

BRANDING NORDIC SEAWEED: AN APPLIED MULTIMODAL PERSPECTIVE

Cheryl Marie Cordeiro^{1,*}, Themistoklis Altintzoglou²,
Guro Helgesdotter Rogns ³, and Florent Govaerts⁴

Abstract

Developments in digital infrastructure in the past decade have allowed new marketing channels and opportunities for small medium enterprises (SME). This study was designed to illustrate how a multimodal analysis approach can be used to study how Nordic seaweed SMEs use a web-based presence to brand and position their products and services. The study provides an investigation and description of how Nordic seaweed SMEs reach their consumers through multimodal channels of communication, taking an active role in educating their consumers about regenerative seaweed harvesting and concepts of ‘slow living’. The findings indicate that SME owners communicate at several target consumer levels, including taking on a public educator role, to help consumers make sustainable food choices towards a more environmentally sustainable diet for the future.

Keywords: Seaweed, multimodality, multimodal analysis, food, business communication, marketing, branding, Nordic countries

^{1,*}Dr Cheryl Marie Cordeiro (corresponding author) is currently a Scientist at the Department of Marketing, at the Norwegian Institute of Food, Fisheries and Aquaculture Research, Nofima. She obtains a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Email: Cheryl.Cordeiro@nofima.no

²Dr.Themistoklis Altintzoglou is currently a Senior Scientist at the Department of Marketing, at the Norwegian Institute of Food, Fisheries and Aquaculture Research, Nofima. He obtains a PhD in Consumer Research from The Arctic University of Norway.

³Dr. Guro Helgesdotter Rogns  is currently Food and Beverage Consultant, Stavanger, Norway. She obtains a PhD in Molecular Gastronomy/Food Chemistry from the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

⁴Florent Govaerts is currently a doctoral student at The Arctic University of Norway, and at the Norwegian Institute of Food, Fisheries and Aquaculture Research, Nofima. He holds a master’s degree in International Fisheries Management from The Arctic University of Norway.

INTRODUCTION

Recent reviews of international business (IB) research noted that contemporary IB scholarship revolves around new corporate players that are reliant on the various digital platforms that have arrived on the scene including Apple, Amazon, Google, and multinational enterprises (MNEs) from emerging economies such as Huawei, Alibaba, Lenovo and Tata (Ghauri, Strange, & Cooke, 2021; Shaheer & Li, 2020). Small-medium enterprises (SMEs) have become a vital part of the IB landscape, with new digital technologies such as the Internet-of-Things, big data, analytics, and robotic systems, gaining increasing research interest in the past decade (Strange & Zucchella, 2017). Evolving information communication technologies (ICT) and digitalization in the past decades has enabled new means by which small medium enterprises (SMEs) in the food industry can reach their business-to-business (B2B) as well as business-to-consumer (B2C) networks (WEF, 2018; Zambon et al., 2019). Research on ICT and digitalization has revealed two areas of knowledge which display gaps in research and practice; these can be broadly situated within the fields of international business (IB) studies and social semiotics. The first pertains to current literature on SMEs and digitalization, suggesting that more multimodal marketing channels could be used by SME business owners as a power tool in engaging with customers (Balogun, Jarzabkowski

and Vaara, 2011; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Reasons often cited for a lack of adoption of multimodal ICT in SMEs are lack of time, resources, and user confidence (de Vries, Veer, & de Vries, 2018; Oncioiu, 2015). ICT and digitalization have also reshaped the ways in which SMEs communicate about themselves and their products, combining rich imagery with text and audio-visuals (Haley and Boje, 2014; Mehmet and Clarke, 2016; Micu et al., 2017). The reshaping of SME B2B and B2C communication has occurred relatively quickly in the past decades, leading to a second knowledge gap pertaining to the knowledge field of applied theoretical and methodological approaches that provide a systematic and comprehensive understanding of how SME multimodal marketing can be analyzed and studied (Gee, 2011; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2002).

In address to the identified knowledge gaps, this study illustrates how multimodal analysis (MMA) as theory and analytical construct can be applied in studying multimodal communication strategies in the Nordic food industry. The collective shift in research attention in the field of IB studies towards language in the IB context began about one decade ago. While language lies at the heart of IB activities, presenting itself in the forms of national, corporate, technical or digital functionalities, the interplay of key language constructs has not been sufficiently articulated or theorized (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2014).

Methodological frameworks for systematic analysis of multimodal data, of which textual and visual language is a part, have been applied by scholars working in the fields of linguistics, organization studies, communication studies, pedagogy, and creative writing (Matelau-Doherty & Pirini, 2021). Blash (2021) for example, combined different methodic frameworks grounded in socio-pragmatic approaches to multimodal and visual discourse to delineate two registers of authenticity in visual political social media communication. Using Nordic seaweed SME companies from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, where seaweed is not normally consumed as part of the daily diet, the process of using an MMA approach in an investigative manner to study how companies position and brand their products and services, is illustrated. The research question in this study is:

How do Nordic seaweed companies position their companies and brand their products through their web-based presence?

The social semiotics perspective in IB is a developing area of research interest, language based analysis in these disciplines remain understudied (Brannen and Mughan, 2017; Brannen, Piekkari, and Tietze, 2014; Tenzer, Terjesen, and Harzing, 2017). The illustration of the application of multimodal analysis in this study broadly supports the growing research

interest in the novel application of an MMA approach in studying food branding and marketing strategies.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The focus of the research and the associated research knowledge gaps are identified in the Introduction, in section 1. As this is a cross-disciplinary study, addressing both theory and practice, the Literature Review in section 2 briefly covers state-of-the-art research on multimodality. Section 3 outlines the Method applied in this study, with information on data collection and the analysis framework. The study employs a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) multimodal framework where Field (Experiential meaning), Tenor (Interpersonal meaning), and Mode (Textual meanings), are explained in relation to how SMEs communicate product value and meaningfulness in their multimodal marketing approach. Section 4 presents the findings and discussion, followed by a concluding section 5, which outlines the limitations of the study and future research suggestions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multimodality

In essence, all communication is multimodal. Human communication uses a combination of language and other non-verbal communicative tools and gestures, including new media such as the Internet (Jewitt, 2009). ‘Language’ in this study is used in its broadest meaning, including text,

images, audio-visuals, and paralinguistic features. It is a complex semiotic, meaning-making system that both describes and circumscribes our reality (Falkenburg, 2010; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Meanings are socially allotted, evolving through time, with place, people, and culture (Halliday, 2008). Rapid development of ICT in the past decades has reshaped the way in which humans communicate and create meaning. Multimodal communication channels allow for a combination of communication tools such as text, images, websites, and social media platforms, as well as audio-visual platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo (Mehmet and Clarke, 2016). As language is a continuously evolving system (Angermuller, Maingueneau, and Wodak, 2014), communication has become increasingly informal and personalized through social media platforms (Crystal, 2012).

Multimodal studies have their foundations in the early studies of semiotics and the social meanings they generate (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; Saussure, 1916). Multimodal phenomena were key areas of study for disciplines such as the visual and performing arts, architecture, and design (Jewitt, 2009). In recent decades, multimodal research has seen increasing influence from social semiotic theory and Halliday's work on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; O'Halloran and Smith, 2011), seeking to understand the meaning of texts from

a functional perspective. In the SFL paradigm, language is seen as an available resource for meaning-making, where the grammatical system of language allows for users to select and design their interlocution for the context. Meaning is expressed simultaneously through 3 language metafunctions (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Mehmet and Clarke, 2016):

- (i) the *experiential metafunction* expresses human experience, the inner world of conceptions and perceptions obtained from the outside world. The experiential metafunction corresponds to the *Field*, and answers the contextual question, "What is going on?"
- (ii) the *interpersonal metafunction* is the vocative, modal (i.e., how obligatory?) and mood-making (i.e., reference points) elements of language, used for interaction between people, maintaining relationships and influencing behavior, expressions of attitude and point-of-view. The interpersonal metafunction corresponds to *Tenor*, and answers to the contextual question, "Who is taking part?"
- (iii) the *textual metafunction* is the words used in the management of text or image cohesion and coherence. The textual metafunction corresponds to *Mode*, and answers to the contextual question, "What role is assigned to language?"

SFL approaches in social semiotics have been applied in

various domains of study and analysis including art and architecture (O’Toole, 2011), visual art, advertising, websites and games (G. R. Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996), spatial semiotics (Krase and Shortell, 2011), spatial semiotics and emotion (Biehl-Missal and Saren, 2012), and music (Tarasti, 2011; Van Leeuwen, 1998). From historical influences and applications in various disciplines, multimodal studies can be grouped

broadly into three distinct theoretical and methodological approaches (Table 1.) including, social semiotic multimodality (SSMM) (Forceville, 2011; G. Kress, Kress, and Kress, 2015), multimodal discourse analysis (Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Maier, 2011), and multimodal interactive analysis (MIA) (Deppermann, 2013; Norris, 2004; Stivers and Sidnell, 2005).

Table 1. The Variety of Multimodality and the Associated Contexts of Use (Adapted from Jewitt, 2009; Mehmet and Clarke, 2016)

Perspective	Historical influence	Context	Emphasis on system	Emphasis on sign maker
Social Semiotic Multimodality (SSMM)	Intertextuality Heteroglossia Semiotics Social semiotics Interactional sociology Art history Iconography Discourse SFL	“Medium to high” articulation through the interest at the moment of sign-making as these are balanced with the normative discourses that act upon it	Medium: as a resource with regularity and dynamic character	High: the interest of the sign-maker
Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)	Systemic Functional Grammar	Medium to High (following that meaning is contextual)	High: system as a set of choices, levels, and principles	Low
Multimodal Interactional Analysis (MIA)	Interactional sociology Interactional sociolinguistics Mediated discourse analysis Multimodality	High, articulated through the interest in the moment of (inter)action	Low	High: the interest in the social actor performing an action; however, agency itself is not taken-for-granted: the actor may also communicate without intention

METHOD

Data Collection

A total of 50 Nordic founded seaweed companies were studied for marketing and communication intent (19 from Denmark and the Faroe Islands, 25 from Norway, and 6 from Sweden). The companies were mainly SMEs founded in the past 20 years and tended to be family owned businesses. Due to the relatively niche product and targeted market, not all Nordic seaweed SMEs had comprehensive websites. For the

purposes of this study, which focuses on web-based presence in communicative marketing intent, 3 SME websites were selected for use in the illustration of the application of an MMA approach to the study of food branding and marketing in IB. These webpages correspond to the SMEs of Dansk Tang (Denmark), Tango Seaweed (Norway) and Catxalot (Sweden). The publicly available websites were accessed between January and June of 2020. The entirety of the websites, their related social media links, together with their narratives were analyzed; only



Figure 1. Dansk Tang (Danish), Denmark (website: <https://www.dansktang.dk/>).

Home Seaweed types Why us? Contact Taste the seaweed beer
Sustainability Become a dealer Why seaweed is healthy
Trade shows

Danish Seaweed

- From the pure Danish nature!
Michelin supplier for some of the best restaurants in the world

Click here!

Who are we?

Danish Seaweed is a seaweed firm who sell seaweed and seaweed products B2B. We only deliver the best quality - So far we have only had one complaint in the last 2 years

People likes seaweed from Denmark because of the taste and the clean sea! - Do you know the next top restaurant who want to test our produkts? - Do you know that seaweed contain big amounts of vitamins and minerals, and is some of the healthiest food you can eat?

Keep reading

Some of the seaweed types from Denmark

Did you know that we both delivre fresh and dired?



Toothed wrack

One of the most common types in Denmark, have a lovely fresh taste of nuts or peas. Especially the tips are very delicious



Chorda filum

Look like spaghetti, and actually you can use it in this way! - Have a delicious fresh lemon flavon.



Laminaria digitata

A beautiful kelp type from Denmark, very delicious for a good dashi! - Begin to grow at 3-4 meters depth

Figure 2 Dansk Tang (English), Denmark (website: <https://www.dansktang.dk/>)



Figure 3 Tango Seaweed, Norway (website: <https://www.tangoseaweed.no/>)



Figure 4 Catxalot, Sweden (website: https://www.catxalot.se/en-GB_)

the entry page screenshots of the websites are shown in this study for illustrative purposes. These SMEs share, a multimodal marketing strategy, featuring prominent narratives of company values and product positioning. These elements can be used as the basis for comparative observations on how Nordic SMEs are marketing a relatively new product such as seaweed in B2B and B2C communication.

In general, website visitors were directed to the SMEs multimodal channels usually through icons indicated at the top of the webpage or at the very bottom of the webpage. This study was conducted in spring of 2020 and the entry webpage (partial) screenshots were retrieved on the same day. The study focuses only on the SMEs' web-presence. Figures 1 through 4 show the webpage screenshots to be analyzed.

Framework of Analysis

The website examples were analyzed in a systemic manner in accordance with the 3 metafunctions outlined above, investigating the meanings expressed by the *experiential*, *interpersonal*, and *textual* metafunctions. The "systemic" analysis was performed at three levels of language metafunction, namely the "Experiential meaning", "Interpersonal meaning" and "Textual meaning". The SFL framework used, allows for a consistent approach to the multimodal content analysis, so that all websites could be compared for the communication, marketing, and branding, strategies used in relation to seaweed, a relatively new food product in the Nordic context. The elements of the meanings realization are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Language Metafunctions and their Elements of Realization (Adapted from Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; and Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996).

Metafunction	Contextual alignment	Textual elements of realization	Visual elements of realization
Experiential meaning	Field "What is going on?"	Material (physical), mental, verbal, and relational processes	
Interpersonal meaning	Tenor "Who is taking part?"	Modality (extent of obligation), affect (emotion), and person	color, font, images, gaze, object salience and prominence, frames, layout, information value
Textual meaning	Mode "Role assigned to language"	Thematic salience	

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section addresses the main research question described in the opening section of the paper, illustrating how MMA can be applied to the study of food branding and marketing, simultaneously revealing how the Nordic seaweed SMEs position themselves *experientially*, *interpersonally*, and *textually* in their B2B and B2C communication. The MMA framework unveils the SME corporate values and work principles through various channel affordances (text, audio-visual, color, images etc.).

Dansk Tang

Dansk Tang is a seaweed SME founded by a father and son team; Claus Marcussen and Simon Weber are seaweed harvesters focusing mainly on the B2B network, although it could be argued that the SME has some influence on the B2C scene as well, when working directly with chefs. In September 2017, Dansk Tang partnered with seaweed pioneer Anita Dietz Lykkegaard, owner of Dietz Seaweed, which has been working with seaweed since 2010 and has a culinary background. Dietz Seaweed produced and imported seaweed to the Danish market, conducting both B2B and B2C sales. Sales were targeted primarily at health food stores, supermarkets, and the food and beverage sector. Based on good working chemistry and the desire to work more in the field of food and events, Anita Dietz

Lykkegaard decided on a working partnership with Dansk Tang. The strategic partnership of Dansk Tang and Dietz Seaweed aimed at expanding the repertoire of Dansk Tang products, bringing them to the target market (Dansk Tang, 2017). The company today has about four persons in the core team and follows two business models. The first is to deliver freshly harvested seaweed to Danish elite restaurants such as Noma, while the second is to produce seaweed infused products such as mustard, pesto, oil, beer, and salt (Riber, 2019). These products are targeted for consumers at Danish specialty stores, fish stores, and supermarkets. As an example of the multimodal marketing strategy, Dansk Tang was featured in a documentary series, “Smagen af Danmark” (DR K, 2019). Simon Weber met with wild herb collector Thomas Laursen and the host of the show Dan Morten Lindberg, to show how different varieties of seaweed (blæretang/fucus vesiculosus; gaffeltang/furcellaria lumbricalis; sjøsalat/ulva lactuca and savtagen/fucus serratus) can be sustainably harvested along the coast of Denmark. As an indication of visual aesthetics and communication of the high-quality background of the food product, Weber also showed how the harvested seaweed is packed and presented to elite restaurants such as Noma. The direct delivery and B2B contact for Dansk Tang encourages prominent and influential chefs such as Anna Andersen of Wild Kitchen in Denmark, to experiment with new

recipes. According to Andersen, savtagen can be made into a fairly ordinary pesto by grinding with hazelnuts and cheese, bl eretang can be complemented on a plate with other ingredients, or made into a marmalade (DR K, 2019).

Multimodal Applications

Apart from appearing in a local culinary documentary series, making the enterprise an actor and stakeholder in the industry sector that actively engages the enterprise towards educating and inspiring a broader general audience, Dansk Tang reaches out B2B and B2C in the virtual network via Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Icons to extended multimodal channels are located at the top right-hand side of the page in prominent yellow, intended for visitors to find “new information” or complementary information outside of their main webpage. Textual coherence is conveyed to visitors in the narrative of the enterprise’s founding history. Simon Weber, the co-founder of Dansk Tang, mentioned in the culinary documentary that the family, when searching for a business idea had settled on bringing to market, local produce in the form of marmalades and fruit conserves. However, while considering what could be considered as a ‘new’ or ‘innovative’ product, it was Weber’s mother who suggested that Danish seaweed could be harvested and turned into food products, leading to the idea of the founding enterprise (DR K, 2019). In the top left quadrant

of the Dansk Tang entry webpage, a combination of the use of text, “Tang fra det danske hav” (seaweed from Danish sea) and “FN’s verdensm l for b eredygtig udvikling” (the UN’s World Sustainable Development Goals), natural colors of the ocean and seaweeds (red, brown and green), with an ocean green and sand beige as corporate colours, Dansk Tang informs their customers that their core values are in providing pure Danish products sourced from the ocean in a manner that is in alignment with the global sustainability goals. Table 3 gives the multimodal analysis synopsis of the Dansk Tang Danish webpage.

The English language webpage of Dansk Tang is similarly organized in 4 segments with a distinct lack of the burst of colors used in the Danish language page. Black and sand beige are the dominating colors of this page, with their seaweed products featured neatly in tiled pictures in the lower half of the page. While their corporate value of sustainability continues to be information salient, located at the top bar of the page, there is distinctly less visual salience given to climate friendliness and global sustainable development in this page. Experientially and interpersonally, this page is adapted towards contact and information sharing, answering pertinent questions with the use of interrogatives such as “Why us?” and the use of directives such as “Become a dealer”. The use of less vibrant colors on this page also conveys a clean, and indicatively sincere effort towards establishing international

Table 3 Dansk Tang (Danish) Webpage: Synopsis of Metafunctional Meanings Conveyed

Metafunction/Contextual alignment	Textual elements of realization	Visual elements of realization
Experiential meaning Field “What is going on?”	Small core team of 4 persons Seaweed harvesters and food product development Harvests and delivers fresh seaweed within 24 hours to proximate business network Active in various social and business networks	4 segment page layout, with information salience given to fresh produce, climate friendly enterprise practices that support the UN Sustainable Development Goals Corporate colors of ocean green, sand beige and black Use of circular imagery with colors of the seaweeds harvested, to indicate corporate values on sustainability
Interpersonal meaning Tenor “Who is taking part?”	High use of modality indicating high obligation and commitment to sustainability values/goals Strong affect/emotions conveyed about their love of fresh, raw produce from the Danish Sea High interest in educating and reaching out B2B and B2C through various social media channels including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and contact webmail formula Interested in trading globally, indicated by English language use on the webpage	Use of colors occurring in nature such as ocean blue, and the red, green, and brown colors of the seaweed The gaze adopted by the main actors of Dansk Tang is often “backgrounded” with actors looking away from the camera Visitors are invited to “gaze” into their various activities, summarized in tiled picture format organized in the second half of the entry webpage Use of drawing of a globe containing a red lipstick kiss on its cheek with the words “Klimakysset” or “climate kiss” to convey affect, and love for global sustainability
Textual meaning Mode “Role assigned to language”	Text, visuals/images, and audio-visuals work simultaneously on fulfilling semiotic functions with active click links that extend their web presence to other social media sites Multimodal use of media affordances, where videos will give immediate effect of “how things are done” at Dansk Tang	

customer contacts. Information is neatly presented. The underlying intention and goal, to communicate across cultures, is delivered visually by use of icons on the webpage.

Dansk Tang also takes on the role of an active informer and educator. The SME addresses topics such as “Vegan”, “Health” and “Sustainable” at the bottom of the page. Visitors are invited to connect with them via their other channels, indicated in yellow icons at the top right quadrant of the webpage, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Contact via mail and phone are also emphasized in the upper half of the English webpage. The actorship expressed through all 3 metafunctions of Dansk Tang demonstrates how their enterprise activities extend into several social and business sectors, including the scientific community at DTU (the Danish Technical University):

“We are in touch with a number of people at DTU (the Danish Technical University), who are involved in algae and marine environment, among others Susan Løvstad Holdt, Ph.D., Deputy Professor at DTUs food institute, as well as Karsten Olsen, Ph.D., Deputy Professor at Copenhagen University. We have delivered both wet and dry seaweed to them for research.”

Table 4 gives the multimodal analysis synopsis of the Dansk Tang English webpage.

While multimodal analysis often considers only online presence and

digital marketing streams, for Dansk Tang, the online presence serves also to connect people in person. The SME offers to take people on a “Tangsafari” or “Seaweed Safari”, an experiential learning activity for individuals to understand food from nature/farm to table, and to gain more knowledge about how foods can and should be harvested in a regenerative manner.

In terms of enterprise coherence and marketing communication, their current strategy of addressing two different markets with various multimodal affordances, corresponds to Dansk Tang’s passion and belief in what they do, and the products that they offer. A young enterprise with a small core team, Dansk Tang’s ambition and entrepreneurial spirit seems consistently reflected in their direct and open communication style for B2B as well as B2C.

Tango Seaweed, Norway

Tango Seaweed AS was founded in 2016 by two individuals Annelise Chapman and Bjørn Otterlei. There are three current core team members of the start-up. Located in the municipality of Herøy on the west coast of Norway, Tango Seaweed is made up of ocean farmers offering processed cultivated seaweed products targeted at Norwegian supermarkets and selected food boutiques. Chapman has a doctoral degree in the field of seaweed, kelp, and coastal ecosystems. Her passion for seaweed led her to cultivating the sea vegetable for food (Bazeat, 2020).

Table 4 Dansk Tang (English) Webpage: Synopsis of Metafunctional Meanings Conveyed

Metafunction/Contextual alignment	Textual elements of realization	Visual elements of realization
Experiential meaning Field “What is going on?”	Seeks active internationalization of the SME via establishing a page in English	4 segment page layout, with information salience given to Dansk Tang being Michelin suppliers of Danish sourced seaweed
Interpersonal meaning Tenor “Who is taking part?”	Textual interlocution and conversation are established on the page through a series of questions and answers Affect/emotion and passion for what they do is illustrated by use of exclamative, e.g., “Danish Seaweed – From the pure Danish nature!” and “People like seaweed from Denmark because of the taste and the clean sea!” High modality emphasis on quality and corporate integrity can be found in sentences such as “We <i>only</i> deliver <i>the best</i> quality – So far, we <i>have had one</i> complaint in the last 2 years” Backed by Science. Collaboration with DTU (the Danish Technical University) involved with marine environment management	Corporate colors of sand beige and black, on white background used in the English page Clear, crisp visualization of products. Seaweed is photographed and featured on white backgrounds, a single product at a time, organized in tiled picture format No human actors are shown on the English language page Little affect/emotion is shown using colors of visuals Emphasis is on language and textual communication via explanation and email / phone contact formulas Visitors are invited to read more about Dansk Tang and invited to explore other information channels as indicated by social media icons situated at the top right-hand corner of the webpage
Textual meaning Mode “Role assigned to language”	Text, visuals/images, and audio-visuals work simultaneously on fulfilling semiotic functions with active click links that extends their web presence to other social media sites Multimodal use of media affordances, where videos will give immediate effect of “how things are done” at Dansk Tang	Offers a physical experience of a “Seaweed Safari”, that will involve full human sensory elements, an immersion in seaweed education and experiential learning

As part of their multimodal marketing strategy, the Director of Tango Seaweed, Annelise Chapman has appeared in interviews in Norway’s national news outlets such as NRK (Berg, 2018) and has been featured on Bazeat, a Norwegian local producers online network hosted by Medium, an online magazine (Bazeat, 2020). In 2019, Tango Seaweed won the “Best Industrial Start-up” Award at the Industrial Design Conference 2019 in Giske, Norway (IDC Norway, 2019; Tango Seaweed, 2019). In Bazeat, Chapman mentioned that the challenge for her and Tango Seaweed is to introduce Norwegian seaweed to the domestic market, where eating seaweed is currently viewed with skepticism and not considered as part of the regular Norwegian diet. The rewarding element in Chapman’s work is to work in proximity with the market and to develop food products that are locally grown/sourced. Food traceability is important to Chapman, as well as being able to influence how food is produced in a regenerative manner that cares for the ecological environment.

The entry webpage contains 3 segments, although continuity and coherence are signaled by the white background on which all information appears. Nature and kelp in its natural form are highlighted in both images and text, “Our vision: Ocean farming – naturally!”. There is high use of modals, indicating obligation and commitment to product quality and sustainable farming: “At TANGO Seaweed we cultivate seaweeds *according to nature’s principles*. We

are *committed* to producing high quality kelps and other macroalgae for human food and other applications.” Interpersonal meanings are established with their customers through addressing the subject of human health: “Whether you enjoy seafood and would like to explore new tastes, are looking for vegetarian supplements and alternatives to conventional diets or whether you want to advance both your own and the planet’s health – seaweed is right for you.” Instead of the use of strong affect/emotion, saliency of information for Tango Seaweed goes into the pragmatic farming processes of their seaweeds, educating people about how seaweed is spored, grown, harvested, and dried as raw ingredients. Table 5 gives the multimodal analysis synopsis of the Tango Seaweed webpage.

Catxalot, Sweden

Catxalot AB was founded in 2014 by Jonas Pettersson and Linn  Sj gren. In 2020, Linn  Sj gren was managing Catxalot. The start-up has several business models. In a B2B business network, Catxalot harvests seaweed from Grebbestad, located along the west coast of Sweden, delivering the seaweed to local high-end restaurants pioneering culinary innovation and the use of new ingredients that can be locally sourced, such as Restaurang VR  in Gothenburg; TAK in Stockholm, whose interiors were designed by the award-winning architect, Gert Wing rdh; and the Michelin awarded

Table 5 Tango Seaweed Webpage: Synopsis of Metafunctional Meanings Conveyed

Metafunction/Contextual alignment	Textual elements of realization	Visual elements of realization
<p>Experiential meaning Field “What is going on?”</p>	<p>Small core team of 3 persons</p> <p>Seaweed growers and food product development</p> <p>Active in seaweed research</p> <p>Growing seaweed organically</p> <p>Active in various social and business networks including academic and business conferences and tradeshows</p>	<p>3 segment page layout with use of colors from nature, in particular use of various shades of green from the seaweed</p> <p>Information salience given to precision technology and processing of seaweed farming</p> <p>Emphasis on climate awareness and marine environment management in conjunction with the importance of understanding food supply chains that affects human health via quality foods</p> <p>Tiled pictures with Chapman and team photographs with individuals featured as main actors/stakeholders with direct gaze into the camera, calling the viewers’ attention to the atmosphere of the work</p>
<p>Interpersonal meaning Tenor “Who is taking part?”</p>	<p>High use of modality indicating high obligation and commitment to sustainability values/goals</p> <p>Strong personal affect/emotions conveyed about their love of seaweed and short food supply chain management</p> <p>High interest in educating and reaching out B2B and B2C through various social media (out-link) channels including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest</p>	<p>Use of vibrant colors in tiled pictures indicates enthusiasm for their work and features of food processing tools (buoys, ships, drying room, ropes, nets etc.), indicating extensive technical knowledge on seaweed growing and processing, creating consumer trust in their food products</p>

Table 5 Tango Seaweed Webpage: Synopsis of Metafunctional Meanings Conveyed (Continued)

Metafunction/Contextual alignment	Textual elements of realization	Visual elements of realization
	Presence on Facebook (with video uploads), own news media channel on webpage	
	Interested in trading globally, indicated by an English language webpage	
	Products page can be found in Norwegian	
Textual meaning Mode “Role assigned to language”	Clean macro-photography features of seaweed Use of social media out-links of their site content for visitors	

restaurant Volt in Stockholm. Catxalot has their own seaweed products such as spices, salt, and dried seaweed. In a B2C business network, Catxalot offers five services broadly characterized as eco or nature tourism, including seaweed canoeing, seaweed safari, beach flower and seaweed walk, gourmet weekend for divers, and training in seaweed foraging for food and health. Like Dansk Tang in Denmark, which also offers nature tourism, the multimodal marketing strategy of Catxalot aims to use their online web presence to coordinate physical group activities.

As an SME, Catxalot positions itself as an actor/stakeholder by reaching out to the public through various media channels including authored books, audio-visuals, and mainstream news media such as local Swedish newspapers and industry

magazines such as *Dagens Industri*, *Business Sweden*, *Bohusl ningen*, *Naturkompaniet*, *Allt om Mat* and *Aftonbladet*. Their media releases are found via an out-link of the Catxalot website under the “Contact Catxalot” page. Like the Norwegian Seaweed Tango, social media icons on Catxalot are discreet, occurring in small grey icons at the top of the page. The message is clear, with the website containing only 3 pages in total, the first is the services introduction page “Start”, followed by “Contact” and “Services”. Table 6 gives the multimodal analysis synopsis of the Catxalot webpage.

In synopsis, most SME owners have acknowledged that they are excited about an emerging market for seaweed in the Nordic countries but face certain challenges in product development as well as product

Table 6 Catxalot Webpage: Synopsis of Metafunctional Meanings Conveyed

Metafunction/Contextual alignment	Textual elements of realization	Visual elements of realization
Experiential meaning Field “What is going on?”	<p>Small core team of at most 2 persons</p> <p>Seaweed harvesters, food product development, gastronomy, and eco-tourism course consultants i.e., “Masterclass “Seaweed foraging, food, and health””</p> <p>Active in various social and business networks such as Facebook and their own video channel on Vimeo, “Catxalot Seaweed Adventures”</p>	<p>Single page layouts in 3 information pages, with information salience given to services and products</p> <p>About 30 videos on Vimeo linked at the bottom of the entry page as out-links to their video channel on Vimeo “Catxalot Seaweed Adventures”</p> <p>Corporate colors of grey and navy blue reflecting the colors of nature in Sweden</p>
Interpersonal meaning Tenor “Who is taking part?”	<p>Use of superlative comparisons to indicate uniqueness of experience for participants, i.e. “An <i>exclusive</i> summer experience with <i>exciting</i> flavors and knowledge in a <i>unique</i> environment – Tjurpannan’s nature reserve in northern Bohuslän”</p> <p>Builds consumer trust and network through sense of collaboration and desire to provide knowledge and help, i.e. “As a seaweed consultant, we <i>provide guidance and assistance</i> to restaurants and companies in the food industry and others. We <i>help</i> you with seaweed knowledge, <i>guidance</i> in choosing seaweed species for products and dishes,</p>	<p>Use of pictures occurring in nature taken from their own eco-tourism activities</p> <p>Pictures shown often lack direct gaze by the main actors and participants to Catxalot’s activities</p> <p>Visitors are invited to view the activities picture, being enticed to join</p>

Table 6 Catxalot Webpage: Synopsis of Metafunctional Meanings Conveyed (Continued)

Metafunction/Contextual alignment	Textual elements of realization	Visual elements of realization
	<p>recipes, nutritional content. We can also <i>guide you</i> to where to buy seaweed (Europe).”</p> <p>High interest in educating and reaching out B2B and B2C through various social media channels including Facebook, and Vimeo, as well as official Swedish news media channels</p> <p>Interested in trading globally, indicated by an English language webpage</p>	
Textual meaning Mode “Role assigned to language”	Text, visuals/images, and audio-visuals work simultaneously on fulfilling semiotic functions with active click links that extend their web presence to other social media sites. Multimodal use of media affordances, where videos will give immediate viewer knowledge of activities conducted by Catxalot	

marketing. Some common organization profiles observed in all three seaweed SMEs across the different Nordic countries are a passion for locally produced food products that are wild harvested in a regenerative manner. Many SMEs were in collaboration with local universities for improving their technology, knowledge and skills. Corporate marketing videos also tend to weave in the values of ‘slow living’

or having the time to explore nature, taste the fruits that nature has to offer, and experience the oceans as a new luxury in life and eco-tourism.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, an MMA approach was applied to study the food branding and marketing of Nordic seaweed SMEs. This study illustrates how the SMEs communicate their

corporate values, brand, and products at B2B and B2C levels. The findings of this study bolster the observation by current applied MMA studies of strategically woven narratives that combine audio visuals, web page presence, and face-to-face interactions, when conducting small grouped ecological seaweed tours for example, easing the transfer of intangible assets such as brand names. Stakeholders are persuaded to embrace new ecological values pertaining to seaweed consumption, and consumer tastes are encouraged to evolve from conventional foods to embrace seaweed as a new type of food for example (Haley and Boje, 2014).

The findings of the study also indicate that SMEs who are agile in adopting a multimodal platform of communication tend to reach a larger consumer base that tends to expedite the processes of firm internationalization (Fernández-Olmos & Ramírez-Alesón, 2017; Johanson & Vahlne, 2011; Mehmet & Clarke, 2016) creating and maintaining higher-level environmental values and vision (Haley and Boje, 2014).

Study Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of this study are method related. Multimodal analysis illustration is better suited to limited size samples of in-depth discourse analysis of multimodal web-presence. As such, the trade-off for deeper insights into case study examples necessarily gives way to broader

generalization of findings. The advantage of such an illustration of method is in its potential for pedagogic and business practice influences. This method of analysis can be applied as a corporate marketing strategy tool, for evaluating the effectiveness of food marketing on websites and web presence. By sieving through the 3 semiotic metafunctions, communicative and knowledge gaps can be identified and addressed towards more comprehensive, efficient branding, and product marketing communication for SMEs who may not always have time or resources to commit to digital use.

With the continuing development of ICT and digitalization, the study of multimodal phenomena is anticipated to become increasingly mainstream, particularly for SME business practices. Future research of food branding and marketing could see an expansion into communication and marketing research in virtual realms, extending into concepts of 'intertextuality' and 'multi-mediality' which are more technically and practically oriented to digital media use (Kress, 2000; Balakina and Sosnin, 2017).

REFERENCES

- Angermuller, J., Maingueneau, D., & Wodak, R. (2014). The Discourse Studies Reader. In J. Angermuller, D. Maingueneau, & R. Wodak (Eds.), *The Discourse Studies Reader: Main Currents in Theory and Analysis*.

- <https://doi.org/10.1075/z.184>
- Balogun, J., Jarzabkowski, P., & Vaara, E. (2011). Selling, resistance and reconciliation: A critical discursive approach to subsidiary role evolution in MNEs. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(6), 765–786.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2011.13>
- Bazeat. (2020). Møt Annelise Chapman — Matprodusent - Bazeat - Medium. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://medium.com/bazeat/møt-annelise-chapman-matprodusent-57a1d0c29084>
- Berg, F. (2018). Laurdagsgodt av tang – NRK Møre og Romsdal – Lokale nyheter, TV og radio. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://www.nrk.no/mr/laurdagsgodt-av-tang-1.14285155>
- Biehl-Missal, B., & Saren, M. (2012). Atmospheres of Seduction. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 32(2), 168–180.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146711433650>
- Blasch, L. (2021). Indexing authenticity in visual political (social media) communication: a metapragmatics-based analysis of two visual registers of the authentic. *Multimodal Communication*, 10(1), 37–53.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/mc-2020-0019>
- Brannen, M. Y., & Mughan, T. (2017). *Language in international business: Developing a Field*. Springer International Publishing.
- Brannen, M. Y., Piekkari, R., & Tietze, S. (2014). The multifaceted role of language in international business: Unpacking the forms, functions and features of a critical challenge to MNC theory and performance. *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 45, pp. 495–507.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2014.24>
- Crystal, D. (2012). The medium of Netspeak. In *Language and the Internet* (1st ed., pp. 24–61).
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139164771.003>
- Dansk Tang. (2017). Pr. 5. september bliver Dietz Seaweed en del af Dansk Tang. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://www.dansktang.dk/press-emeddelelse-dietz-seaweed-del-dansk-tang/>
- de Vries, H. P., Veer, E., & de Vries, K. V. (2018). An examination of SME social media use in the food industry. *Small Enterprise Research*, 25(3), 227–238.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13215906.2018.1521741>
- Deppermann, A. (2013, January). Multimodal interaction from a conversation analytic perspective. *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 46, pp. 1–7.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2012.11.014>
- DR K. (2019). *Smagen af Danmark: Sæson 2 – Fermentering og tang | DRTV*. Retrieved from <https://www.dr.dk/drtv/episode/>

- smagen-af-danmark_- fermentering-og-tang_98301
- Falkenburg, B. (2010). Language and Reality: Peter Mittelstaedt's Contributions to the Philosophy of Physics. *Foundations of Physics*, 40(9), 1171–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10701-010-9449-8>
- Fernández-Olmos, M., & Ramírez-Alesón, M. (2017). How internal and external factors influence the dynamics of SME technology collaboration networks over time. *Technovation*, 64–65(July 2016), 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2017.06.002>
- Forceville, C. J. (2011). Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(14), 3624–3626. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.06.013>
- Gee, J. P. (2011). Discourse Analysis for Images and Multimodal Texts. In *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (pp. 193–200).
- Ghauri, P., Strange, R., & Cooke, F. L. (2021). Research on international business: The new realities. *International Business Review*, 30(2), 101794. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2021.101794>
- Haley, U. C. V., & Boje, D. M. (2014). Storytelling the internationalization of the multinational enterprise. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45(9), 1115–1132. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2014.32>
- Halliday, M.A.K & Hasan, R. (1985). Halliday, M.A.K. and Ruqaiya Hasan Language, context, and text: aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (1985). *Language Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social -Semiotic Perspective*, 15–23.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2008). Written Language, Standard Language, Global Language. *The Handbook of World Englishes*, 22(4), 349–365. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470757598.ch20>
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.; M. A. K. (Michael A. K. Halliday & C. M. I. M. Matthiessen, Eds.). Routledge.
- IDC Norway. (2019). Industri Design Conference, Industrial Design Awards 2019. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <http://idcnorway.com/prisutdeling/>
- Jewitt, C. (2009). *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. London: London: Routledge.
- Johanson, J., & Vahlne, J. E. (2011). Markets as networks: Implications for strategy-making. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39(4), 484–491.

- <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-010-0235-0>
- Krase, J., & Shortell, T. (2011). On the spatial semiotics of vernacular landscapes in global cities. *Visual Communication*, 10(3), 371–376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357211408821>
- Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality: Challenges to Thinking about Language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(2), 337. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587959>
- Kress, G., Kress, & Kress, G. (2015). Semiotic work: Applied Linguistics and a social semiotic account of Multimodality. *AILA Review*, 28(1), 49–71. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.28.03kre>
- Kress, G. R., & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: the grammar of visual design*. Routledge.
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2002). Colour as a semiotic mode: Notes for a grammar of colour. *Visual Communication*, 1(3), 343–368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147035720200100306>
- Maier, C. D. (2011). Communicating business greening and greenwashing in global media: A multimodal discourse analysis of CNN's greenwashing video. *International Communication Gazette*, 73(1), 165–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048510386747>
- Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52(4), 357–365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.03.002>
- Matelau-Doherty, T., & Pirini, J. (2021). Introduction and contents for special issue of Multimodal Communication 10 (1). *Multimodal Communication*, 10(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mc-2020-0031>
- Mehmet, M. I., & Clarke, R. J. (2016). B2B social media semantics: Analysing multimodal online meanings in marketing conversations. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, 92–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.12.006>
- Micu, A., Micu, A. E., Geru, M., & Lixandriou, R. C. (2017). Analyzing user sentiment in social media: Implications for online marketing strategy. *Psychology and Marketing*, 34(12), 1094–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21049>
- Norris, S. (2004). *Analyzing Multimodal Interaction: A Methodological Framework*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203379493-6>
- O'Halloran, K. L., & Smith, B. A. (2011). *Multimodal studies: exploring issues and domains*. Routledge.
- O'Toole, L. M. (2011). *The language of displayed art*. Routledge.
- Oncioiu, I. (2015). *Eco – Innovation*

- in European SMEs : between Limitation and Possibilities.* 512–518.
- Riber, M. (2019). Dansk Tang gets seaweed on our plates | Spring Nordic. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from <https://springnordic.dk/dansk-tang-gets-seaweed-on-our-plates/>
- Saussure, F. de. (1916). *Course in general linguistics* (W. Baskin, P. Meisel, & H. Saussy, Eds.). Columbia: Columbia University Press.
- Shaheer, N. A., & Li, S. (2020). The CAGE around cyberspace? How digital innovations internationalize in a virtual world. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 35(1), 105892. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2018.08.002>
- Stivers, T., & Sidnell, J. (2005, January 30). Introduction: Multimodal interaction. *Semiotica*, Vol. 156, pp. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2005.2005.156.1>
- Strange, R., & Zucchella, A. (2017). Industry 4.0, global value chains and international business. *Multinational Business Review*, 25(3), 174–184. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MBR-05-2017-0028>
- Tango Seaweed. (2019). TANGO Seaweed wins ‘Best Industrial Start-Up’ Award. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://www.tango seaweed.no/blog/tango-seaweed-wins-best-industrial-start-up-award>
- Tarasti, E. (2011). Musical signification: Essays in the semiotic theory and analysis of music. In *Musical Signification: Essays in the Semiotic Theory and Analysis of Music* (Vol. 34). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3108439>
- Tenzer, H., Terjesen, S., & Harzing, A. W. (2017). Language in International Business: A Review and Agenda for Future Research. *Management International Review*, 57(6), 815–854. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-017-0319-x>
- Van Leeuwen, T. (1998). Music and ideology: Notes toward a sociosemiotics of mass media music. *Popular Music and Society*, 22(4), 25–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007769808591717>
- Vladimirovna Balakina, J., & Vladimirovich Sosnin, A. (2017). Intersemioticity and multimedia: Transition from traditional to electronic texts. *Studia Linguistica Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, Vol. 134, pp. 323–335. <https://doi.org/10.4467/20834624SL.17.023.7097>
- World Economic Forum. (2018). *Operating Models for the Future of Consumption A Report by the World Economic Forum’s System Initiative on Shaping the Future of Consumption prepared in collaboration with Accenture.* (January), 31. Retrieved from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Operating_Models_for_th

e_Future_of_Consumption.pdf
Zambon, I., Cecchini, M., Egidi, G.,
Saporito, M. G., & Colantoni, A.
(2019). Revolution 4.0: Industry
vs. Agriculture in a Future
Development for SMEs.
Processes, 7(1), 36.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/pr7010036>