424). To elaborate, a rhetorical figure occurs when an expression violates an expectation at either a semantic or lexical level (Leech, 1966, McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). A study by Tom & Eves (1999) which looked at 120 print advertisements discovered that advertisements which incorporated rhetorical devices were not only more persuasive, but also had more recall value. While there are various types of rhetorical devices in the English language, I will be focusing on the most frequent and significant types that occurred in my dataset: metaphors and hyperboles. The retreats use metaphors to convey both the obligatory Move 1, introducing the retreat and Move 4, introducing the services.

6.6.1 Metaphors

The first rhetorical device I would like to discuss are metaphors, since they were the most popular device featured on the homepage retreats and were especially prevalent in the headlines and sub-headlines. Metaphors are part of rhetorical figures that serve to emphasize or de-emphasize statements but are also used as a tool to understand and construct our social realities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In advertising, metaphors are often used to link products to something that is “meaningful within a cultural context” (Johnson, 2007, p.11). They are also deemed valuable to advertisers according to Leech (1966) and Tanaka (1994) because they can help writers to create emotive associations with the product and give readers the opportunity to derive their own assumptions.

For my analysis, I decided to adopt Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) *conceptual metaphor theory* which states that metaphors are not just a deviation of language but are pervasive in human thought and action as they structure the way people perceive, think and behave (p. 3). This framework was preferred due to its typical usage in Western advertising as it draws on the common cultural understanding shared by members of a group (Zhang & Gao, 2009). To identify the underlying structures of metaphors, Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) use of three overlapping categories: structural, orientational and ontological, which are different, but can share similar features.

Structural metaphors referred to when a concept is metaphorically structured on the basis of another. For instance, the LIFE IS JOURNEY metaphor whereby the properties of having a journey were structurally mapped onto the properties of life (Yu, 2013). The second category of orientational metaphors organise a system of concepts, often through spatial orientation such as HAPPY IS UP and SAD IS DOWN, as exemplified in the usage of “high spirits” or “feeling low” (Yu, 2013, p. 1471). Lastly, were ontological metaphors which centred around people’s experiences with physical objects and how they allowed people to process abstract concepts. For example, Tanaka (1994) observed that the metaphorical concept, SKIN CARE IS WAR was present in Japanese skincare advertisements through statements such as “Let’s ward off ultraviolet rays” and “A counter-measure against damage for summer skin”.

Based on my data, I found that retreats mostly used structural or ontological metaphors – or a combination of both of these. Following Yu (2013), who adopted Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) method of constructing a metaphor, I identified the structural metaphor ‘FREEDOM IS BUILT’ that was sometimes used on the retreat homepages by mapping the properties of construction onto the properties of living freely. Table 6.5 below illustrates this point.

Table 6.5.
Structural mappings from BUILDING to FREEDOM

Structural mapping	Examples
The path to freedom can be mapped or drawn out.	*Design* your life at sea (Nomad Cruise, n.d.)
You have the power to transform a space and create new life.	*Make* the world your office (The Remote Life, n.d.) The world *can be* your office (The Remote Trip, n.d.)
A good job or life is based on a sturdy foundation.	*Build* a career that makes you feel alive (Nomad Academy, n.d.) Helping people *build* location independent lives (Outsite, n.d.)
The ability to achieve freedom is in your hands.	*Make* this life a wonderful adventure (Roam, n.d.)

Through these metaphors, the message is conveyed to viewers that they have the power to control their own freedom, with the help of the retreats. This can be very empowering, especially for individuals who are eager to pursue the digital nomad lifestyle. Metaphors that make use of structure and organisation can also have persuasive effects on the readers provided that the semantic associations are linked to the argument (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). Words such as *build, design* and *make,* are links that highlight the metaphor by making them more comprehensible, and thus more persuasive. These metaphors also insinuate that the viewers are missing something from their lives or are not currently 'living their best lives', implying that this is a problem.

Goatly & Hiradhar (2016) posited that advertisers played a crucial role in consumer capitalism by encouraging the notion that buying a product can solve one's problems, whether the product is actually needed or not. In order to create a persuasive message for viewers, the retreats used metaphors as a strategy to make consumers feel dissatisfied with their current state. This can be seen in Table 7 through another example of a structural metaphor that I identified on the homepages, namely the LIFE IS ADVENTURE metaphor.

Table 6.6.
Structural mappings from ADVENTURE to LIFE

Structural mapping	Examples
The ideal life involves seeking adventure every day.	Live your *bucket list* (Hacker Paradise, n.d.)
A lack of stability can lead to a more exciting life.	Live *unsettled* (Unsettled, n.d.)
Break away from your daily routine to reach your full potential.	Every day, a new *adventure* (Hubud, n.d.)

By using phrases like *bucket list*, which is a metaphor in itself, the retreats appeal to their viewers' desire for excitement, adventure and a break from routine. Furthermore, the imperative mood of these sentences also implore viewers to take action and change their lives. Instead of phrasing the metaphors as a question (*Would you like to live your bucket list?)*, the imperative nature of these statements have a much stronger effect on the viewers. The term *unsettled* is also a play on the common phrase '*settle down'* which people often use to describe a stable lifestyle that involves getting a regular job, getting married and staying in a permanent place. Both the structural metaphors FREEDOM IS BUILT, and LIFE IS ADVENTURE are examples of how the coworking retreats use persuasive linguistic devices to idealise the lives of digital nomads as a sort of holiday that is based on constant adventure and excitement and is free from mundane obligations. These messages use an emotional appeal to once again make viewers aware of the lifestyle that they do not have while urging them that their dream lifestyle can be achieved through the retreats.

From a social identity standpoint, the retreats seem to offer viewers the opportunity to choose their identity and be a part of an exclusive digital nomad community who forge their own path in life. Through these metaphors, the retreats imply that their viewers deserve a better life and by doing so "make the poor aware of a quality of life to which they have the right" (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016, p. 206). Another example of this are the ontological metaphors used by the retreats, as seen in Extracts 6.12 – 6.14 below.

6.12) Work where your heart *takes* you (Alpine Coworking, n.d.)
6.13) Let your surroundings *move* you (Cowork Paradise, n.d.)
6.14) *Embrace* the unknown (Unsettled, n.d.)

Ontological metaphors allow viewers to relate better to physical objects or emotions and ideas by giving them human qualities and personifying them (Tanaka, 2004). For instance, all of the examples above (see Extracts 6.12 – 6.14) personify either physical items (*heart*) or abstract ideas (*surroundings* and *unknown*) by imbuing them with human qualities like *take*, *move* and *embrace*. According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980), ontological metaphors are meant to help people deal rationally with their experiences by understanding certain concepts through the qualities of a human entity. In this case, Extract 6.12 is a different take on the idiom '*follow your heart'*. Here, *heart* is used by the retreats to represent viewer's hopes and dreams so while it cannot physically *take* people anywhere, it encourages them to give in to their desires and follow their intuition. Similarly, if the word *move* in Extract 6.13 was replaced with '*inspire'* it would produce '*Let your surroundings inspire you*'. Although this statement still makes sense, it loses its sense of memorability and emotional appeal due to the lack semantic incompatibility.

Although the results of investigations about whether metaphors are effective persuasive devices are mixed, Sopory & Dillard (2002) found that metaphors have a stronger effect on consumer attitude than literal language. Their comprehensive study also discovered that "metaphors were most persuasive when placed in the introduction position of a message" (p. 410), which was compatible with my data since all of the metaphors were featured as headlines or sub-headlines.

6.6.2 Hyperbole

Apart from metaphors, there were also instances of hyperboles used by the retreats. Originally, a Greek word which meant 'overcasting', hyperbole is a type of figurative speech "which contains an exaggeration for emphasis" (Cuddon, 2013, p. 346). Hyperboles were commonly used in Tudor drama, as Cuddon (2013) explained, but were later employed for comedic effect like in the Dickens novels. Advertisers usually adopt hyperboles to emphasise their product benefit or highlight a brand feature (Chetia, 2015). Although the literature on hyperboles in advertising is limited, a study conducted by Barbu-Kleitsch (2015) on the use of visual hyperboles in advertisement found that most participants responded positively to visual hyperboles and even found them to be persuasive. That being said, hyperboles can also have a negative effect on some readers especially if they are not aware of its rhetorical functions (Callister & Stern, 2012).

According to my dataset, the most common hyperbole was the claim *work from anywhere* or *work from anywhere in the world* which were used by retreats such as Active Workation, Outsite and Wifly Nomad. *Anywhere in the world* here is an exaggeration that the viewer is meant to process as the range of different destinations that the retreats offer. Since the retreat programmes actually offer participants a chance to work from various locations and countries, the use of hyperbole here is both attractive and memorable. For instance, the retreats do not really intend for viewers to believe that they can literally work anywhere in the world, but the use of hyperbole is meant to strengthen the message in an ambiguous and dramatic manner. It also motivates readers to process the deeper meaning behind the message, which Callister & Stern (2012) point out, can increase positive attitudes towards the brand and product.

However, due to some advertisements that make inflated claims about their products, readers might be sceptical about hyperboles since they perceive these exaggerations as “hype, puffery or even deception” (Callister & Stern, 2012, p. 4). McQuarrie & Mick (1996) noted that it is important to make a distinction between hype and hyperbole in advertising because the latter has figurative meanings whereas the former merely aims to create an excessively positive portrayal of the brand. Based on my observations, I found a few of the retreats that demonstrate this. Institute of Code, for example, featured the headline *Life-changing courses in Bali* while Cofounders Retreat claimed that their programme was *The ultimate entrepreneurial experience*. These statements represent more of an enhanced opinion rather than hyperbole since they do not possess any figurative intent and are instead puffed up propositions for readers to accept literally (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). As a new industry, these types of enhanced opinions could negatively impact the coworking retreats if viewers find them untrustworthy.

Another example of hyperbole was found on Remote Year’s homepage: *Remote Year, a totally different approach to travelling the world*. The figurative intent here is clear because Remote Year has not claimed that they are the best way to travel, but rather described that their retreats adopt a different approach compared to other retreats or holiday programmes. Callister & Stern (2012, p. 5) call this tactic “truth-telling fictions”, because it the advertisers assume that readers will be able to separate truth from fiction and understand the intended meaning. Although hyperboles are intended to have a playful and memorable effect in on the homepages, all the hype and puffery might lead to viewers finding the retreats manipulative and deceptive. Therefore, it is important for the retreats to avoid hype language and instead utilise hyperboles for more effective results.

6.7 Examining the collocates of *community*

One of the more significant words in my top 15 keyword list was the noun *community*. Since one of the main attractions of these coworking retreats is that they assist digital nomads in building new relationships and encourage professional collaboration, it made sense that they would emphasise the notion of community. However, coworking scholarly literature has argued that the broadness of the term *community* has led to many businesses using it as a promotional benefit to increase their reputation (Gandini, 2016, Spinuzzi et al., 2019).

According to my dataset, *community* collocated with words such as *global, like-minded, support* and *activities.* Many of the retreats emphasised the fact that they hosted a *global community,* which not only meant that the participants originated from different countries and ethnic backgrounds but implied that the retreats provide international collaboration opportunities. This implication was contested by Spinuzzi et al. (2019) as their study found that most coworking spaces do not actually host a collaborative community, which involves working on a common project or activity. Rather, the authors drew parallels between coworking communities and Gesellschaft communities. Developed by sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, Gesellschaft, which translates to ‘society’, apply to people with individual interests and secondary relationships such as friends or colleagues. While some coworking communities would collaborate by sharing knowledge or experience, the authors found that most members had never worked on a task together, leading them to deduce that the majority of coworking spaces focussed on “individuality and business interests” (Spinuzzi et al., 2019, p. 131).

The term *like-minded* was also defined differently on every website. Some retreats that offered a niche referred to *like-minded* in the sense that the community they selected were a focussed group of individuals. For instance, retreats such as *Pangea Dreams, Digital Nomad Girls* and *Remote Explorers* that were specifically for women and *Adventurous Life* which was for people over 50 years used *like-minded* to refer to the demographic similarities in their community. Other retreats such as *Unleash Surf, Surf Office* and *Coworking Camp* who prioritised beach-related activities referred to *like-minded* people in the behavioural sense.

That being said, most retreats used *like-minded* to mean that the participants consisted of other people who were living or interested in the digital nomad or location independent lifestyle. Haking (2017) noted that many of her respondents used the phrase *like-minded* when they described how digital nomad communities supported their professional development. This was because they felt that “less distractions from non-entrepreneurial friends and family increases their focus” (Haking, 2017, p. 34). Perhaps it is because the term *like-minded* conveys a sense of relatability and comfort to viewers in that there are other people who share the same goals and principles as they do. The frequency of their use in these contexts have turned terms such as *global* and *like-minded* into buzzwords that the retreats use to describe their communities, which forms part of the branding digital nomad lifestyles.

Curiously, Lee et al. (2019) pointed out that many digital nomads did not see the social value in coworking spaces because these spaces did not facilitate engagement between different residents and were more focussed on space provisions. This was especially prevalent among nomads who considered themselves introverts or socially awkward. In fact, the authors discovered that despite being members of coworking spaces, many nomads preferred to meet people through websites such as Meetup and Reddit and Facebook pages (Lee et al., 2019).

It is important to note, however, that these studies were conducted on coworking spaces and the same might not apply to coworking retreats that already provide curated community activities for members to socialise. The retreat setting could also be one which enhances relationship building since it is usually hosted in a secluded location, with lots of time to be spent on socialising and networking with other participants. Coworking retreats tend to operate in large groups (Fahle, 2016), which could be an issue when it comes to getting along with everyone in the group (Meier, 2019). An article by Adams (2016) also found that the lack of group diversity could be a problem for retreat communities since most of the participants from Western cultures prefer to be with their own groups and are not willing to immerse themselves in the different local cultures, unlike digital nomads who travel individually.

6.8 Summary

The findings presented from this chapter demonstrate the ways in which coworking retreats have commercialised and changed the original concept of digital nomadism by presenting an idealised version of it through persuasive linguistic features. After a close examination of the top 15 keywords in the CRH corpus, I focused my lexico-grammatical analysis on investigating three main lexical features: pronouns, imperatives and rhetorical devices as they produced the most significant linguistic patterns on the retreat homepages. The usage of pronouns revealed how the coworking retreats attempt to build a relationship with viewers while establishing their credibility as experts on the digital nomad lifestyle. Imperative verbs are also employed on the homepages to invite viewers to be a part of the retreats. The imperatives do not push viewers to make a payment for the programme, rather they are used as a persuasive technique to encourage viewers to spend more time engaging with the website. It is possible that the retreats employ this strategy to establish a long term relationship and build trust with their viewers. The use of aspirational language was one of the most significant persuasive linguistic strategies that

I identified on the retreat homepages. This, I suggest, was done to encourage a desire in viewers for the digital nomad lifestyle by selling them a better version of themselves (Luntz, 2007) by promoting an idealised lifestyle that they could attain from visiting the retreats. Although aspirational language could be observed in the usage of pronouns and imperative verbs, they were most prominent in the use of persuasive rhetorical devices such as metaphors and hyperboles. These devices essentially portray digital nomads as people who lead adventurous, spontaneous lifestyles and are in complete control of their professional freedom. While these representations might be creating a positive persuasive effect on viewers, they are exaggerated and like most promotional discourse, should not be taken literally. Finally, I analysed the collocates of the word *community* and how it is used by the retreats for promotional purposes to attract and persuade viewers, especially those who are looking to connect with other nomads. In the next chapter, I present my findings of the visual design analysis that was conducted on coworking retreat homepages since images as well as text can greatly influence people's perception of the digital nomadic lifestyle.

Chapter 7: Visual Design Analysis

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the visual design elements on coworking retreat homepages, which contain their own ‘grammatical structure’ to express meaning as Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) established. Like most cybergenres and promotional genres, visual elements are employed on the coworking retreat homepages to achieve their communicative purposes of building a relationship with potential customers, introducing and promoting their services, and persuading potential customers to apply. The visual analysis of three retreat homepages, Remote Year, Unsettled and Hacker Paradise, was conducted to study how the retreats idealise and brand the digital nomad lifestyle in trying to achieve their communicative purposes.

Kress & van Leeuwen’s (2006) extensive visual grammar framework explores how social meaning and ideological positions are articulated through “contemporary visual design in ‘Western’ cultures” (p. 3). As discussed in section 4.4.3, this study adopted the three metafunctions proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) to understand how the social actors were represented (representational meaning), the relationship between the represented participants and viewers (interactive meaning) and how the information was organised visually through the homepage layout (compositional meaning). Table 7.1 below outlines the features from Kress & van Leeuwen’s (2006) framework that were observed on the coworking retreat homepages.

Table 7.1.

Visual design features on coworking retreat homepages

Metafunctions	Features on retreat homepages	Interpretation
Representational	Narrative process	How represented participants use vectors to interact with other image elements.
	Conceptual process	Objects, people or places in their timeless, static state.

Interactive	Contact - Demand or offer	Eye contact between represented participants and viewers.
	Social Distance - Close-up, medium or long shot	Framing of represented participants through distance.
	Perspective - Vertical angles Horizontal angles	Creating involvement and identifying power relations through angles.
Compositional	Information value	Layout of visual elements on homepages
	- Left/right	Given/new information
	- Top/bottom	Ideal/real information
	- Centre/margin	Critical/subordinate information
		Flow of information
	Framing	

The first meaning I explored in my visual design analysis was the representational meaning on coworking retreat homepages which observed how the represented participants appeared on the homepages (see Table 7.1). These roles were then identified as either narrative or conceptual. The narrative process studied the type of actions performed by represented participants or the events that took place through vectors. Vectors are elements in visuals that form a diagonal line and bear the “marks of narrative process” and can be represented by humans or objects in action (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 82).

On the other hand, the conceptual process explored images that featured the represented participants in a more generalised and static context as they lack the use of vectors and often feature no interaction between the visual elements (Yang & Zhang, 2014). It is important to note that the represented participants are not limited to humans, instead they are the “subject matter” that is being featured in a particular image which also includes places, animals or abstract things (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 48).

In understanding the interactive meaning of visuals displayed on the retreat homepages, I observed the relationship and interactions between the represented participants and viewers. My study analysed three aspects including the contact (eye contact), social distance (visual framing) and positioning of angles (vertical, frontal or oblique). These aspects were considered in order to reveal any potential power relations between the represented participants and viewers and to observe the ways in which digital nomads were portrayed as a group. Finally, I observed the compositional meaning of the retreat homepages by analysing the information value and framing of visual structures on the retreat homepages. This section focused on the positioning and layout design of visuals to understand how the retreats display their information to attract and persuade viewers. Although saliency is also a process of compositional meaning, this study was not able to investigate this aspect due to the scope of this thesis.

7.2 Visuals presented on coworking retreat homepages

This section discusses the number and type of images portrayed on the selected coworking retreat homepages, namely Remote Year, Unsettled and Hacker Paradise. Following Leelertphan (2017), I identified the number and types of visuals in order to compare the similarities and differences between the visuals presented on the three retreat homepages. Although the coworking retreats feature a variety of visual elements including icons and diagrams, the following subsections focus on static and moving images as well as colours in order to explore the way in which the retreats use visuals to brand the digital nomad lifestyle. The number and type of visuals that were analysed on each of the three coworking retreat homepages can be seen below in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2.
Type of visuals analysed on coworking retreat homepages

Type of visuals presented	Remote Year	Unsettled	Hacker Paradise
Static images	9	18	20
Moving images (frames)	5	26	0

Overall, the number of static images used on the homepages ranged from 9 to 20 (see Table 7.2). The reason for such a high number of static images, especially on *Unsettled* and *Hacker Paradise* could be because the homepage is often the most visited page on a website and is presented as “the company’s face to the world” (Nielson & Tahir, 2002, p. 1). The homepage is the brand’s first impression to viewers as Lindgaard et al. (2006) stated and most web designers only have 50 milliseconds to attract the viewers and make a good impression. Nielson

& Tahir (2002) recommend that images on the homepage should not exceed 15% of the page or 9 images. However, the authors also acknowledge that some websites might need to include more images if their content is “highly visual” (Nielson & Tahir, 2002, p. 49). Although a high quantity of static images could lead to an “overload” of information for viewers, Arguel & Jamat (2009) found that using a combination of static and moving images was beneficial for understanding and learning new information. The following section presents a detailed discussion of my visual analysis findings.

7.3 Representational meaning

According to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), the representational meaning assumes that “any semiotic mode has to be able to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans” (p. 42). The represented participants could comprise people, places, objects or elements whereas the interactive participants are those in the act of communication such as producers or viewers. As stated in section 7.0, two kinds of images have been identified by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) with reference to the representational meaning, namely narrative or conceptual images. The still images in my dataset include a combination of narrative and conceptual images, with a higher percentage (70%) of the former.

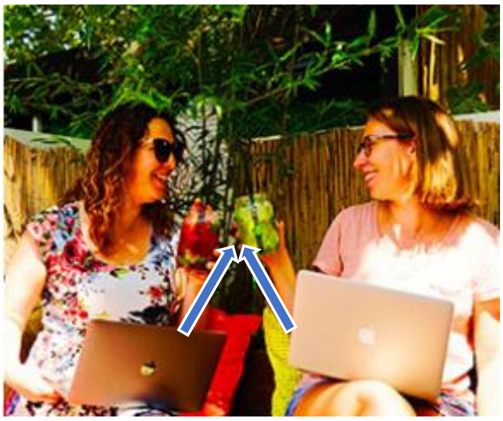
As for the moving images, Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) state that the visual patterns also largely comprise of the narrative processes since the role of vectors are characterised through movement instead. The moving images that appeared on *Remote Year* and *Unsettled* are what filmmakers refer to as a montage, an editing technique whereby different shots are juxtaposed in a fast-paced style to convey a message to viewers in a short period of time (Daily, 2016). Montages are usually not recommended for traditional promotional videos because the quick changes between settings can cause the viewer to disengage with the video, although Daily (2016) suggests that they can benefit a brand depending on the communicative purpose. In this case, the coworking retreats might use a montage-style video to inform viewers of their services while promoting the entire experience that might be too dynamic to represent through still images alone. In the following subsections, I provide a detailed analysis of the visual semiotics observed on coworking retreat websites and how digital nomad lifestyles are branded through visual representation.

7.3.1 Narrative representations

In essence, narrative visuals represent the processes of change through unfolding actions and events and often portray participants performing roles (Leelertphan, 2017). Narrative visuals can be realised as action processes, reactional processes, speech processes, mental processes, and conversion processes based on the type of vector and participants involved (Ansori & Taopan, 2019). The narrative images used on coworking retreat homepages comprised of either Action or Reactional processes. This includes the moving images which appear on the website header as they did not include any dialogue or thought bubble. Manca (2016) explains that action processes can either be transactional, whereby a vector is departing from or formed by an Actor towards a Goal, or non-transactional, featuring two Actors interacting with a non-present Goal. Figure 7.1 below portrays an example of the transactional action process.

Figure 7.1.

Action process on Hacker Paradise homepage



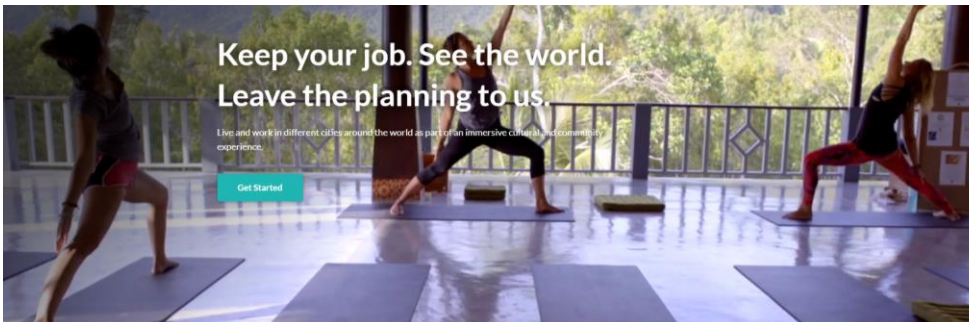
Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

In Figure 7.1, two types of vectors are observed. The first vector is formed through the Actors' arms as their drinks touch while the second is created through their gaze as they smile at one another. This type of transactional structure is bidirectional, meaning that each participant plays the role of Actor and the Goal simultaneously to create a circuit of interaction (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In this instance, the Actors are creating an exchange between each other through the act of sharing a drink together. The use of this image on Hacker Paradise might intend to convey the type of friendly relationships and connections that potential customers can expect to form during the retreat programme.

The juxtaposition of Actors sharing a drink in a tropical setting while using their laptops also exemplifies an idealisation of digital nomad lifestyles. Through these types of images, the retreats construct a narrative which describes digital nomads as individuals who spend their days relaxing without the "careful preparation and meticulous planning" that is actually involved (Mouratidis, 2018, p. 37). Based on my dataset, non-transactional processes are more commonly observed whereby the Actors are forming vectors, but the Goal is invisible, meaning their actions are not "'done to' or 'aimed at' anyone or anything" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 63). Figures 7.2 and 7.3 show examples of this.

Figure 7.2.

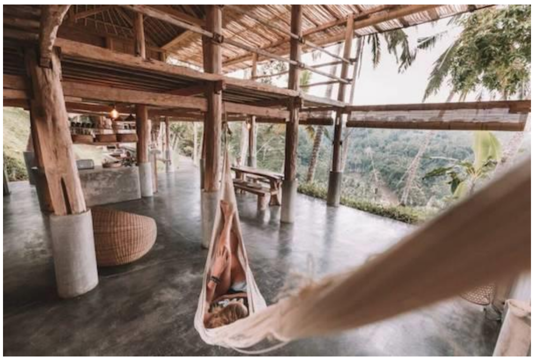
Action process on Remote Year homepage


Keep your job. See the world.
Leave the planning to us.
Live and work in different cities around the world as part of an immersive cultural and community experience.
Get Started

Note. From Remote Year. (www.remoteyear.com). Copyright 2019 by Remote Year, Inc.

Figure 7.3.

Action process on Unsettled homepage



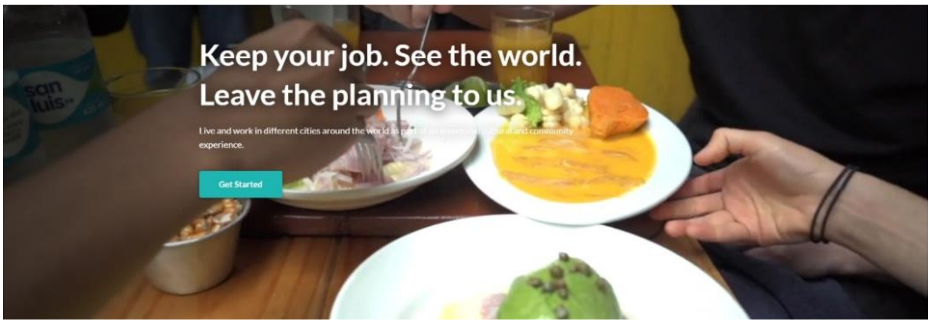
Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

Figure 7.2 is a screenshot of one of the montage frames from Remote Year's homepage. The Actors can be seen forming vectors with their arms and limbs, but they are not acting upon anything or interacting with each other. In this case, the Goal might be the act of performing yoga in itself. Similarly, Figure 7.3 features vectors that are formed by the hammock, but there is no Goal in sight. These images, which portray participants performing relaxing recreational activities in natural surroundings, might be a persuasive strategy used on the homepages to entice viewers with the prospect that they too can lead the relaxing lifestyle of digital nomads if they attend the retreats.

According to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), some non-transactional structures only feature a vector and a Goal, while the Actor is either absent or half-visible. This type of representation is referred to as an Event, as realised in Figures 7.4 and 7.5.

Figure 7.4.

Event representation on Remote Year homepage



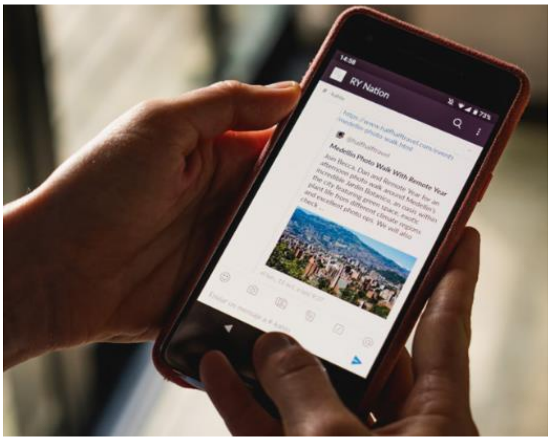
Keep your job. See the world.
Leave the planning to us.

Live and work in different cities around the world as [illegible] and community experience.

Note. From Remote Year. (www.remoteyear.com). Copyright 2019 by Remote Year, Inc.

Figure 7.5.

Event representation on Remote Year homepage



Note. From Remote Year. (www.remoteyear.com). Copyright 2019 by Remote Year, Inc.

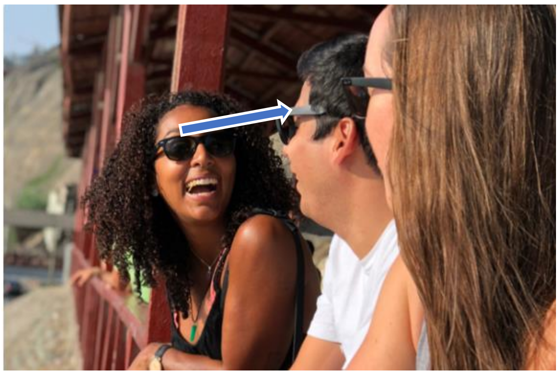
Both the images above (see Figure 7.4 and 7.5) show events taking place but do not reveal who is making these events happen. In Figure 7.4, various hands are seen sharing different types of food. This might be intended to convey a sense of closeness that the represented participants have with each other since they are comfortable enough to share meals from the same platter, much like a family or close group of friends would. In Figure 7.5, the hand of an Actor is holding a phone displaying a chat group called ‘RY Nation’ (presumably Remote Year Nation) in which a recommendation for an event has been posted. The headline accompanied by Figure 7.5 on the Remote Year homepage states: *We'll help figure out how to make Remote Year work for you every step of the way*, thus assuring participants of the support they will receive from the retreat organisers.

Although the Actors are left up to the viewer's imagination, both the Events shown in Figures 7.4 and 7.5 might intend to portray a supportive community through the Goal of both images (sharing a meal and receiving support from organisers). These images can also be viewed as a way to convey one of the communicative purposes of the retreat homepages: to build a relationship with potential customers. By displaying these images, the retreats perhaps hope to establish trust with their viewers through reassurances that they will be well taken care of.

Another significant type of narrative representation that is commonly used on the retreat homepages are Reactional processes, in which vectors are formed by the represented participants' gaze or direction of eyeline (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Leelertphan (2017) points out that the represented participants are labelled as Reactors while the object or person that they are looking at is referred to as the Phenomenon. This can be seen in Figures 7.6 and 7.7 from the *Remote Year* and *Unsettled* homepage where the Reactors connect with the Phenomena (in this case, other human beings) through their gaze.

Figure 7.6.

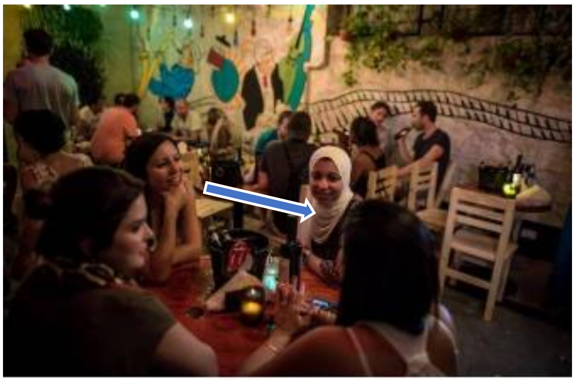
Reactional process on Remote Year homepage



Note. From Remote Year. (www.remoteyear.com). Copyright 2019 by Remote Year, Inc.

Figure 7.7.

Reactional process on Unsettled homepage



Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

Since one of the main attractions of these retreats is meeting new people, the homepages tend to feature images like those seen in Figures 7.6 and 7.7, occupied by human participants (Reactors) who are interacting with each other (Phenomena) through gaze. In both the images above, some of the human participants are represented by people of different ethnicities and are shown interacting with happy facial expressions. The retreats might feature these images on their homepages to imply their welcoming of cultural diversity and mixed community as part of the retreat experience. However, it is important to note that the images featuring People of Colour (POC) made up just 23% of all the images in my dataset. This observation was also reflected by Meier (2019) who noticed a lack of visibility of POC and the LGBTQIA community on *Remote Year*'s online and social media marketing materials. Unfortunately, this was also reflected in Meier's (2019) retreat experience as the author reported that 70% of her Remote Year cohort were "a mix of cisgender, heterosexual, Millennial white people from North America and Europe".

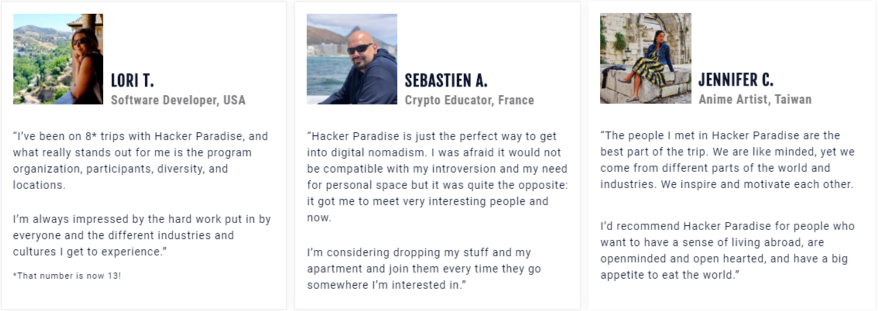
These images might be a true reflection of the demographic of digital nomads, who are mostly “racially white” since becoming a digital nomad requires a strong passport, which is usually held by citizens from Western countries (Thompson, 2018a, p. 32). That being said, the lack of representation of the POC and LGBTQIA community on the homepages weaken the claim of coworking retreats who state that they cultivate and expose participants to a *global community*. This further corroborates the claims by Gandini (2016) and Spinuzzi et al. (2019) that businesses use the notion of community for their promotional benefit without actually facilitating it. It also could be perceived as a sense of social exclusion by the retreats who are implying, through the lack of cultural diversity, that these experiences cater more to digital nomads from Western societies.

7.3.2 Conceptual representations

According to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), conceptual representations aim to show visuals as part of taxonomies and static structures that do not feature vectors or the unfolding of actions. The represented participants in conceptual images are usually featured in terms of their class, structure or meaning (Manca, 2016). Conceptual images can be realised as Classificational, Analytical or Symbolic. The classificational process portrays participants through an objective lens, in a taxonomy or type of classification structure (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Participants could assume the role of Subordinates to other participants who are the Superordinate, or they could be displayed in “symmetrical equivalence” (Manca, 2016, p. 25). In this case, a symmetrical representation of participants is employed for the testimonial section of the homepages, as seen below in Figure 7.8 and 7.9.

Figure 7.8.

Testimonials on Hacker Paradise homepage



LORI T.
Software Developer, USA

“I’ve been on 8* trips with Hacker Paradise, and what really stands out for me is the program organization, participants, diversity, and locations.

I’m always impressed by the hard work put in by everyone and the different industries and cultures I get to experience.”

*That number is now 13!

SEBASTIEN A.
Crypto Educator, France

“Hacker Paradise is just the perfect way to get into digital nomadism. I was afraid it would not be compatible with my introversion and my need for personal space but it was quite the opposite: it got me to meet very interesting people and now.

I’m considering dropping my stuff and my apartment and join them every time they go somewhere I’m interested in.”

JENNIFER C.
Anime Artist, Taiwan

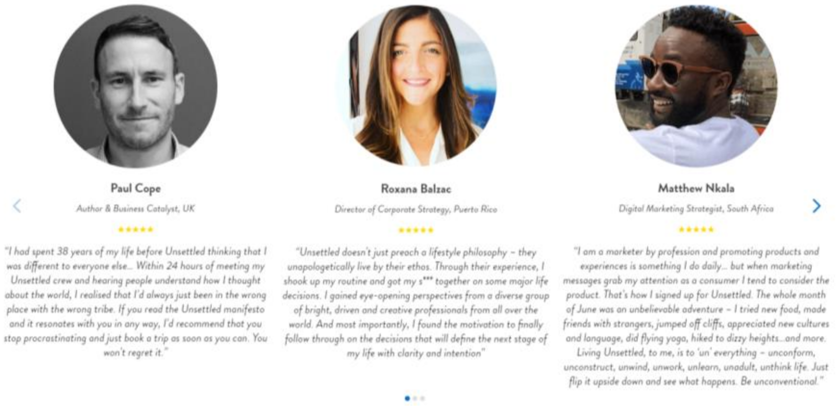
“The people I met in Hacker Paradise are the best part of the trip. We are like minded, yet we come from different parts of the world and industries. We inspire and motivate each other.

I’d recommend Hacker Paradise for people who want to have a sense of living abroad, are openminded and open hearted, and have a big appetite to eat the world.”

Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

Figure 7.9.

Testimonials on Unsettled homepage



Paul Cope

Author & Business Catalyst, UK

★★★★★

"I had spent 38 years of my life before Unsettled thinking that I was different to everyone else... Within 24 hours of meeting my Unsettled crew and hearing people understand how I thought about the world, I realised that I'd always just been in the wrong place with the wrong tribe. If you read the Unsettled manifesto and it resonates with you in any way, I'd recommend that you stop procrastinating and just book a trip as soon as you can. You won't regret it."

Roxana Balzac

Director of Corporate Strategy, Puerto Rico

★★★★★

*"Unsettled doesn't just preach a lifestyle philosophy – they unapologetically live by their ethos. Through their experience, I shook up my routine and got my s*** together on some major life decisions. I gained eye-opening perspectives from a diverse group of bright, driven and creative professionals from all over the world. And most importantly, I found the motivation to finally follow through on the decisions that will define the next stage of my life with clarity and intention"*

Matthew Nkala

Digital Marketing Strategist, South Africa

★★★★★

"I am a marketer by profession and promoting products and experiences is something I do daily... but when marketing messages grab my attention as a consumer I tend to consider the product. That's how I signed up for Unsettled. The whole month of June was an unbelievable adventure – I tried new food, made friends with strangers, jumped off cliffs, appreciated new cultures and language, did flying yoga, hiked to dizzy heights...and more. Living Unsettled, to me, is to 'un' everything – unconform, unconstruct, unwind, unwork, unlearn, unadult, unthink life. Just flip it upside down and see what happens. Be unconventional."

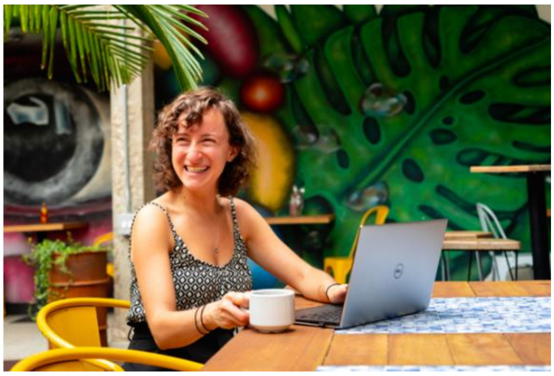
Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

In both Figure 7.8 and 7.9, the images of previous participants are the framed in the same size and placed on a horizontal axis at an equal distance apart. Following Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) explanation, the participants are portrayed in a decontextualized manner and while there is no text inside the picture space, the text surrounding the space invites viewers to classify the participants as members of the same class. The use of images in the testimonial section are possibly to direct viewers to the positive opinions about the retreat experience while implying the participants' professional and geographical diversity, such as an Anime Artist from Taiwan (see Figure 7.9). Apart from building the image of the retreats, this representation of testimonials might intend to persuade viewers of the notion that anyone can become a digital nomad, no matter their vocational background or nationality. While these images might seem aspiring or hopeful to viewers, it can also be perceived as an idealisation of the digital nomad lifestyle since 66% of the participants featured above come from Western countries, and all of them are citizens of nations who rank relatively high in passport strength (McKirdy & O'Hare, 2019, Brophy, 2020, Wang, 2020).

Turning now to the Analytical processes, these conceptual images connect participants to a part-whole structure, whereby the participants are the Carrier (whole) who have any number of Possessive Attributes (the parts). Like the examples provided by Manca (2016) and Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), the digital nomads on the retreat homepage can be analysed in terms of their clothing. For instance, in Figures 7.10 and 7.11 both the women represent the Carrier while their casual attire represents the Possessive Attributes. Much like Figure 7.1, both the images below feature women who are dressed casually and situated in a seemingly tropical or natural background while presumably working on their laptops.

Figure 7.10.

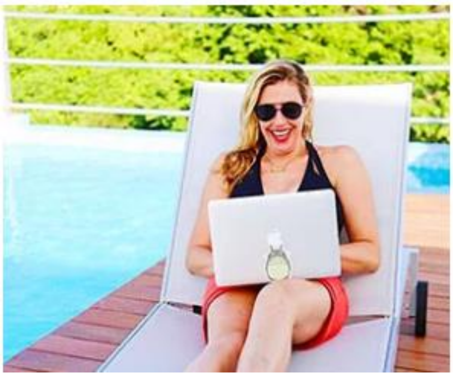
Analytical process on Remote Year homepage



Note. From Remote Year. (www.remoteyear.com). Copyright 2019 by Remote Year, Inc.

Figure 7.11.

Analytical process on Hacker Paradise homepage



Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

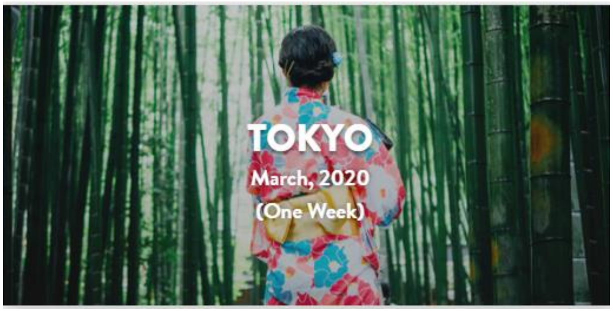
These images (see Figure 7.10 and 7.11) illustrate the concept of work-life balance and serious leisure that digital nomads tend to prioritise (Reichenberger, 2018). A closer observation of the images on the retreat homepages will reveal that nearly all the participants are dressed in inexpensive clothing that is usually worn on holiday to warm, tropical countries. These representations of the digital nomad lifestyle might be seen as another aspirational marketing strategy that aims to evoke a desire in viewers and persuade them to attain this lifestyle. The lack of any formal attire in the images implies the individualistic choices that are possible with the digital nomad lifestyle including the ability to create their own identities and schedules

(Mouratidis, 2018) – choices that are not always available for the average traditional worker but are conceivably achieved through the retreat programmes.

Finally, the Symbolic process can either be Attributive or Suggestive and often refers to what the participant means through symbolic representation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The former is usually featured in the foreground, made salient through bright colours and have a sharp focus. The latter only contains one participant, the Carrier, whose symbolic meaning might be established by creating a mood or atmosphere through colours and tones. Figure 7.12 below features a woman wearing a *kimono* in a bamboo tree forest and serves as an example of a Symbolic Attributive process.

Figure 7.12.

Symbolic process on Unsettled homepage



Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

Although the woman in Figure 7.12 is not directly facing the camera, it can be presumed that she is posing for the viewer without performing any type of action, which constitutes as a Symbolic Attributive image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The woman (Carrier) is positioned in the foreground and is in sharper focus as the bright colours of her kimono make her a salient figure. On the Unsettled homepage, this image intends to inform viewers that Tokyo is one of the locations of their retreat visits and participants will get to spend one week there. Based on this information, I gather that the woman and the forest are meant to symbolise traditional Japanese culture, indicating that the retreats intend to explore the cultural parts of Tokyo rather than its modern city.

However, this image also conveys a sense of exoticism commonly used in promotional tourism material. In her work on the inferior representation of locals in Western tourism imagery, Jaworska (2016) discussed how the local people were often portrayed as submissive or primitive while the locations were preserved in a rural and timeless state. Similarly, this image neglects to acknowledge and represent Tokyo as the modern metropolis that it is known for to serve and appeal to Western individuals who wish to take a break from their urban lives. This could be perceived as another example of the retreats reinforcing social exclusivity in their target audience.

7.4 Interactive meaning

The next component of this framework, the interactive meaning, is realised by the type of interaction established between the represented participants, image producers and viewers (Carvalho, 2013). According to Carvalho (2013), the participants are individuals who create and “give real meaning to the images in the context of social institutions that regulate what can or cannot be expressed through images in different degrees and forms” (p. 172). The interactive meanings between participants can be examined from three aspects: Contact, Social Distance and Attitude. With written text, the coworking retreats maintain their interaction with viewers through linguistic devices such as pronouns and imperatives but examining how a similar relationship is constructed through visual elements might be slightly more complicated (Leelertphan, 2017). Therefore, this section discusses how the retreats attempt to build a relationship with viewers and persuade them by examining the interactive meaning and context in which the images are presented on the homepages.

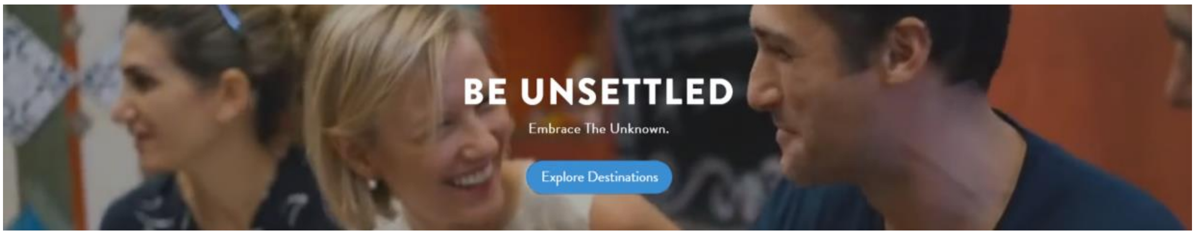
7.4.1 Contact

The first process of the interactive meaning, Contact, refers to whether there are vectors connecting the represented participant’s eyeline and the viewer. The types of Contact can either be established through Demand, whereby the represented participant invites the viewer to enter into an imaginary relationship by looking directly at the viewer, or Offer, in which the viewer is addressed indirectly without eye contact to depict the participants as objects or information (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Based on my findings, only 32% of the images (both still and moving) used the Demand act, while the majority, 68% presented an Offer to the viewers.

While it is a common advertising strategy to use Demand images in genres such as product advertising (Guo & Feng, 2017) or news reading, a direct gaze can sometimes be “too blunt to be really effective” by imposing persuasion on the viewer (Tomaskova, 2015, p. 90). Scholars such as Manca (2016) and Leelertphan (2017) have also found that the use of Offer is more typical when promoting tourism and hotel services on websites because the represented participants act as models of the destination advertised. It is also possible that the retreats mostly use Offer images on their homepages to create a desire for their services by showing participants enjoying themselves during the retreat experience while implying that viewers too could experience similar enjoyment if they attended the programme. Another reason for using Offer images might be to give viewers an insight into the overall digital nomad lifestyle by displaying represented participants as if they were "specimens in a display case" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 124). This instance can be exemplified below in Figures 7.13 and 7.14.

Figure 7.13.

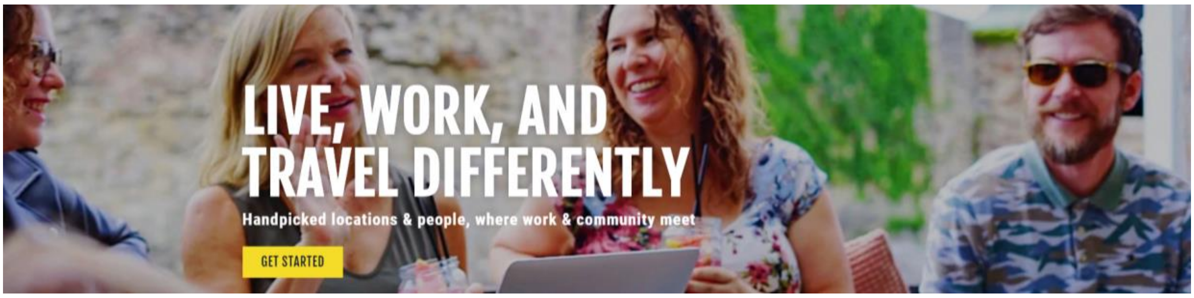
Offer images on Unsettled homepage



Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

Figure 7.14.

Offer images on Hacker Paradise homepage



Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

Both the images above are featured in the website header, which is the first visual element that viewers will see. Figure 7.13 is taken from a frame of the moving image while Figure 7.14 is a still image. The human participants in the images are making eye contact with each other instead of looking directly at the viewer, looking as if they do not know that they are being watched. As Tomaskova (2015) pointed out, the lack of direct gaze towards the viewers "creates the effect of a hidden camera or a feature film", which creates a temptation for viewers, who are positioned as the observer, to join in (p. 90). The retreats have purposely selected images of people smiling to show what a good time they are having, almost signalling to viewers with a message that says, 'this could be you'.

As another persuasive technique, Lakhani (2008) explains that advertisers use the ‘fantasy’ of potential customers to create an experience that will influence their decisions and “move them to where you want them to go” (p. 130). Most individuals join the retreats because they are “sick of solo travelling” (Sapio, 2018) and want a “community of friends around the world” (Riachi, 2017). Therefore, the retreats might be responding to the ‘fantasy’ of digital nomads who wish to forge new, close relationships with like-minded people with visual messaging that conveys their emphasis on community and relationships.

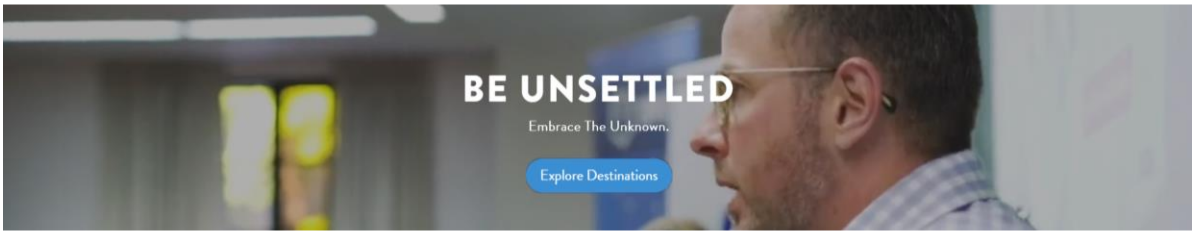
7.4.2 Social distance

The interactive meaning in visual communication can also be interpreted through Social Distance which describes the relationships that might exist between the represented and image participants based on different distances (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2008). These distances, namely the close up, medium or long shot, apply to objects and landscapes as well as human participants although this study will compare the size of a frame in relation to the length of a human body, following Kress & van Leeuwen (2006). A close up shot which usually features the head and shoulders of a subject can imply intimate relations between the represented participants and viewer. Medium shots, whereby subjects are generally shown from the waist up, represent what Kress & van Leeuwen (2006, p. 125) refer to as “far social distance”, a distance at which social interactions or impersonal business is conducted. Finally, a long shot tends to feature the whole body and usually signals a distance between strangers and represents detachment (Leelertphan, 2017).

The majority of images on the retreat homepages used close up shots (46%) to promote the experience of human participants from a first-person point of view. Medium shots were sometimes used (35%), especially to depict more than one human participant experiencing the retreat while long shots were used sparingly (19%) to portray landscape and group photos. Figures 7.15 and 7.16 shown below exemplify the use of close up shots on the *Unsettled* homepage.

Figure 7.15.

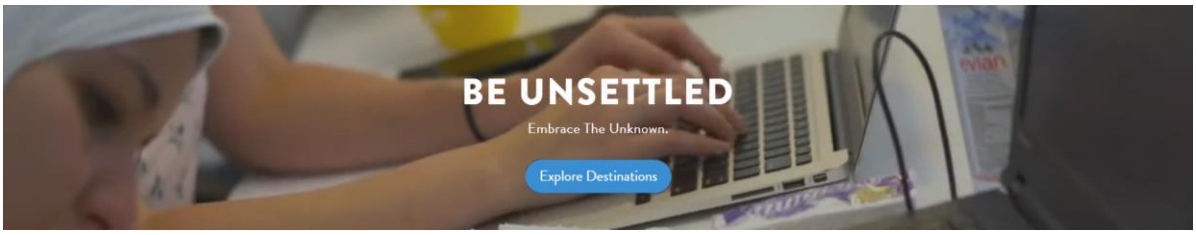
Close-up shot on Unsettled homepage



Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

Figure 7.16.

Close-up shot on Unsettled homepage



Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

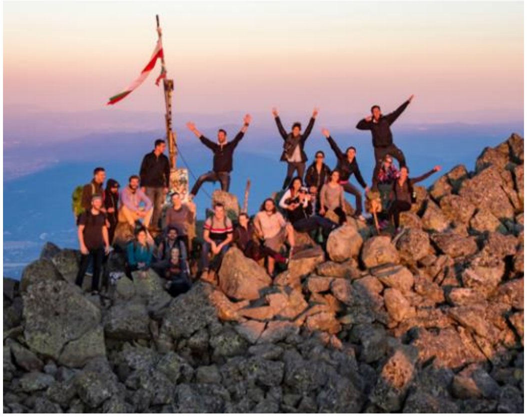
Both the images are frames taken from a moving image on the Unsettled homepage. Figure 7.15 features a close up shot of a man talking with a board behind him, presumably giving a speech while Figure 7.16 partially reveals a woman's face while also featuring another participant working on a laptop. Close up shots are usually employed to magnify details or intensify a message (Leelertphan, 2017) or might intend to position the subjects as "within the viewer's reach" to encourage viewers to visualise the subject's experience (Cheng, 2016, p. 101). The retreats might use these types of close up images on their homepages to persuade viewers by making them feel as though they are experiencing the retreat for themselves, thus creating a temptation for the real experience.

Since viewers tend to form expectations of the services based on what they are advertised (Lakhani, 2008), it could be inferred that Figure 7.15 and 7.16 are meant to promote the work and professional development aspects offered by the retreats. However, reviews from past *Unsettled* participants argued that the retreats do not always give importance to work, sometimes accepting unemployed participants. This sometimes led to some of the working members to feel left out while others went sightseeing (Halpern, 2018, Haro, 2017). Haro (2017) also stated in his review that most of the workshops were developed by participants themselves, not the organisers and were "mediocre at best" – which contradicts what is being portrayed on the homepages.

The 19% of long shots employed on the retreat homepages mostly feature group photographs from past excursions and display the locations that are offered for retreat participants to visit. Examples of these images are shown below in Figures 7.17 and 7.18.

Figure 7.17.

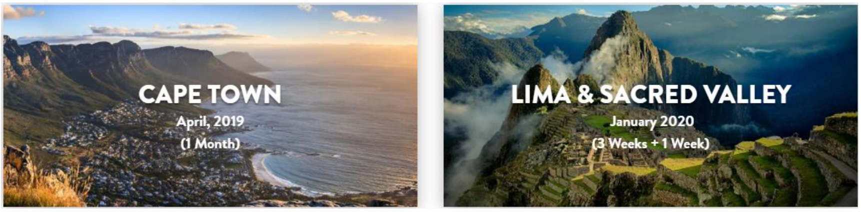
Long shot on Remote Year homepage



Note. From Remote Year. (www.remoteyear.com). Copyright 2019 by Remote Year, Inc.

Figure 7.18.

Long shot on Unsettled homepage



Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

In Figure 7.17, the long shot shows a group of Remote Year participants who have just climbed a mountain together. Although viewers are not able to see the actual mountain, it is presumed that the participants are at a high altitude given the view of sky and clouds in the background. The facial expressions of each participant are not visible, and the public distance makes them feel like strangers, but the retreats suggest that the represented participants are experiencing enjoyment from their enthusiastic hand gestures. The retreats once again use an emotional appeal to persuade viewers by portraying how the participants feel and react to their community activities.

On the other hand, Figure 7.18 shows landscapes of two locations that the Unsettled retreat intends to visit. Based on how far away the shots are positioned, they are most probably taken from the air and following Kress & van Leeuwen’s (2006) explanation, seem like they are “from a lookout position, a place not itself in the landscape but affording an overview of it” (p. 128). It is possible that the retreats use these images to induce a feeling of awe or appreciation for these picturesque sceneries (Cheng, 2016). This imagery may aim to persuasively tempt viewers with the promise of travelling to new and unfamiliar destinations, which is an important aspect of the attraction to the digital nomad lifestyle (Reichenberger, 2018).

7.4.3 Perspective

Lastly, I explored the final aspect of interactive meaning, the Perspective, or degree of involvement between participants through the camera angles and perspectives (Manca, 2016). According to Stoian (2015), images can portray participants from vertical or horizontal angles, indicating a different relation to the viewer. Vertical angles can be either high to give power to the image participants, low to assign power to represented participants or at eye-level to represent equal relations (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). On the other hand, horizontal angles can be frontal to encourage involvement or oblique to indicate a sense of detachment (Leelertphan, 2017, Stoian, 2015). Table 7.3 below presents the number of different perspectives of images on the retreat homepages.

Table 7.3.

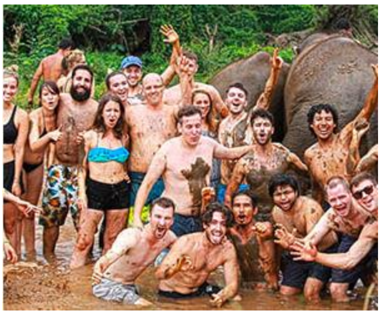
Type of visuals analysed on coworking retreat homepages

Perspectives	Remote Year	Unsettled	Hacker Paradise	Percentage
High angle	3	14	3	26%
Low angle	0	9	4	18%
Eye level	11	20	13	56%
Frontal angle	12	32	18	79%
Oblique angle	2	14	2	21%

Based on Table 7.3, it is appears that the majority of images featured on the retreat homepages are shot at eye level with a frontal angle. The infrequent use of low or high angle images projects a friendly and equal relationship between the represented participants and viewer. As Carvalho (2013) states, the frequent occurrence of frontal images conveys a sense of involvement with the viewer by placing the represented participant’s eyeline on the same plane as the photographer. It is possible that these images convey an invitation to viewers to join the retreats by portraying the represented participants as friendly and approachable individuals, making the digital nomad lifestyle seem as though it is easily attainable. Figures 7.19 and 7.20 below show examples of this observation.

Figure 7.19.

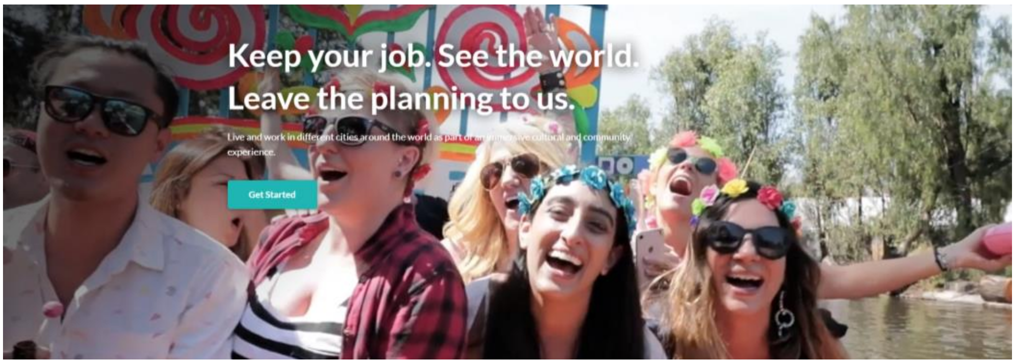
Eye level, frontal image on Hacker Paradise homepage



Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

Figure 7.20.

Eye level, frontal image on Remote Year homepage



Keep your job. See the world.
Leave the planning to us.

Live and work in different cities around the world as part of an immersive cultural and community experience.

Note. From Remote Year. (www.remoteyear.com). Copyright 2019 by Remote Year, Inc.

Both the images contain human participants taking part in the retreat activities. Figure 7.19 shows a group of people standing close and posing for the camera while Figure 7.20 is taken from a moving image that features another group of participants, huddled together while singing at the camera. Based on the matching flower headbands and colourful banners, the setting in Figure 7.20 seems to involve a sort of festival or event. Having a frontal interaction with viewers at eye level reflects the communicative intent of the retreats to reinforce their promise of a friendly, like-minded community.

Interestingly, nearly all the images that were shot at eye level on the retreat homepages feature human participants whereas the high or low angle shots with an oblique angle were used to promote landscapes or the room facilities. This finding corroborates studies by Cheng (2016) and Leelertphan (2017) who point out that travel and hotel webpages often feature images with oblique perspectives to capture and promote the angles that best showcase their services. Unlike promotional tourism discourse, which typically features famous locations and people sightseeing (Manca, 2016), the retreats drew attention to their participants to suggest an attractive and desirable experience that potential customers would value.

7.5 Compositional meaning

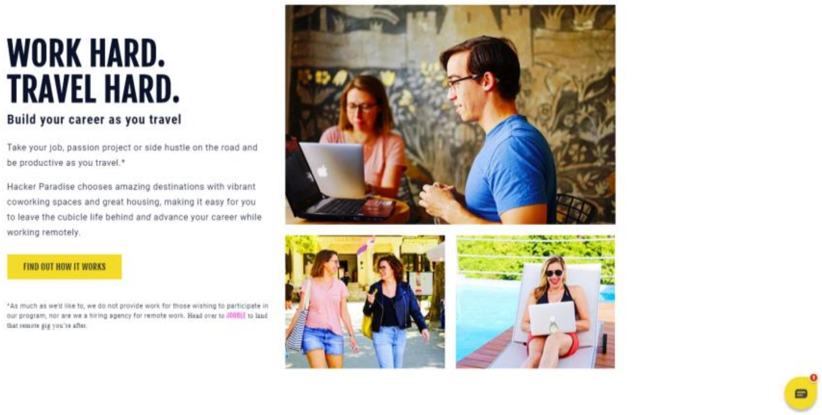
The final metafunction of this framework that I focused on is compositional meaning, which refers to the way elements in images are strategically and meaningfully organised to convey a message (Manca, 2016). This process can be realised by three aspects, Information Value, Salience and Framing (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, Leelertphan, 2017). While Information Value examines the placement of elements in different parts of the image, Salience refers to the visual cues used to attract viewer's attention such as colour contrasts, sharpness and size. Finally, Framing observes the absence or presence of lines to connect or disconnect elements. Due to the scope of my study, this section focuses more on the Information Value and Framing processes to better understand the flow of information presented on the homepage and how it contributes to the persuasive messaging intended by the retreat homepages. Since these processes are not restricted to images, I will be applying the compositional meaning to the layout of the retreat homepages which combines text and visual elements (Stoian, 2015).

7.5.1 Information value

According to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), information value concentrates on three visual aspects, namely left and right, top and bottom and centre and margin. In the case of left and right composition in Western semiotics, the left section represents Given information that the viewers are assumed to already know whereas the right section implies New information that needs to be discovered (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, Leelertphan, 2017). Based on the homepage layouts in my dataset, only Hacker Paradise applied the Given-New structure by initially placing the text on the left side and a group of images on the right, as shown in Figure 7.21 below. The textual elements on the left presents itself as Given information that the viewers are assumed to be familiar with or have already seen. Seeing as the retreats already introduce their services at the top of the homepage, the textual information placed on the left can be treated as an extension of the homepage header or an “agreed-upon point of departure for the message” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 181). On the other hand, the images on the right side may not yet be known by the viewer and are placed to direct the viewer’s attention. For instance, viewers might understand the concept of coworking retreats, but the images on the right side help them visualise what the experience might look like.

Figure 7.21.

Given-New structure on Hacker Paradise homepage



WORK HARD.
TRAVEL HARD.

Build your career as you travel

Take your job, passion project or side hustle on the road and be productive as you travel.*

Hacker Paradise chooses amazing destinations with vibrant coworking spaces and great housing, making it easy for you to leave the cubicle life behind and advance your career while working remotely.

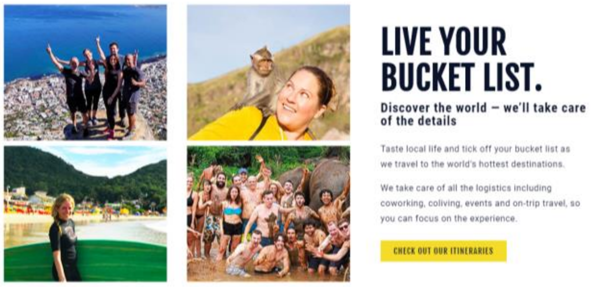
*As much as we'd like to, we do not provide work for those wishing to participate in our program, nor are we a hiring agency for remote work. Head over to JOOBLE to land that remote gig you're after.

Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

However, once viewers scroll down to the next part of the homepage (see Figure 7.22), the images are presented as Given information and the text as New information. This example semantically relates but is not equal to the linguistic Theme-Rheme structure developed by Halliday (1985). According to Manca (2016) the Theme is presented as the first part of a sentence which is then developed by the second part of the sentence, the Rheme. Similarly, the layout initially presents the text on the left as Given, with images on the right as New. Since viewers have now been exposed to a set of images in Figure 7.21, the set of images in Figure 7.22 are then presented as Given information while New textual information about the retreats are placed on the right. The homepage layout used by Hacker Paradise increases the readability and makes it easier for them to take viewers through a narrative of what their retreat experience is like, which could make the brand more memorable in viewers’ minds (Askhave & Nielson, 2005).

Figure 7.22.

Given-New structure on Hacker Paradise homepage



LIVE YOUR BUCKET LIST.

Discover the world – we'll take care of the details

Taste local life and tick off your bucket list as we travel to the world's hottest destinations.

We take care of all the logistics including coworking, coliving, events and on-trip travel, so you can focus on the experience.

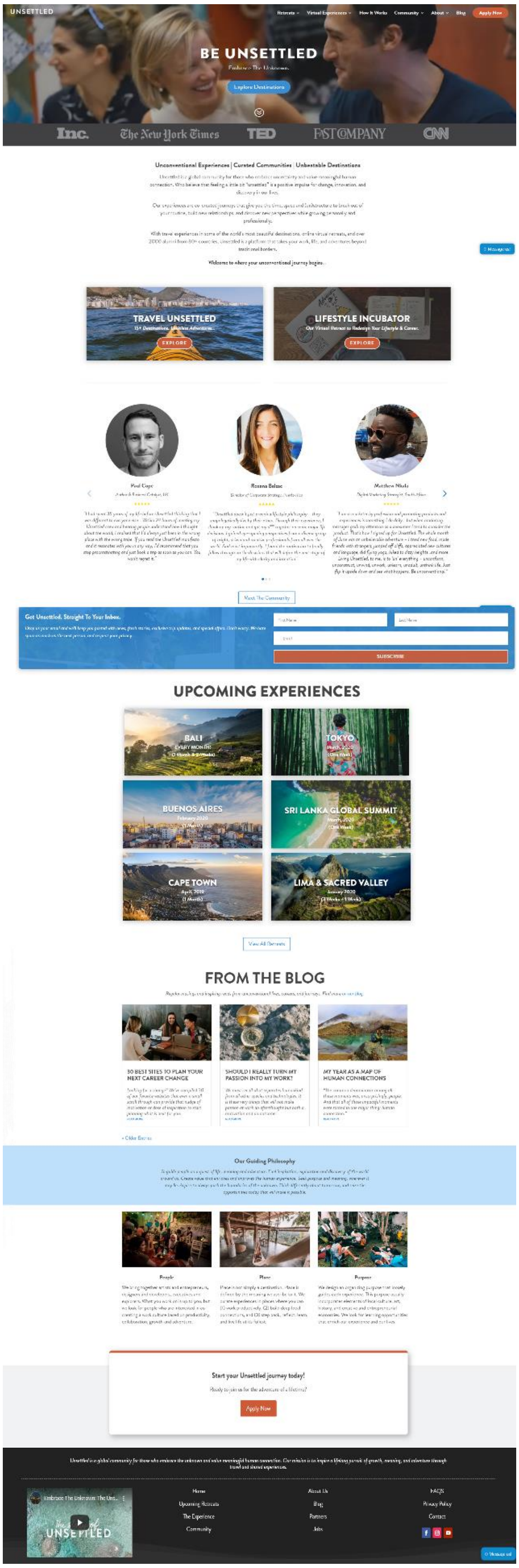
Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

All three of the retreat homepages in my dataset applied a top-bottom or Ideal-Real structure on the layout of their homepage. The elements which appear on the top section, known as Ideal, convey abstract or generalised information that tend to appeal to viewer's emotions by showing them a promise of 'what can be' (Carvalho, 2013). In contrast, the Real features elements towards the bottom section and are meant to present specific or practical information. This division of information on the retreat homepages was especially apparent on the Unsettled homepage where the promise and indication of value of the retreat experience was featured on the top half of the page and the trip itineraries, blog and company philosophy were placed towards the bottom half of the homepage, as seen below in Figure 7.23.

The visual and textual layout of *Unsettled's* homepage in Figure 7.23 exemplifies the Ideal-Real structure. Like most websites, the top of the page features the brand logo and a navigation menu to help viewers access other parts of the website and gain more information (Askehave & Nielson, 2005). Below that sits the website header which usually features the headline and main welcoming image of the website and can be realised through a static image, an auto-rotating banner or in this case, a moving image showcasing the retreat experience (Leelertphan, 2017).

Figure 7.23.

Layout structure on Unsettled homepage


UNSETTLED
Retreats
Virtual Experiences
How It Works
Community
About
Blog
Apply Now
Explore Destinations
Inc.
The New York Times
TED
FAST COMPANY
CNN
Message us
EXPLORE
EXPLORE
Meet The Community
First Name
Last Name
Email
SUBSCRIBE
View All Retreats
« Older Entries
Apply Now
Home
Upcoming Retreats
The Experience
Community
About Us
Blog
Partners
Jobs
FAQS
Privacy Policy
Contact
Embrace The Unknown: The Uns...
UNSETTLED

BE UNSETTLED

Embrace The Unknown.

Unconventional Experiences | Curated Communities | Unbeatable Destinations

Unsettled is a global community for those who embrace uncertainty and value meaningful human connection. Who believe that feeling a little bit "unsettled" is a positive impulse for change, innovation, and discovery in our lives.

Our experiences are co-created journeys that give you the time, space and infrastructure to break out of your routine, build new relationships and discover new perspectives while growing personally and professionally.

With travel experiences in some of the world's most beautiful destinations, online virtual retreats, and over 2000 alumni from 80+ countries, Unsettled is a platform that takes your work, life, and adventures beyond traditional borders.

Welcome to where your unconventional journey begins...

TRAVEL UNSETTLED

15+ Destinations. Limitless Adventures...

LIFESTYLE INCUBATOR

Our Virtual Retreat to Redesign Your Lifestyle & Career.

Paul Cope

Rosana Balsac

Matthew Nkala

Get Unsettled. Straight To Your Inbox.

UPCOMING EXPERIENCES

BALI
EVERY MONTH!
(1 Month & 2 Weeks)

TOKYO
March, 2020
(One Week)

BUENOS AIRES
February 2020
(1 Month)

SRI LANKA GLOBAL SUMMIT
March, 2020
(One Week)

CAPE TOWN
April, 2019
(1 Month)

LIMA & SACRED VALLEY
January 2020
(3 Weeks + 1 Week)

FROM THE BLOG

30 BEST SITES TO PLAN YOUR NEXT CAREER CHANGE

SHOULD I REALLY TURN MY PASSION INTO MY WORK?

MY YEAR AS A MAP OF HUMAN CONNECTIONS

Our Guiding Philosophy

People

Place

Purpose

Start your Unsettled journey today!

Ready to join us for the adventure of a lifetime?

Unsettled is a global community for those who embrace the unknown and value meaningful human connection. Our mission is to inspire a lifelong pursuit of growth, meaning, and adventure through travel and shared experiences.

Note. From Unsettled. (www.beunsettled.co). Copyright 2018 by Unsettled, Inc.

The website header as seen in Figure 7.23 is followed by textual information that introduces the concept of coworking retreats and testimonials from past participants. All these sections aim to persuade the viewer to be a part of the retreat by showcasing the benefits of the retreats, which includes a moving image of the participants having fun while combining work and travel. By outlining the upcoming experiences and asking people to apply for the retreats, the bottom half of the page then features the Real, or practical information about the retreats. Ultimately, the Real structure (as observed in Figure 7.23) reveals the second communicative purpose of coworking retreat homepages: to introduce and promote their services to viewers.

Lastly, a Centre-Margin alignment also contributes to the information value. Leelertphan (2017) explains that the Centre-Margin alignment presents the most important or salient content in the Centre, with other elements surrounding it as Margins. Curiously, all three of the retreats incorporated a centre-margin alignment even though a central composition is more commonly applied by Asian designers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), and the retreats are Western-based organisations. That being said, the website design and layout might not have been produced by the Western founders themselves. It is also likely that those who produced the website used a Centre-Margin to increase the legibility, which Kovark (2002) asserts is the first rule of visual design. Figure 7.23 above exemplifies this by displaying the retreat information in the centre of the homepage with plain white margins to ensure that the content is presented as “the nucleus of information” and will catch the eye of the reader (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 196).

7.5.2 Framing

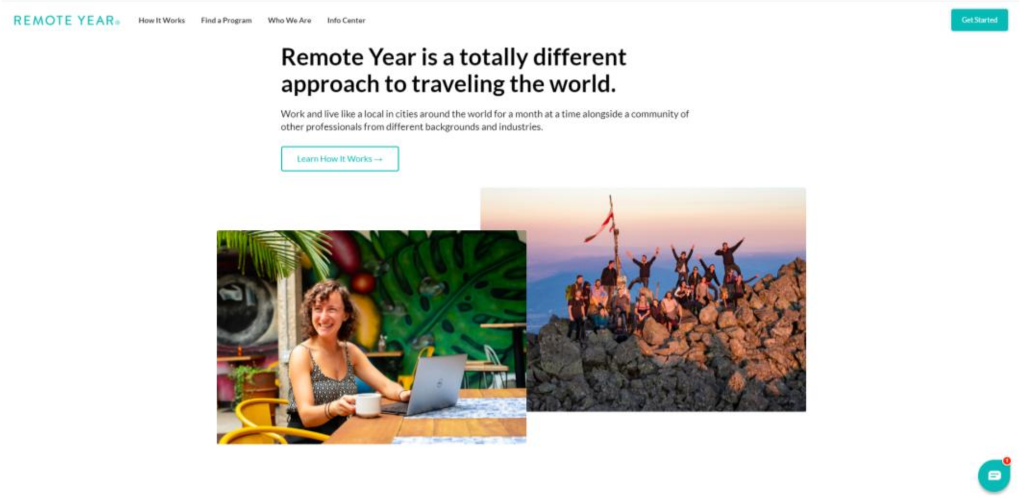
Another important aspect of the compositional meaning is Framing, which refers to how elements in an image or page can be connected or disconnected by frame lines or empty spaces (Stoian, 2015). Framing may be realised through real or imaginary boundary lines and usually expresses the content as either separate elements or a single unit of information (Moerdisuroso, 2014). This process also relates closely to Bateman’s (2008) concept of page-flow, which the author describes is the spatial distribution between elements that convey a sense of relatedness or difference, depending on the various kinds of grouping.

The Framing of the retreat homepages can be analysed in two ways; the framing within individual images and the grouping of elements as a whole page. Overall, the retreat homepages did not employ strict framing lines within images as there is evidence of group photos and interaction between human participants. This could be how the retreats symbolise belongingness or togetherness within the digital nomad community by reducing the communicative gap between human participants within the static and moving images. However, this observation is dependent on the message that the retreats intend to communicate to viewers on different sections of the homepage. For instance, in Figure 7.23 above, the images of testimonial participants on the *Unsettled* homepage were isolated from each other by frame lines to separate their opinions and indicate personal preference or point of view.

In terms of the entire homepage layout, the retreats in my dataset use frame lines to separate the different sections and content to viewers. Bateman (2008) notes that the presence of technological possibilities has made it possible for designers to use complex page-flow methods and similar genres might be expressed using different page layouts. For instance, Figures 7.24 and 7.25 are examples of how Remote Year and Hacker Paradise frame their page layout to promote and introduce their retreat concepts.

Figure 7.24.

Framing on Remote Year homepage



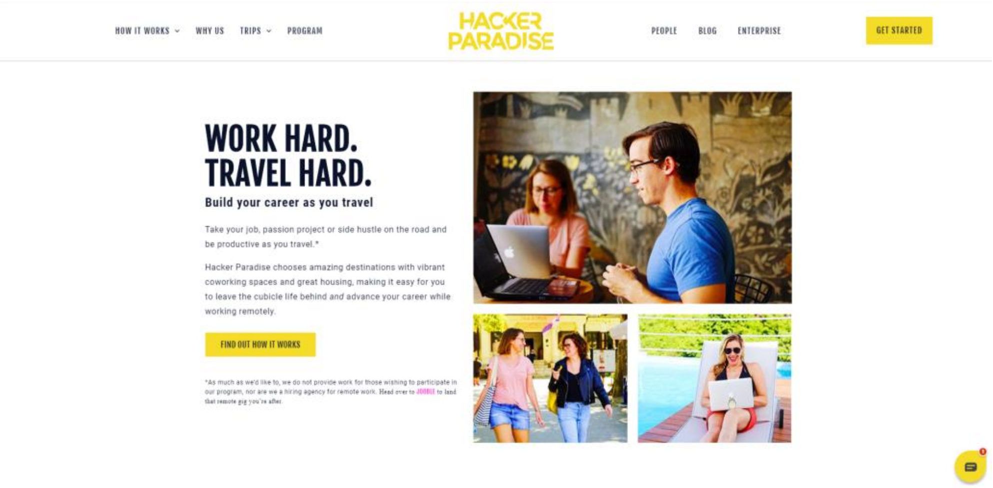
Remote Year is a totally different approach to traveling the world.

Work and live like a local in cities around the world for a month at a time alongside a community of other professionals from different backgrounds and industries.

Note. From Remote Year. (www.remoteyear.com). Copyright 2019 by Remote Year, Inc.

Figure 7.25.

Framing on Hacker Paradise homepage



WORK HARD.
TRAVEL HARD.

Build your career as you travel

Take your job, passion project or side hustle on the road and be productive as you travel.*

Hacker Paradise chooses amazing destinations with vibrant coworking spaces and great housing, making it easy for you to leave the cubicle life behind *and* advance your career while working remotely.

*As much as we'd like to, we do not provide work for those wishing to participate in our program, nor are we a hiring agency for remote work. Head over to JOBBLE to land that remote gig you're after.

Note. From Hacker Paradise. (www.hackerparadise.org). Copyright 2018 by Hacker Paradise.

Both the layouts (see Figure 7.24 and 7.25) share similarities and differences in how they present their promotional information. The retreats feature a navigation menu at the top of the page with the retreat logos placed on the left and in the middle respectively. The logo plays an important role in establishing the brand's identity and image (Askhave & Neilson, 2005) and is often the first introduction viewers have with the brand (Nielson & Tahir, 2002). Although standard website designs have their logo placed on the left-hand side for readability Chen & Wu (2016), positioning the logo in the top centre part of the page could attract more attention from viewers. Both retreats also feature their CTA buttons and chatbot buttons in solid colours on the top and bottom right corner of the page. The use of bright colours against a plain white background is not only more legible but may also attracts the viewer's gaze and encourage them to interact with the page elements (Imtiaz, 2016).

Although the two images in Figure 7.24 are placed in separate panel frames, they do not appear to be as disconnected as the images in Figure 7.25. This could be because the image panels in Figure 7.24 are overlapping, or what Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) refer to as "spatially integrated", encouraging a continuous visual flow from one image to the other (p. 203). In contrast, the images in Figure 7.25 are strictly divided within boxed frames and while they are grouped together on the right side of the page, they appear to be separated by empty spaces, which adds to the feeling of disconnectedness.

Both of these design choices might merely be aesthetic ways to present and promote the retreats but the text and visuals in Figure 7.24 can be viewed as a cohesive unit whereas the images in Figure 7.25 are presented as information that is disconnected from the text. However, the framing disconnect in Figure 7.25 is overcome by the unity of colour between the yellow CTA button and the background of the bottom images; both of which feature shades of yellow and bright green. This colour cohesiveness, along with the yellow logo and top right CTA button ties the separate elements together to impact viewer satisfaction (Imtiaz, 2016). The retreats also might use colours to invoke different emotions in the viewer: the thematic colour yellow throughout Hacker Paradise's homepage indicates fun and energy while the use of teal evokes a feeling of relaxation and balance (Imtiaz, 2016).

7.6 Summary

In conclusion, the findings from my visual design analysis of Remote Year, Unsettled and Hacker Paradise reveal that coworking retreats employ visuals on their homepage to achieve their communicative purposes of building a relationship with potential customers, introducing and promoting their services and persuading viewers to apply for their programmes. By applying the three metafunctions to my analysis – representational, interactive and compositional, I found a similar pattern across the three retreat homepages – where, in interest of promoting their own brand, they tended to portray the digital nomad lifestyle as one that is filled with relaxation, community, adventure and freedom.

My findings also show that the retreat experiences do not always live up to the promised experience portrayed on these homepages. For instance, the homepages utilise narrative images to showcase their cultural diversity and social inclusivity even though most of the participants who actually attend the retreats are mainly from Western cultures (Meier, 2019). In fact, there were subtle patterns of elitism and Western superiority that were observed through this analysis. In terms of interactive meaning, the retreats used Offer images as a persuasive strategy to tempt viewers with their 'fantasy' experience that combines travel and work, and the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals. Besides elements of Western superiority, I did not observe any power relations conveyed through the social distance and perspective aspects. Most of the images were close up shots, with an eye level and frontal perspective, creating an intimate and friendly atmosphere for viewers. As social actors, it was common to see the represented participants wearing casual clothing while working on laptops, which possibly homogenised them as a group of digital nomads while idealising their lifestyles as relaxing and adventurous. Although the retreats did not use framing within the images, the homepages tended to adopt structural framing into their layouts to categorise the content and separate different information from each other, ensuring better readability for viewers. The next chapter presents my discussion and final conclusion on this thesis.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on my research findings that were presented in Chapters 5 to 7, particularly in response to the research questions put forward in Chapter 1 and to my argument that coworking retreats have created a more idealised version of the original concept of digital nomadism. This chapter also highlights the key observations that have emerged from this study of the genre of coworking retreat homepages. I proceed to present the implications of this research and outline both my contributions of new knowledge and the limitations of this study. Finally, I suggest opportunities and directions for future research.

8.2 Key observations

This study investigated the novel genre of coworking retreat homepages in response to the main research question that asked: *In what ways has the concept of digital nomadism been commercialised by the coworking retreat industry?* I had been intrigued by the fact that the original concept of the digital nomad – an individual who embraces the opportunity to simultaneously experience the freedom of work and travel – had been used by coworking retreats to promote their services for a niche audience through their websites. Therefore, I have argued that the process of commercialising digital nomad lifestyles through coworking retreats has altered the original concept of digital nomadism. In drawing on theories that discuss how the power of language and image can be exploited in a professional context to achieve specific goals (Bhatia, 2015), this study asked three additional questions about the retreat websites:

- What similarities exist in the structural patterns on the genre of coworking retreat homepages that brand the digital nomad lifestyle?
- In what ways do the linguistic and visual elements employed on coworking retreat homepages convey an idealised digital nomad lifestyle?
- How do coworking retreats promote their own services by crafting an idealised digital nomad lifestyle?

To answer these questions, I conducted a mixed methods approach within a multimodal genre analysis as detailed in Chapter 4. By examining a total of 45 coworking retreat homepages as a novel genre, I was able to not only identify the communicative purposes of these homepages but also uncover the ways in which these retreats have reshaped the meaning of digital nomadism through capitalisation and commercialisation. My move/step analysis (Chapter 5), which drew on Bhatia’s (2004) promotional move structure, identified various similarities between the ways in which the coworking retreat homepages realised their main communicative purposes, which included: (i) building a relationship with potential customers, (ii) introducing and promoting services, and (iii) persuading potential customers.

The lexico-grammatical analysis of this study (Chapter 6), which employed a corpus-based approach to identify the top 15 keywords in my dataset, found that the homepages employed a number of linguistic devices to convey the idealised digital nomad lifestyle. These included metaphors, which are particularly persuasive because their use of aspirational language helped to portray digital nomadism as a desirable lifestyle to viewers. Finally, my visual design analysis (Chapter 7) applied Kress & van Leeuwen’s (2006) visual grammar framework, focusing on three retreat homepages, *Remote Year, Unsettled* and *Hacker Paradise* to examine the representational, interactive and compositional meanings of static and moving images and the homepage layout. The findings of my visual design analysis revealed how different aspects such as vectors, symbolism and image perspective are utilised to construct digital nomads in an idealised manner.

Interestingly, I also noted implications of elitism in these visuals and a surprising lack of diversity from coworking retreat organisations that claimed they connected various communities. The combination of linguistic and visual elements also displayed how the retreats suggested their services as a solution to the main problems faced by digital nomads, namely loneliness and the hassle of planning their trips. Based on my observations, the coworking retreat homepages displayed evidence of embedding capitalist ideology into their promotional messaging to advertise their services (Goatly & Hiradhar, 2016).

In reviewing the findings presented in this study, there are three key observations I wish to draw attention to about the branding of digital nomad lifestyles on coworking retreat homepages.

(i) **Constructing a desirable lifestyle**
(ii) **Digital nomads as elite travellers**
(iii) **Coworking retreats: the key to your dream life**

These observations are discussed in the following sections.

8.2.1 Constructing a desirable lifestyle

My findings showed that the persuasive techniques used on the coworking retreat homepages construct a desirable lifestyle that inspires potential customers to pursue the elite status of a digital nomad. Persuasion plays a crucial role when it comes to selling a product, as O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy (2004) point out, customers purchase not only the product, but the symbolic image of that product as well, based on how it is described. In this case, the retreat homepages draw attention to the more desirable aspects of digital nomadism, such as being able to travel to exotic locations and escaping the rigidity of work structures, to appeal to viewers' aspirations.

Using an aspirational approach on the homepages through linguistic and visual elements identified in the findings, the retreats construct a narrative about who digital nomads are and what it means to live like one which I suggest is quite different from the original concept of the digital nomad. The website narratives involve placing digital nomads on a pedestal, pointing out to viewers that they could be living a better, possibly happier life. In Nichols & Schumann's (2012) study on consumer preferences for marketing techniques, they found that there was a greater preference for "aspirational models", meaning people, endorsers, and spokespersons who embody an idealised image of who viewers wish to become (p. 2). The authors discovered that consumers especially preferred looking at aspirational models when they were being advertised symbolic products such as wristwatches, which reflect an individual's social status, as opposed to functional products such as lamps, which are purchased regularly (Nichols & Schumann, 2012). While their study did not focus on digital nomads and coworking retreats, their analysis indicated the persuasive strategy used by image-building brands to create a desire for a product or service.

Based on my findings, digital nomads are presented as aspirational models and their lifestyles are represented as a utopia for potential customers, in hopes that they will use the retreat programmes to achieve it. This is exemplified through linguistic rhetorical devices such as metaphors and hyperboles that point out the possibilities of a more fulfilling life that feels out of reach but can be obtained through the retreats. My findings support Luntz's (2007) work on effective promotional language which stated that aspirational marketing is a powerful persuasion tool because it presents people with an idealised self-image that helps them identify with the message in a profound and emotional way.

Rather than following standard tourism discourse which focuses more on scenes of well-known and sought-after travel destinations (Manca, 2016), the retreat homepages place greater emphasis on the representation of people - presenting a narrative of the experiences that participants might expect and desire. For instance, the digital nomads who feature on the homepages are often seen wearing casual attire while using their laptops by the pool or at a resort. Through the attributes of dressing casually, the homepages imply that digital nomads are able to enjoy freedom and flexibility in every aspect of their lives, including choosing what to wear and where to work. The juxtaposition of carrying out professional work in casual clothing also connotates the individuality of digital nomads as individuals who not only resist organisational structure but have the freedom to craft their own identities (Mouratidis, 2018, Petriglieri et al., 2019).

Advertisers often apply persuasive strategies to first create a desire for a particular product, then persuade viewers to act on these desires (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019). Similar relationships were observed through the aspirational approach in both linguistic and visual elements employed on coworking retreat homepages to portray an idealised lifestyle of digital nomads.

8.2.2 Digital nomads as elite travellers

Of particular interest in my findings was the way the retreat homepages portrayed digital nomads as an elite group of travellers compared with traditional workers. Aside from addressing their target audience with monikers as *digital nomads*, *entrepreneurs* or *remote professionals,* imperative sentences such as *Live, work and travel differently* suggested a sense of exclusivity that comes with the digital nomad lifestyle.

By distinguishing digital nomads from other types of workers, the retreats cultivate a feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them’, automatically triggering a social comparison process in viewers. According to Trepte & Loy (2017), this process occurs when people compare themselves with members of other groups, based on positive and relevant perceptions of that group. Therefore, in portraying digital nomads as an exclusive group on their homepages, the retreats hope that viewers will join their programme based on the desire to self-categorise as the digital nomad in-group.

The retreats further present digital nomads as an elite group by verbally describing them as well-travelled individuals who are adventurous and culturally sophisticated, despite not always having stable incomes or job security, as Thompson (2018a) and Reichenberger (2018) state.

It is important to note that the elitism implied on the retreat homepages should not be confused with luxury – digital nomads are not portrayed as people who live in extravagance and the coworking retreats do not claim that their amenities are five-star hotels. Instead, the socioeconomic status of digital nomads as portrayed by the retreat homepages is reflected in the number of countries they have visited and experiences they have had. This finding supports Mouratidis' (2018) study, which reported that aspiring nomads are often drawn to digital nomadism based on the belief that frequent travel provides them with a better social status. However, this pursuit of modern elitism and rose-tinted perspectives could result in aspiring nomads being unprepared for the hardships that accompany with digital nomadism, including loneliness, the lack of employee benefits and even stress (Reichenberger, 2018).

The elitism and exclusivity of digital nomads were also illustrated visually on the retreat homepages, as my findings observed that many of the represented participants in the images were racially white and from Western backgrounds. This was an interesting observation, considering that nearly all the retreats claim that they offer individuals a chance to become "global citizens" (Hacker Paradise) and that they are a "global community" (Unsettled) which suggests a more diverse set of people. One might argue that perhaps the images on the retreat homepages are reflective of the real demographic of digital nomads who seem to be predominantly from "countries that belong to the Western world" (Mouratidis, 2018, p. 56) or "Western cultures" (Reichenberger, 2018, p. 378). Thompson (2018a) posits that this is because digital nomads require a strong passport in order to enter countries visa-free and most strong passport countries are Western.

However, it is concerning that these coworking retreats claim to cultivate a diverse community for digital nomads, only to feature images of racially white participants on their homepage. The lack of representation of POC and the gender diverse LGBTQIA community on the retreat homepages might be perceived as a pattern of subtle dominance or exclusion (Said, 1978) by the retreats who are reinforcing the "unspoken norm of whiteness underlying the digital nomadic lifestyle" (Thompson, 2018a, p. 10). These findings also support the claims put forward by Gandini (2016) and Spinuzzi et al. (2019) that many businesses use the term *community* simply for promotional benefits.

The analysis also corroborated Jaworska's (2016) observation that locals and hosts are often portrayed as inferior and docile in Western tourism imagery. Although many of the retreats visited developing Southeast Asian and South American countries, their homepages hardly ever featured images of local people or nomads engaging in local activities. In the few instances that locals were featured, they were portrayed as either exotic or primitive, but never as urban or dynamic individuals. The lack of diversity and proper representation of locals essentially contradicts the authentic experience that digital nomads seek (Mouratidis, 2018) and instead reinforces notions of Western superiority and social inequality within this lifestyle. Furthermore, this study highlights the potential social and identity issues that could arise from the perceived elitism of retreat-going nomads which distances them from those who seek a more authentic digital nomadic lifestyle.

8.2.3 Coworking retreats: the key to your dream life

Overall, the coworking retreats used their homepages to win over potential customers by justifying their services as a novelty experience or the first step towards becoming a digital nomad. This justification centred on the argument of convenience that viewers will get from their pre-planned programmes, which would allow them to enjoy the retreat much more. This argument was illustrated through the balance between work and play – that is, the retreats emphasised the great business opportunities that they provide through professional support and drew attention to the enjoyable lifestyle they offered viewers, including a promise to develop a sense of community with like-minded people.

Although digital nomads commonly make their own lifestyle, work and travel arrangements, studies by Mouratidis (2018) and Reichenberger (2018) have reported that this can sometimes lead to additional stress since nomads are always thinking about accommodation and travel changes on top of their daily responsibilities. It was apparent that the retreats used this insight to sell their services, positioning themselves like travel agents by reassuring statements such as *Leave the planning to us* (Remote Year) or *We'll take care of the details* (Hacker Paradise). However, much like planned travel packages, the attractive offer of not having to plan your own trip is not only offset by the price tag, but also the obligation to follow the programme. For individuals who have chosen to become digital nomads to escape the inhibiting structures of their lives, this concept might contradict their philosophy.

It may be argued that in providing such services, the retreats have inspired a different type of nomad; one that lives a semi-structured life that enables them to enjoy the best of both worlds – constant mobility without the hassle of planning and loneliness. Considering that these retreats cost an average of $2,000 USD per month, these nomads may well be starting from a successful financial position or have already been working as a digital nomad for some time.

This leads one to wonder what type of socioeconomic diversity and inclusivity coworking retreats are encouraging within digital nomad communities. Based on the findings of my study, it seems that these retreats are simply curated experiences for wealthy and privileged Western individuals, as Thompson (2018a) also claimed.

The retreats also stress other aspects such as comfort, productivity and fun as selling points to persuade viewers. At first glance, the programmes on the homepage look extremely attractive and almost too good to be true. The idealisation of digital nomad lifestyles is demonstrated with visions of happy people, beautiful destinations and unique activities, offering viewers a ‘what more could you want?’ argument by justifying all the positive aspects to be gained. As the retreats frame themselves as an essential part toward the journey of becoming a digital nomad, the unrealistic representation of digital nomad lifestyles is concerning as it might result in false expectations about the true identity of digital nomads. Furthermore, this could create in-groups and out-groups within the digital nomad community as those who attend these expensive retreats might not be regarded as ‘real’ digital nomads since they do not face the same challenges as those nomads who take on the tasks of planning their own journey.

8.3 Final reflections: reshaping the meaning of digital nomadism

Based on these observations from my study, coworking retreat homepages have been shown to consistently create and craft an idealised version of digital nomadism in order to promote their own brand and services. Most of the literature on digital nomad lifestyles focus on the positive aspects about this way of life, which include the potential for freedom and excitement. However, upon critical examination through genre analysis of the retreat homepages, it is apparent that the commercialisation of digital nomadism by businesses such as coworking retreats involves the construction of their own, romanticised narrative of what this lifestyle should be and the types of people who make the ideal digital nomads. The persuasive techniques used by these retreats on their homepages rely on a combination of textual and visual elements to brand and convey a somewhat superficial image of digital nomads and their lifestyle.

In the branding of these retreats, it appears that the true essence of what it means to be a digital nomad has been shifted and reshaped. As laid out at the beginning of this thesis, the digital nomad concept began as an exciting possibility to incorporate elements of work and travel into everyday life so individuals could enjoy the flexibility of working while satisfying their desires to see the world. However, scholars have found that this lifestyle can get lonely as digital nomads often travel to different locations for months at a time and thus, are not able to establish meaningful connections with the people around them (Putra & Agirachman, 2016, Mouratidis, 2018, Nash et al., 2018).

As a response to this issue, businesses such as coworking retreats have offered services whereby nomads can enjoy the experience of living with a “constructed community” while their accommodation and travel plans are taken care of (Thompson, 2018a, p. 2). In order to promote their services, however, many of the retreats appear to represent an idealised lifestyle of digital nomads on their websites, which could potentially restructure the original intentions of digital nomadism and might give rise to a new group of nomads who wander together in their respective ‘tribes’.

Although some scholars believe that coworking retreats might be the solution for lonely digital nomads as they provide emotional and work-related support (Orel, 2019), there are digital nomads who have stated that coworking retreats are not a necessary part of pursuing this lifestyle, as many are able to make the same trips for a cheaper price and deal with loneliness by reaching out to other nomads from online communities (Mouratidis, 2018). In fact, although the retreat homepages advertise their services as havens for digital nomads or entrepreneurs, they seem to accept any individual who can afford their prices, whether or not that person is a location independent worker or has a job at all (Adams, 2016, Haro, 2017, Halpern, 2018). This suggests that the retreats are more interested in hosting large travel groups to benefit their own financial growth, rather than creating actual communities for digital nomads.

Furthermore, the high prices of these retreats and lack of diverse representation on their websites run the risk of appearing as though they are curated specifically for wealthy and privileged Western individuals. Their structured activities and travel guides might also hinder the freedom and control that most nomads seek in their daily lives, which could result in a social identity divide within the digital nomad community. In the concluding section of this chapter, I outline the new contributions that this study provides to existing knowledge on digital nomad and coworking literature.

8.4 Conclusion

8.4.1 Contributions to new knowledge

This study contributes to a relatively new area of research on digital nomadism. So far, much of what has been written on this topic has focused on understanding this phenomenon (Muller, 2016, Reichenberger, 2018, Mouratidis, 2018), the work identities of digital nomads (Prester et al., 2019, Petriglieri et al., 2019), the economies and type of technologies they use (Thompson, 2018b, Nash et al., 2018) and their lifestyle (O'Brien, 2012, Haking, 2017, Thompson, 2018a). In this study, however, I have drawn attention to how the concept of digital nomadism is often capitalised by new businesses such as coworking retreats through the idealised portrayal of their lifestyles. This was exemplified through the linguistic and visual elements employed on coworking retreat website homepages in order to promote their own services.

This study also contributes to the limited research on coworking, specifically coworking retreats which is a new area of research that has yet to be extensively explored. While most coworking research revolves around the emergence of coworking spaces, only a few studies have linked the effects of coworking businesses to digital nomads (Orel, 2019, Lee et al., 2019) or considered the organisation of conferences or retreats specifically for digital nomads (Thompson, 2018a).

The methodological approach to this study is also noteworthy to the investigation of digital nomads particularly when it comes to incorporating linguistic and visual analysis. Previous studies have only focused on interviews with digital nomads. However, in my study I have identified another dimension of analysis of coworking retreats by identifying the persuasive techniques used on their homepages to promote their services, shedding light on how coworking businesses construct and rely on the idealised image of digital nomads to sell their services and attract potential customers. It is hoped that future research can build on my research design of genre analysis, multimodality and the use of a corpus linguistics approach.

8.4.2 Limitations of study

The main limitations of this study were the lack of existing scholarly literature on coworking retreats, digital nomad lifestyles or the representation of either of these in the media or on websites mainly because this is a relatively new phenomenon. Besides Thompson's (2018) paper which briefly discusses the Digital Nomad Girls (DNG) retreat in which the author met and interviewed digital nomads, the phenomenon of coworking retreats, much less the branding of these experiences, has yet to be explored by scholars. This limitation caused much of my primary literature on branding to rely on destination branding and promotional tourism discourse literature, since these topics were the most relevant to my research questions. However, this study managed to utilise media articles and blog posts on coworking retreats as secondary resources for understanding this phenomenon.

Due to the scope of this study, including time and word count constraints, my corpus analysis was limited to examining 45 retreat homepages, and the closer visual design analysis of three coworking retreat homepages. While I feel this study might have benefited from providing “convergent accounts” by interviewing coworking retreat professionals in order to better explain the nature of their homepages as a genre (Bhatia, 2015, p. 18), this I decided to leave as a focus for my future research. Since my dataset was also limited to examining only English websites, it would be good for future studies to investigate coworking retreat websites in other languages to compare the use of persuasive strategies.

8.4.3 Implications for future research

Despite the limitations encountered in this study, it presents opportunities for future research in several areas. While this study focused on coworking retreat homepages, future research might look to see how the commercialisation of the digital nomadic lifestyle has infiltrated other forms of media such as magazines, news articles and social media. Equally, it would be interesting to investigate the ways in which other businesses such as coworking spaces, travel agents and tourism industries might capitalise on the concept of digital nomads and other location independent workers. Given that some employers appear to be relieved from any responsibility to provide health benefits, paid leave or office space for digital nomads who work for them (Thompson, 2018a), future research might consider the implications of this. It would also be intriguing to see what digital nomads themselves think of their lifestyle being capitalised and whether they feel it has changed or reshapes the meaning of digital nomadism. This research has provided opportunities for genre analysts to explore the type of linguistic patterns and visual elements used to advertise new and unique services such as coworking retreats. Therefore, future research might contemplate studying coworking retreat websites from other languages to compare the types of strategies employed by different cultures. Finally, it would be interesting for future research to conduct an empirical study on a larger dataset of websites to obtain more conclusive results.

8.5 Final reflections

The issues of loneliness and isolation among digital nomads as well as the rise of location independent workers have inspired the emergence of businesses such as coworking retreats (MBO Partners, 2018). These immersive retreat experiences offer individuals a chance to work and travel the globe, while engaging with like-minded community (Thompson, 2018a). At a closer look, however, it became apparent in my research that there was a frequent pattern in the ways these retreats promote their services on their homepage; many of them crafted an idealised concept of digital nomadism to attract potential customers as a money making venture.

By crafting an idealised concept of digital nomadism, the coworking retreats have reshaped the meaning of this phenomenon – perhaps by producing a more superficial type of nomad. This has potentially created a social identity divide within the digital nomad community between those who consider themselves as ‘real’ digital nomads based on its original construct and those who view coworking retreats as the perfect opportunity for an idealised digital nomad lifestyle. The ‘original’ digital nomads might be regarded as becoming an ‘endangered species’ whose identity has been ‘appropriated’ and capitalised by coworking retreats keen to attract individuals (mainly from Western cultures) who desire an elite and exotic lifestyle where they work and travel simultaneously with groups of like-minded individuals.

However, it seems timely to point out that during the course of writing this thesis, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly restricted travel for people around the world as governments fear the spread of the deadly virus. These coworking retreats too are under threat as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic with a number of the websites like NomadCruise and Remote Year already indicating that their retreat programmes have come to a halt until further notice. Meanwhile, retreats such as Adventurous Life and Nomad Academy have gone out of business while Remote Explorers and Unsettled have switched their programmes from retreats to providing participants with virtual experiences that include online workshops and podcasts.

As Putzier (2020) states, these setbacks for coworking companies are a “dramatic reversal” for one of the fastest-growing industries. However, social distancing and closed borders have created opportunities for remote jobs and location-independent work (Collins et al., 2020) with countries such as Barbados and Estonia offering digital nomad workers visas to work and travel to strengthen their economy (Sharma, 2020). With the potential demise of coworking retreats, now unable to operate under strict travel and contact restrictions, I wonder whether this might lead to the return of the ‘authentic’ digital nomad.

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Glossary

Coworking retreats	Organised work and travel programmes for digital nomads and location independent workers.
Digital Nomads	Professionals who earn an income through digital communication technologies while travelling the world for an extended period of time.
POC	An abbreviation for People of Colour and used to refer to people who are not Caucasian
LGBTQIA	An abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual. A term used to refer to the community as a whole.