

Semiotic Analysis of Images & English Usage in Tourism Promotional Material: Aso Kuju National Park, Japan

Jeffrey Stewart Morrow

Abstract

Semiotics, or the study of signs and their underlying meanings, has been used widely to examine various facets in many fields for decades. Advertising and media have used images to engage viewers' emotion towards certain feelings for products; likewise, tourism uses images and signs to seize viewers' sentiment to a certain kind of travel experience. One country that has interested travelers for decades is Japan, and millions already know of cities such as Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka. However, less know that the Southwestern Island of Kyushu contains interesting ecological factors, culture, and food that is worth investigation, though little research has been done in semiotics in the area. To fill this gap, the author conducted a simple semiotic analysis of images and English usage in travel flyers and brochures in Aso-Kuju National Park, within the Aso Unesco Geopark. Analysis shows that the English used contains many metaphors, active words and phrases, and pictures show wide, open, natural spaces, activities depicted as family-oriented, literary-oriented wording, and soft pastel colors, all depicting a safe adventure experience and non-threatening tourism experience. In an opinion survey among international residents in Kumamoto, results found that the images and English were impactful in eliciting curiosity and interest appealing to the potential excitement found in the area, though at times the English lacked.

Keywords: Tourism images, English usage, signifier, signified, semiotic ascriptions.

Introduction

Semiotics is the study of signs, although what can be considered a sign has many varying contexts; indication and designation can be thought of as signs, on the other hand likeness, metaphor, and symbolism can also be thought of as signs though they may not have specific text, color, or images embedded within them. Language, symbols, pictures, and wording in general tourism has been researched on many levels, from comparing

branding in cities (Hyeong-Yeon & Ji Yeonjung, 2012), to tourist sites as semiotic signs (Lau, 2011), to myth analysis in heritage brochures (Yousefi, 2017) to literature for tourism promotion (Nofiyanti, Festivalia & Enggriani, 2018). Through this literature, one element that can be deemed extremely important is the emphasis on wording, image, color, and literary style of tourist brochures and the tourist's interpretation of signs geared toward the traveling public. One important aspect of semiotics is that the sign holds a meaning and ideology and as such, it is an incredibly important form of communication, especially in advertising and marketing in general tourism.

In many situations, websites, flyers, brochures, or other printed information, containing both photographs and text, are often the tourists' first view of a particular destination, and therefore, need to carry within them much underlying information. Semiotic analysis of tourism has focused largely on three underlying meanings of the messages of various types of signs (road, hotel, and restaurant). Those three are: 1) the symbols used *within* signs and *as stand-alone* communicative items; 2) the wording alongside websites, flyers, brochures, images, guidebooks; and pictures – either taken by the location or offered by guests; and 3) anything else that is considered to be a “sign” or conveyor of information.

According to Nofiyanti, et. al. (2018), even fiction writing that includes narrative information about a particular locale by using descriptive adjectives can be considered a form of semiotic communication. Such a case can be seen in Laskar Pelangi (Rainbow Troops) that talks about Belitung, an island in the South Pacific...*The scenery more beautiful if we climb a small hill and on the southwest side of the base...the Savannah trees and...crisscrosses between the...and...* Phrases that give underlying descriptions are often the hook travelers need to push them on a visit, and therefore can also be considered a “sign.” Other research by Homayoun (2017) views “myth” as a research draw whereby travelers are greeted with stories of a mythological nature which piques their interest enough to warrant a visit. Tourism is considered an “expression for programmed mythology” (p.933) that lured travelers to a particular place feeding their senses with images of localized myth. Hyeong & Ji (2012) did a comparison of semiotics found in websites in Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing in order to examine differentiation and ascertain whether perceptions were favorable, and to further explain city branding and the notion of *isotopes*. The concept of an isotope (found in semiotics as well as semantics) was characterized by Greimas (1970, in Hyeong and Ji) as the redundancy of items in a text

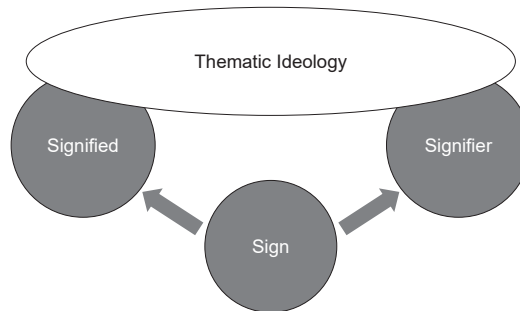
that allows an understanding. The redundancy of entire segments found in a passage, sign, or reading allows the reader to naturally understand the text as a consistent whole. Hyeong and Ji found multi-languages used in their analysis: Chinese, Korean, and English. The websites each contained similar characteristics, such as iconic photography; however, differences were also found. The Korean website used traditional, plastic style and also featured Korean windows and Korean paper. Tokyo, on the other hand characterized freshness, as found in a blue water image, reflecting the fact that it is an island country, whereas Beijing contained red colors invoking the spirit of nationalism. Photos can pinpoint a semiotic nuance as well. In photos on each country-specific website, Seoul shows fluidity, fast movement and variety, and contains a large central image of the city. Tokyo has no large central image on the page, but it is displayed as a modern, well-kept city through images of buildings, streets, parks and shrines. Beijing is filled with images of its varying districts, offering adventure, cuisine, and culture-related activities.

As for wording in the main titles of the websites studied in their study, Hyeong & Ji found in Seoul, headings such as: *get to know us, come and visit, do business, live in Seoul, where...* Those examining Tokyo's website can see wording on clickable headings such as government, topics, profile, office, residents, and links, characterizing a more "government" or top-down related nuance. Beijing's website contains the headings: Beijing info, government, travel, culture, visa, study, business, photo gallery, sister cities, and volunteering, and tries to run the gamut of endless offerings of interesting things related to any kind of lifestyle. Locally, Aso, Japan, is more rural, and its website and promotional information therefore contains differing nuances, and aspects that are related more to the environment and ecology. As the paper will demonstrate following, Aso advertising uses images such as the smoking volcanic crater, flowering cherry blossom trees, and foreign backpackers as well as words like "wide-open skies" and "the wind from the mountains welcomes its guests" to portray a situation that is exciting, enticing, and safe.

Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of semiotics, felt that everything has the potential to communicate through its language and or message, and that both signs and images make meaning. De Saussure delineated signs into two sectors: the signifier, meaning the form the sign takes, and the signified, or the concept to which the sign refers (Chandler, 2019) (See Fig. 1) Some interpretations of semiotics include the thematic ideology, or

people's assumptions about what the particular sign is and what consequences viewing it may create among viewers.

Fig. 1 Saussure's Sign Theory



Source: Chandler, 2022. (Slightly modified by the author).

Although various travel and tourism research has been conducted in Japan, little research has been conducted in semiotics in Japanese tourism, and even less to the author's knowledge in Aso-Kuju National Park in Kyushu in southern Japan, not to mention research on resources that use the English language. However, while there are many brochures and flyers relating to Aso tourism of late, there is little research into the semiotic question of images and English text used in brochures in Aso and around Kumamoto. The importance of semiotic research is that it can lend much insight into the history, culture, and lifestyle of any geographical and cultural area, in this case, Japan. To fill the void of little semiotic research having been done in Kyushu-area related tourism, the author's goal was to analyze the semiotics found in ecotourism-related information in tourism flyers and brochures in and around Aso-Kuju National Park, in Kyushu, Japan, and also to examine the impact these have on tourism, denoted from responses to reactions to images in a survey among international residents in Kumamoto completed by the author. The field of semiotics is enormous and includes elements from anthropology, sociology, and linguistics. Because of the exhaustive nature of possible research aims, this paper will examine only the fundamental aspects of semiology through an analysis of the signifier and signified as put forth by de Saussure, the father of semiotics; the signifier, meaning the form the sign takes, and the signified, or the concept to which the sign alludes. Also given in this paper are semiotic ascriptions for each image along with English used, as assigned by the author, the thematic ideology for each item, and a brief

synopsis of the images and English used for each.

The paper also shares the results of a five-point Likert style questionnaire conducted with seven international residents to gauge the impact of the collected samples of tourism brochures by examining the images and the English used.

Section one contains background information of Aso-Kuju National Park as the reader may not be familiar with the area. Section two offers the study methodology, including the study style and process, and also gives a breakdown of the material collection method. Section three also describes the material used in the study and interprets the information found. It also explains certain English language sign nuances, following the fundamentals of semiotics that include the signifier, the signified, and the thematic ideology. Section three gives the results from a survey conducted among international residents in Kumamoto, Japan, by the author to discover the impact these brochures have. It is hoped that through this analysis, further implications for ecotourism development in the area can be reached. Section four discusses the findings, and the last section offers concluding remarks.

1. Background of Aso-Kuju National Park.

Aso-Kuju National Park is an area of 72,678ha (703.3km²) and is located in the Northeast quadrant of Kumamoto Prefecture on the island of Kyushu, Japan. It was commissioned as a National Park in 1934 and is one of Japan's oldest national parks. This particular national park is allowed to contain businesses and residential areas alike, but also contains areas that are off-limits to travelers and disallow businesses, other profit-making enterprises, drones, mountain biking, off-road motorcycling and the like (see Fig. 2). According to City Population website, the Aso district has a population of 33,773 and a population density of 48.02km² as of the 2020 census. The majority of the population are in the working age group (15-64) with a population of 16,237; beyond that are adults (aged 60-79) with a population of 11,422. The smallest population is comprised of those 20-29 years old (1,868).

Fig. 2 Overhead Picture of Mount Aso and Surrounding Area



Source: Sonata at Japanese Wikipedia, 2014

2. Method and Material

The materials in this study of semiotics are primarily categorized based on images and English usage in ecotourism/tourism travel brochures and flyers. Ecotourism activities are starting to flourish in the area due to its unique location around an active volcano. As such, there are many promotional materials at hand at different locations within the area; of late, these brochures include many languages such as English, Chinese, and Korean. Since the goal was to examine and analyze the available English information presently in the area and to examine its effectiveness for ecotourism, the author collected material around the area that included guidebooks, flyers, and brochures, that contained at least *some* English. The collection method was to randomly obtain existing brochures and flyers in English available at various locations within the area at various sites in and around Aso-Kuju National Park. These sites included the Aso Roadside Station, Aso Train Station, Minami Aso Visitor's Center as per website, and the Aso Volcano Museum. Many brochures and flyers can be found at several different locations around Route 57 (a major thoroughfare connecting Kumamoto Prefecture and Oita Prefecture), the area around Aso Station, and the area around the Aso Volcano and Aso Volcano Museum. The objective was to examine the brochures with English to exemplify what elements the items contained, and to judge their impact for international tourism. This was accomplished in

a five-item, Likert style questionnaire aimed at obtaining thoughts and opinions of each image containing English used from seven international travelers living in Kumamoto, Japan.

During the collection phase, twenty brochures and flyers of varying types were randomly gathered. To save space, the collection of brochures and flyers was narrowed to eight different types. The sample selection is displayed in Table 1 in the following section. Care was taken to make sure that the chosen items reflect the majority of brochures, guidebooks, and flyers seen in the area. Section 2.1 examines and explains the brochures chosen for this study.

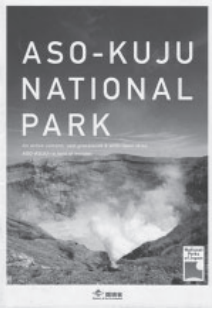






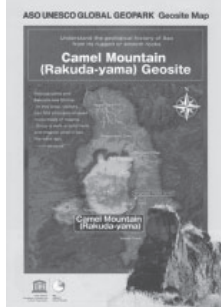
A five-question, Likert-style questionnaire was administered to seven international residents of Kumamoto. They were shown the brochures and the elements included in the analysis process including the signifier, the signified, and the thematic ideology and a synopsis of the images and English usage.

2.1 Breakdown of Collected Material

The brochures and flyers were chosen after a lengthy consideration of their wording, text style, color, initial impact, location of destination, and overall style. The impetus for choice was potentially eye-catching elements to an international traveler. After selection, the photographs were uploaded to the document and the brochures/flyers were scanned and then uploaded.

Table 1 contains a numbered, tabulated table of all collected brochures and under each picture, the main semiotic ascriptions for each image are given. These ascriptions, assigned by the author, are meant to portray the intricate nuances commonly found in English promotional material in the Japanese tourism market. Permission was granted from the pertinent tourism offices for use in academic purposes only.

Table 1. Collected Guidebooks, Brochures, and Flyers from Aso, Kumamoto, Japan

			
<p>Item 1: Cover of general travel brochure (Source: Ministry of Environment, 2019)</p>	<p>Item 2: Inside a general travel brochure (Source: Ministry of Environment, 2019)</p>	<p>Item 3: Inside a general travel brochure (Source: All Aso Tourism Association, 2019)</p>	<p>Item 4: Inside pages of an activity brochure (Source: Aso Nature Land, 2020)</p>
<p>Semiotic ascriptions: English phrases like “active volcano, wide open skies;” picture of active volcano crater</p>	<p>Semiotic ascriptions: Phrases like “roof of Kyushu,” unique skyline; a majestic mountain picture</p>	<p>Semiotic ascriptions: A feminine style containing flowers and pastel colors; poetic style title: “In the flowering season...”</p>	<p>Semiotic ascriptions: Active pictures; mostly Japanese with some English (tandem paragliding, blocker); pastel colors</p>
			
<p>Item 5: Marketing brochure for a local theater using live monkeys (Source: Aso Monkey Theater, 2019)</p>	<p>Item 6: Aso public transport information guidebook (Source: Aso Global Geopark, 2019)</p>	<p>Item 7: Flyer for bus trip to Aso including food, sightseeing, and activities (Source: Aso Global Geopark, 2019)</p>	<p>Item 8: Brochure of Camel Mountain, a UNESCO Geosite (Source: Aso Global Geopark, 2019)</p>
<p>Semiotic ascriptions: A child in photo; active colors; monkey in the center; monkey doing tricks; English words like “amazing”</p>	<p>Semiotic ascriptions: Bold ink: Aso Travel; Aso travel in round medallion to catch eye; use of foreigner in photo; illustrations of types of transport</p>	<p>Semiotic ascriptions: Aso in big letters; Unesco Global Geopark underneath; promoting travel from the station to eat beef, to a famous viewpoint; red arrow highlights the cost: around \$10</p>	<p>Semiotic ascriptions: The shape of camel mountain in the foreground; promoting the geo-site as part of the geopark</p>

Source: Collected by the author in Ask-Kuju National Park, 2020.

The next section describes the images and English in the above samples, firstly examining the images (color, view, style); and then examining English chosen (words and phrases) for each brochure. It is assumed that the image and English were carefully chosen and worded to make them appealing and not used or translated in a haphazard fashion.

2.2 Descriptions and Interpretations of Collected Pictures & Flyers/Brochures

As can be seen generally, all the images contain at least some views of a vast sky along with pictures of natural elements common in the area, including views of the local mountains, cherry blossom trees, flowers, outdoor activities, the active volcanic crater, and unique or interesting tourist attractions that perhaps are all meant to be worded to pique curiosity for Mount Aso and environs in the reader. Although many of the brochures have captured the impact of the location through the image and underlying meaning, there are brochures that do not capture the entire essence or nuance of nature within the area. In this section, each image with English is explained. In addition, the signifier, signified, and thematic ideology of each brochure is given.

Item 1.

Image. This brochure can be found at many of the tourist-related shops around the area and the image contains white, large lettering, reminiscent of clouds floating in the sky. Below the lettering is a picture of a steaming volcano crater, noticeably active.

English Usage. The main text is prominent and extends across a blue-sky spelling out Aso-Kuju National Park in capitals. The entire English phrases reads: “An active volcano, vast grasslands & wide-open skies. ASO-KUJU – a land of wonder.” The brochure also uses phrases like “wide-open skies” and words like “wide” and “open” which inherently make people curious and excited and carry nuances of adventure.

Signifier: An active volcano.

Signified: Interest, fascination, danger, adventure.

Thematic ideology: Appreciating a vast skyscape, blue sky juxtaposed with white volcanic smoke.

Item 2.

Image. Here, the inside matter of the same travel brochure (item 1) is displayed;

a green mountain, large and inviting, is depicted as dynamic and lush. It also contains other images such as historical walking and hiking courses, and area-specific information. While the outer image shows a deep-blue sky color, the inside matter contains a more relaxed turquoise color. This is an interesting facet and is probably meant to give a different image or juxtaposition of the two views of the sky to draw the viewer in.

English Usage. The brochure has English strewn throughout. For example, the title of the inner matter, “The Roof of Kyushu” is a phrase that captures the imagination, in that a roof depicts a covering or umbrella, that may be used to show protection of the area and the environment. Under this heading is the phrase: “Over twenty lava dome volcanic mountains give Kuju its unique skyline. The cluster of 1700m+ peaks has earned Kuju the name Kyushu no Yane – the Roof of Kyushu.”

Signifier: A volcanic mountain surrounded by verdent, flowing hills.

Signified: Quaint and peaceful, adventurous.

Thematic ideology: Get away to an enchanted space that offers outdoor activities.

Item 3.

Image. This item is found inside a different general travel brochure; it is characterized by soft colors, and the use of items such as cherry blossoms. It also contains lush and abundant colors. The brochure is highlighted by a cursive, almost feminine style of writing and the wording used is quite poetic, perhaps meant to draw in the more introverted traveler who wishes to engage in “softer” styles of tourism in the area; that is, gentle sightseeing and appreciation of natural views rather than engaging in more rugged, adventurous activities. Even so, the brochure aims to leave the traveler with the feeling that even softer tourism is extremely interesting.

English Usage. The phrase “in the flowering season, see the mountain dress up” is quite soft and also emits a feminine feeling of the area perhaps to appeal to women and girls. The entire passage reads: “The deep blue sky, budding flowers and pure melted snow spring water. Springtime in Aso is full of the energy of life. A carpet of Miyama-Kirishima (Kyushu Azalea) basking in the glorious sunshine.”

Signifier: A large cherry blossom tree, blooming flowers, mountains in the background.

Signified: Cursive poetic English style that evokes a calm feeling.

Thematic ideology: Relax while enjoying the peaceful surroundings of nature.

Item 4.

Image. This is inside matter of a local, well-known, outdoor activity company brochure. The item displays children and adults alike in family-style outings and activities, such as downhill grass skiing, paragliding, and hot-air ballooning. It contains active pictures and somewhat soft lettering, but many pictures are fitted into quite small spaces within the brochure, indicating that there are many family-related activities to take part in, and is, therefore, exciting. This connotes the inner feeling that the activities are more geared toward the domestic traveler.

English Usage. There are quite a few Japanese words and explanations used that may not be familiar to international travelers; however, some of this is interspersed with English in phrases such as “tandem paragliding - paragliding from outer rim of Aso Caldera, 450 meters from the ground,” and “flight from about 90m in gentle breeze sunset.” Another section of the brochure contains the “blocker” (small seat with wheels), and contains the English: “New sense, gliding sports. Fast! Refreshing! Pleasant!” Several of the pictures show activities with the words “only Japanese,” which communicates that either: 1) these activities are only conducted in English OR 2) are for Japanese people only, a factor that can be quite confusing to the international eye.

Signifier: Children and adults riding mini hill-bikes.

Signified: Ecology, green grass, enveloping mountains.

Thematic ideology: Family togetherness, engaging in safe, fun activities outdoors.

Item 5.

Image. This is the marketing brochure for a local theater using live monkeys. As seen, the titles are colorful, and the image is active, drawing the eye in. The pictures contain monkeys acting and performing and the audience is quite engaged; one can see that entire families visit the theater to watch monkeys perform unique tasks and the pictures and wording are meant to display the unique quality of this theater.

English Usage. There is quite a bit of Japanese interspersed with English that gets to the point: “come and see amazing monkeys!” and “Japanese traditional entertainment.” Korean language is also used, and contains the same phrases therefore depicting the same

idea.

Signifier: Trained monkeys.

Signified: Perform with amazing dexterity, unique attraction that entertains.

Thematic ideology: Family togetherness and fun watching performing monkeys.

Item 6.

Image. This is a promotional brochure of a transport company in Aso. The photo shows a woman with a backpack and a wide-brimmed hat, gazing at Nekodake (Cat Peak), one of the main peaks of Mount Aso. Viewing the photo gives the impression of “a backpacker’s paradise” and leads one to ponder over the essence of traveling to the wondrous region of southern Kyushu. The insignia at the top left corner gives the idea of a travel stamp one receives when traveling on a train.

English Usage. The flyer contains English phrases, “Aso Travel Information Guidebook,” “public transport,” and “picture Aso like this book shows.” All of these phrases are very clear and to-the-point, which tells the reader that transport is within arm’s reach.

Signifier: Woman with a backpack and arms outstretched holding on to her hat facing mountain.

Signified: Engaging in international travel.

Thematic ideology: Feeling of freedom in an interesting country that is attractive to international travelers.

Item 7.

Image. This flyer in the Japanese language offers information for a bus trip around Aso in which the destinations include food, sightseeing, and other activities. In fact, the activities offered are like ones found in other brochures and flyers. The words in blue at the center of the flyer are written in Japanese, (though romanized) and say: “Daikanbo Liner,” which connotes the image of sweeping through the region on a luxurious bus. In the background of the flyer is a broad view of Aso, as seen in other flyers.

English Usage. The wording at the top of the flyer has the only English found: “Aso – Unesco Geopark,” which might be of enough interest to international travelers to

warrant more investigation. For this reason, the English usage could be seen as lacking.

Signifier: Ad for a bus trip offering a sweeping journey around the big view of Mount Aso.

Signified: Large letters, pictures food and pictures.

Thematic ideology: Food and nature appeal to travelers, both domestic and international.

Item 8.

Image. This is a brochure for one aspect of the Aso Geopark: the Camel Mountain, which is so named because of its resemblance to the back of a camel. There are several other similar brochures produced for promotion and information about different aspects of the Geopark; these range across areas such as the active crater, other peaks like Nekodake and hiking trails the crisscross the Aso area. Upon examining this flyer, one has the feeling that it is more serious, informative, and academic and indeed, it may be produced to do just that. The flyer itself gives some detailed information about the formation of certain rugged and smooth rocks found in the area.

English Usage. Here, English phrases are used primarily for educational purposes for both domestic and international travelers; however, the English reads very serious and is quite formal, leading one to feel that this geosite offers serious, academic, and lengthy lectures about the creation of the Aso crater and surrounding rock structures, which may not appeal to everyone.

Signifier: Formations from geothermal activity.

Signified: History and gaining knowledge of geothermal activity.

Thematic ideology: Through study and learning, one can gain knowledge of volcanoes and geothermal activity offered at this site.

Table two shows the overlapping natural elements (mountains, volcano, etc.) and activities that could correspond with each brochure (paragliding, hiking, etc.) in a symbolic manner that are supplied, either straightforwardly or implied, in the brochures. For each brochure, six natural elements commonly found in mountain areas were chosen to investigate. These are displayed on the left side of the table. On the right side of the table, six activities and man-made elements were chosen that commonly correspond with

the natural area. A circle delineates that the activity is captured both in the image and the corresponding English. These elements are useful for tourists deciding whether to visit a location.

Table 2. Overlapping Suggestive Elements of Brochures*

Natural elements								Activities & Man-made elements									
Sky	●	●		●		●	●	●	Para-gliding		●		●			●	
View	●	●				●	●		Photo Fun	●	●			●	●	●	
Volcano	●								Hiking	●	●		●		●	●	
Land tree			●	●		●			Camping	●	●		●		●	●	
Mnts.	●	●					●	●	Zipline		●						
Water						●	●		Food						●	●	
Image	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Image	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Source: Compiled from survey data, 2022.

*Idea from Kai, R., 2022

3. Results of Likert Style Questionnaire Among International Residents

This section reviews the results of an opinion survey conducted with seven international residents in Kumamoto, Japan to determine the overall tourism impact the images and English usage had on them. The items contained in the questionnaire for each item are as follows: 1) The image generally appeals to me; 2) This image makes me curious and want to visit the area; 3) I understand the meaning fully; 4) The English used appeals to me and gets my attention; 5) The image and English together are appealing. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) while viewing the brochures with the images and English. They were asked to write any further opinions of the images and English in prose. Results are tabulated and offered in Table 3. The table is organized as follows: The left contains the brochure number; the next column houses the questions given above; and next and subsequent columns are the responses according to the scale above. The responses are given in percentages for each item.

Table 3. Likert Results of International Questionnaire for Each Item (n=7) (in %)

Item	Likert Quest.#	SA	A	N	D	SD	Various Opinions of the items
1	1	43%	28%	15%	14%		Fresh, natural colors, interesting and informative text, but not engaging.
	2	43%	28%	15%	14%		
	3	100%					
	4	72%	14%	14%			
	5	58%		28%	14%		
2	1	72%	28%				Spots of interest would be a bonus, appealing to hikers.
	2	57%	28%	14%			
	3	86%		14%			
	4	43%	43%	14%			
	5	57%	43%				
3	1	28%	57%	14%			Nice scenery but focused on one season.
	2	28%	28%	43%			
	3	43%	43%	14%			
	4	28%	28%	43%			
	5	14%	72%	14%			
4	1	14%	43%	28%	14%		Good to see people having fun.
	2	28%	43%	14%	14%		
	3	28%		72%			
	4	14%	14%	57%	14%		
	5		14%	72%	14%		
5	1		14%	14%	28%	43%	Looks fun. Language is clear but a cartoon image would be appealing.
	2		28%	14%	57%	14%	
	3	57%		14%	14%	14%	
	4	14%		14%	28%	43%	
	5			3	28%	28%	
6	1	43%	28%	28%			The text is clear and easy to understand. Informative.
	2	28%	57%	14%			
	3	43%		43%	14%		
	4	28%	14%	57%			
	5		43%	57%			
7	1	14%	28%		28%	14%	No English at all, and meaning can only be understood from the pictures.
	2	14%	14%	28%	14%	14%	
	3	43%		14%	14%	14%	
	4	14%		28%	14%	43%	
	5			28%	14%	57%	
8	1	14%	14%	43%	28%		Natural colors but not that exciting. Need more information to decide.
	2	14%		72%	14%		
	3	28%	14%	28%	28%		
	4	14%	14%	43%	28%		
	5		14%	57%	28%		

Source: Compiled from survey data, 2022.

4. Discussion

In most of the images and English presented in this paper, there are many views of the sky, mountains, clouds, trees, nature-based activities, man-made activities, promotional words and phrases in English, travel promotions, food, and geothermal education. Through the semiotic analysis in section three, it was found that the English accompanying each image was useful and to-the-point, although in some cases, it was less than appealing. However, it can be seen in the descriptions following that a large percentage of respondents felt that the image captured their attention, they understood the English, and that the image and English used together were appealing – a positive element that shows the respondents felt the impact of the images and were able to see the sign through the signifier, signified, and thematic ideology, evident through their answers in the Likert-style questionnaire.

Item one shows a picture highlighting the deep blue sky and shows smoke plumes coming directly from within the active crater, a common sight there. The image contains the words, “wide-open skies.” This truly creates a large visual image with words like “wide” and “open.” These words, juxtaposed with the active crater smoke, may indeed strike an adventurous chord with the international traveler looking forward to seeing a large caldera surrounding an active volcano. In fact, 100% strongly agreed that they understood the English meaning fully, and 72% strongly agreed that the English captured their attention, while 43% strongly agreed that the image appealed to them and 58% strongly agreed that the image and English together were appealing.

Item two contains a turquoise hue of the sky around the Mount Aso outlying caldera, with the crater in the center. Readers gain the feeling of grandeur and awe at the smoking crater, and these images may (and do) attract adventure-seekers wishing to embark on a unique experience. Using real photos of active volcanoes as signifiers is quite apt for this kind of promotional brochure; the signified aspects of danger and adventure justly allow one to envision a tour to an active volcano. In fact, 72% strongly agreed that the image appealed to them. The brochure had English strewn throughout. For example, the title of the inner matter, “The Roof of Kyushu” is a phrase that captures the imagination, in that a roof depicts a covering or umbrella, that may be to protect the area and the environment. Under this heading is the phrase: “Over twenty lava dome volcanic mountains give Kuju its unique skyline. The cluster of 1700m+ peaks has earned Kuju the name Kyushu no Yane – the Roof of Kyushu.” These words, too, pique the curiosity

of the reader, and travelers may indeed want to visit the area after seeing such a brochure as can be seen in the fact that 86% strongly agreed that they understood the meaning fully and 57% strongly agreed that the image and English together were appealing.

Item three contains the crater as well as a famous Sakura tree as signifiers, tying together the rough excitement found in the first two images with the tender beauty of nature, a contraposition so often touted in Japan. In this image, the signified can be thought of as feminine and quiet with pastel colors, leading one to imagine a more relaxed holiday, to which many people may aspire. Here, 57% agreed that the image was appealing. Intertwined with the soft-style photographs are the feminine words, “in the flowering season, see the mountains dress up.” This lends itself to a less rugged style of tourism that many people may enjoy but the image still maintained the main aspects of the area: flowers and mountains; 72% of respondents agreed that the image and English together were appealing.

Item four depicts the fun and adventurous side of Aso, and contains images of riding a small mountain style bike called a blocker down a hill surrounded by family members. The image is quite “busy” and 14% strongly agreed that the image was appealing. This item seems to have the English translated from a computer or machine which is not perfect, and therefore may cause the international traveler to question what the underlying meaning is; in fact, only 14% agreed that the image and English used together was appealing.

Image five depicts a promotion for a local monkey theater, and although the image and the underlying meaning may not appeal to some, 57% of respondents strongly agreed that they understood the English fully, and 14% strongly agreed that the English used got their attention. As for curiosity, 28% agreed that the image made them curious and want to visit the location.

Image six shows the promotional advertisement of a public transport company. In many ways, the printing on the side, and the use of the round medallion and the foreigner in the photo are quite eye-catching; 43% strongly agreed respectively that the image was appealing and that they understood the English fully, and 43% agreed the image and English together were appealing; 57% of respondents agreed that the image made them curious and want to visit. For a transport brochure, this may indeed well entice a traveler to the area.

Image seven is the travel brochure for a travel bus trip around the area. Bus trips

such as this were common in the area before the COVID-19 Pandemic, and offered everything from pick-up to drop-off to meals, opportunities to shop, plentiful sightseeing and the like. Unfortunately, there was very little English used, and this makes one think it is branded more for domestic than overseas tourism. Here, 14% strongly agreed that the image was appealing and 14% strongly agreed that it made the respondents curious and want to visit, while 43% strongly agreed that they understood the English fully.

Image eight is the brochure of a segment of the Aso Geopark UNESCO Geosite and is filled with plentiful background information in both Japanese and English in separate brochures. The style of the English can be described as almost lecture-like, and some perceive this as overly serious, which may not appeal to everyone. However, the English was well-written and carried a plethora of background information. The colors here were quite dark and plain and did not leave much to the eye; in fact, only 14% strongly agreed that the image was appealing, while 28% strongly agreed that they understood the English fully. Of the total, 14% agreed that the English used appealed to them and got their attention, and 14% agreed that the image and English used together were appealing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the images and English found in brochures for international travelers reached their mark in attracting travelers to the various locations depicted. In the Likert responses, it was found that Japan has a good handle on creating effective and appealing brochures with images as well as English. Some brochures were more appealing to the respondents than others, but for the most part, the images paired with the chosen English used generally grab the attention and appeal to the international resident, and perhaps the international tourist alike. It can be said that a positive response from the images and English used in the sample flyers was gained through this research. The research is being completed for academic purposes only and not as suggestions for advancing promotional material. This being the case, it is perhaps worthy to note that this type of research can help local areas thrive more readily in local tourism, and so research such as this should be conducted more in the future.

References

- Chandler, D. (2019). *Semiotics for Beginners*. Princeton University Press. Retrieved from: <https://www.cs.princeton.edu/~chazelle/courses/BIB/semio2.htm> November 16, 2022.
- City Population. (2022). Aso City Population Data. Retrieved from https://www.citypopulation.de/en/japan/admin/kumamoto/43420__aso/ October 14, 2022.
- Hyeong-Yeon, J. & Ji-Yeonjung. (2012). A Comparative Study of Branding Cities through Semiotic Analyses of the Official Websites of Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing. *Proceedings of the 10th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*.
- Kai, R. (2022). Personal conversation regarding semiotic fundamentals from previous research.
- Lau, R. (2011). Tourist Sites as Semiotic Signs: A Critical Commentary. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 38, No. 2.
- Nofiyanti, F., Festivalia, F., & Enggriani, M. (2018). Literature for Media Tourism Promotion (Review Semiotics). *Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research*, Vol. 52.
- Sonata at Japanese Wikipedia. (2014). Retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:20140516%E9%98%BF%E8%98%87%E5%B1%B1%E5%BA%83%E5%9F%9F.jpg> October 14, 2022.
- Yousefi, H. (2017). A Myth Analysis of Persian Heritage Brochures with Reference to Barthes' Semiology. *International Journal of Scientific Study*.