Visual Grammar and Cultural Perception in Thai Tourism Memes: A Study of the 'Farangs Gone Wild' Instagram Page

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Abstract

This study qualitatively examines a set of 20 visual memes related to tourism in Thailand from the "Farangs Gone Wild" Instagram page using Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (2006) and Goss's (1966) perceptual tendencies. The goal was to examine how visual and textual elements convey meanings and reflect perceptions of the memes' creator. The findings suggest that the memes convey representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. In terms of representational meaning, the findings suggest an interplay between processes within tourism memes, revealing their function as sites for meaning construction and cultural commentary. Furthermore, the memes are influenced by closure and expectation based on Goss's (1996) perceptual tendencies. This research highlights the role of the interplay between images and texts as dynamic forms of digital communication. However, future research should involve a wider and more diverse sample across social media platforms to strengthen the findings.

1. Introduction

The term 'meme' was coined by Dawkins (1976) to describe how ideas spread and evolve in culture in a manner similar to genes. In the digital era, Shifman (2013) defines internet memes, which are often humorous and rapidly shared, as cultural artifacts that combine texts and visuals. According to Wiggins and Bowers (2015), brevity, multimodality, participatory remixing, and satire are the defining features of internet memes.

Internet memes play an essential role in online settings, serving as instruments for sharing opinions, humor, and cultural experiences. Memes can convey opinions and emotions on societal events, spread cultural perspectives and bridge language barriers (Akhther, 2021). Given these characteristics, memes are versatile and can be used for different purposes in online communication, ranging from simple replies to commercial objectives on social media (Iloh, 2021).

Tourism-related memes are not only humorous artifacts but also shape perceptions of destinations and cultural narratives. These memes often reflect travelers' encounters, attitudes, and stereotypes, thereby shaping collective imaginaries towards places (Yhee et al., 2024). They can also contribute to participatory image-building of destinations, as tourists may imitate memes or create new ones (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Findings indicate that memes appear in tourism contexts. A tourism meme represents a tourist's personal or cultural encounters within specific locales (Yhee et al., 2021). Viewers may imitate memes and share content that reflects their interpretations or representations of the meme, often containing inherent cultural connotations on social media platforms, which may challenge established cultural meanings (Rubtcova & Pavenkov, 2019).

Several previous studies have prioritized linguistic features or focused on intercultural communication within memes (Adiga & Padmakumar, 2024; Rubtcova & Pavenkov, 2019; Wu & Fitzgerald, 2020). For example,

Adiga and Padmakumar (2024) examined the textual structure of memes. However, few studies have investigated how the visual design of memes contributes to meaning-making, particularly in the context of tourism. Even fewer studies have applied visual grammar frameworks to analyze how cultural perceptions are encoded through images, layout, and composition in memes. The current study addresses this gap by integrating visual grammar with Goss's (1996) perception theory to analyze tourism memes.

This study employed data from the Instagram page "Farangs Gone Wild", created by a foreign content creator living in Thailand. As the page features satirical memes on Thai social and cultural themes and has a substantial number of followers, it provides a compelling case of visual and intercultural discourse conveying perceptions, misinterpretations, and stereotypes that reflect cross-cultural dynamics. In this context, the page functions as a site where cultural boundaries are visually negotiated and meaning-making occurs, making it suitable for examining how cultural perceptions are shaped and circulated.

The purpose of this study was to analyze tourism memes about Thailand using Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (2006), focusing on representational, interactive, and compositional meanings. It also examined the perceptions influencing meme creation through Goss's tendencies of closure, familiarity, and expectation, in order to understand how visuals convey information and reflect cultural influences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Internet Memes

Over the past decade, scholarly interest in internet memes has increased. Scholars recognize them as cultural units in participatory media environments (Milner, 2016). These units often combine visual imagery and embedded text, which Nugroho (2023) describes as essential

to meaning construction. This interplay aligns with the broader concept of multimodality, wherein meanings are made through a combination of image, gesture, speech, and spatial arrangements (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Furthermore, humor and political parodies have been frequently employed to create memes (Adiga & Padmakumar, 2024), making memes a unique form of discourse that constructs implied meanings (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

2.2 Sentiment Embedded in Memes

Adiga and Padmakumar (2024) assert that inherent humor within internet memes results in their widespread use and stimulates engaging interactions. Rubtcova and Pavenkov (2019) argue that the comic effects of memes can be fulfilled when their readers possess some background knowledge about them. Furthermore, the uses of memes are not limited to generating comic features. They can be used to produce creative expressions and engagement in responses. Internet memes are utilized to create playful banter or convey a self-deprecating tone as strategic moves (Wu & Fitzgerald, 2020).

Sentiment in memes is shaped by affective semiotics. According to Shifman (2013), memes reflect ambient affiliation where humor and emotion are shared among users. Highfield (2017) further argues that emotional cues embedded in memes foster community engagement. These elements are intensified by the use of visual metaphors, emojis, irony, and exaggerated expressions (Vásquez, 2019), making memes powerful tools for expressing sentiment and attitude.

2.3 Visual Grammar

Visual language enables us to fill the gap in communication via graphic expression (Cohn, 2013). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) proposed a framework for understanding visuals as both representation and communication, identifying three dimensions of meaning-making based on

Halliday's metafunctions: representational, interactive, and compositional meanings.

Recent developments in multimodal discourse analysis emphasize the dynamic interplay between visual and textual elements in meaning-making. Many researchers assert that images are not passive but actively encode ideological messages. In memes, visuals perform representational (depicting events), interactive (viewer engagement), and compositional (layout and salience) roles, all shaped by sociocultural context (Machin, 2013). This perspective extends Kress and van Leeuwen's model by incorporating the ideological and cultural dimensions of image production and reception.

2.3.1 Representational Meaning

1) Narrative Process

In the narrative process, the following subtypes are included: action, reactional, speech and mental, with conversion processes based on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). Table 1 summarizes the core components of the narrative process.

Table 1

Narrative Processes and Their Core Components (adapted from Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)

Narrative Process	Key Features & Explanations
Action Process	- Involves actor, vector, and goal
	- The actor is the participant who initiates the action.
	- The vector is the directional line (e.g., body or object movement).
	- The goal is the recipient of the action

Table 1

Narrative Processes and Their Core Components (adapted from Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) (cont.)

Narrative Process	Key Features & Explanations
Reactional Process	- Involves the reactor, eyeline vector, and phenomenon. - The reactor is the participant producing the gaze. - The vector is formed by the eyeline or glance. - The phenomenon is what is being looked at.
Speech Process	- Includes sayer, utterance, and optionally the receiver. - Realized via speech balloons or quotation marks. - The utterance refers to verbal content; the Sayer produces it.
Mental Process	- Includes senser and phenomenon. - Realized visually through thought bubbles or introspective imagery. - The senser is the participant thinking; the phenomenon is the object of thought.
Conversion Process	- Represents transformational change across frames. - Often seen as before/after sequences. - Also referred to as a "Chain of transactional processes" (p. 68).

In the action process, when only an actor is present, the action is considered a non-transactional action process. In a transactional actional process, both an actor and a goal are involved, and communication can be bidirectional if the actor and the goal direct their vectors toward each other. Likewise, the reactional process can be either non-transactional or transactional. While there are Rectors and Phenomena in the process, this is transactional. In contrast, if there are only rectors, it is classified as non-transactional. Communication is bidirectional when participants from both sides perform mutual glances.

2) Conceptual Process

This process deals with interpreting the underlying messages, values, narratives, symbols, represented participants, and conceptual relationships conveyed via the interaction of visual elements. This process can be subdivided into classification processes (one set of participants falling under a broader category), analytical processes (participants showing a part-whole relationship), and symbolic processes (the meaning of the message participants intend to convey).

2.3.2 Interactive Meaning

Interactive meaning involves the relationship between participants within an image and the viewers. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) explain that interactive participants are people situated within the context of social institutions, who regulate what can be communicated and how. Interactive meanings are conveyed through four key elements: contact, attitude, distance, and modality.

2.3.3 Compositional Meaning

Compositional meanings concern the organization of elements in multimodal discourse and how these elements are arranged within an image. They consist of information value, salience, and framing. Information value relates to the placement of elements at different levels, such distinguishing new from old information. Salience refers to the prominence of some elements over others, indicated by features such as size, sharpness, and hierarchical placement (foreground and background). Framing refers to devices that connect elements within the discourse.

Visual grammar posits that language is a social semiotic system. When language is combined with other semiotic forms in a discourse, it can make the discourse significant and colorful (Ping, 2018). Nevertheless, memes can be ambiguous and can generate various interpretations

(Nugroho, 2023). Furthermore, the perceptions and cultural assumptions of creators influence the production of memes (Dwivedi, 2023).

2.4 Lack of Exploration on Perception Regarding Memes' Creation

Previous studies have primarily focused on examining specific features of memes, such as their comic effects (Adiga & Padmakumar, 2024), widespread circulation (Bauckhage, 2021), and negative expressions (Bernstein, 2024). Nevertheless, some research highlights the intersection of visual grammar and intercultural communication. For instance, a study on how gender representation can be reflected through memes (Nugroho, 2023) focused on using memes from the perspective of insider views to promote tourism (Tomaž & Walanchalee, 2020).

In addition, several previous studies have prioritized linguistic features and intercultural communication. These studies show a limited exploration of creators' perceptions underlying meme creation. Liu, Volcic, and Gallois (2019) illustrate that divergence in perception results in misinterpretation during communication between individuals from diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, Klyukanov (2024) identifies two stereotypes that influence how individuals form perceptions when engaging with new cultures: normative stereotypes, which pertain to one's own culture, and non-normative stereotypes, which emerge from limited information. Furthermore, Dwivedi (2023) highlights the varied perceptions that are interconnected with the creation of memes. Consequently, this concept merits further investigation.

2.5 Perceptual Tendencies

Goss (1996) identifies three perceptual tendencies: closure, familiarity, and expectation. Closure deals with the assumption of perceiving things as a complete whole instead of an unfinished setup, presumably from minimal data. Familiarity suggests that one associates the data with things they already know or are familiar with. Expectation corresponds to the idea that one tends to have fixed images in mind.

To be more precise, Goss suggests that "you see what you expect to see. You hear what you expect to hear. Perception is a very subjective process" (1996, p. 9).

As explained above, the beliefs of one's culture can play a pivotal role in creating memes. (Dwivedi, 2023). Therefore, this study also includes the examination of those perceptions using the three perceptual tendencies identified by Goss (1996). In turn, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

a) How do internet memes about Thailand on the Instagram page 'Farangs Gone Wild's construct meaning?

b) How do perceptual tendencies influence the construction of memes on the 'Farangs Gone Wild's page?

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Context of the Current Study

The data were collected from the Instagram page "Farangs Gone Wild" between June and November 2024, representing the most recent period available at the start of the study to ensure the data's recency and contextual relevance. Collecting data as close as possible to the occurrence of the study can maintain relevance to capture experiences in the immediate context (Flick, 2018). At the time of collection, this page had 34.8k followers, indicating substantial audience engagement. This Instagram page was purposefully selected due to its focus on satirical depictions of events in Thailand from foreigners' perspectives. On average, the account posts three to four memes per week. The content consists of still and moving images or GIFs combined with overlay text created by the page administrator. As the content combines visuals and text related to Thai tourism and culture, it provides naturally occurring discourse rich in embedded cultural dimensions and is particularly suited for examining perception tendencies.

3.2 Data Collection

To reduce selection bias, twenty memes were purposively selected from a specific timeframe based on thematic richness, visual clarity, and relevance to the research questions. Following Machin and Mayr (2012), the focus was on analytical depth rather than representativeness, allowing an in-depth exploration of narrative processes, sentiment, and perception.

3.2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The data are limited to one platform, and the content must reflect a variety of narrative processes and perceptions associated with Thailand to ensure representativeness in visual grammar and perception analysis. Nevertheless, some visual memes were eliminated because certain images might contain inappropriate elements viewed as undesirable or repugnant. Furthermore, although memes exist in various formats, such as video or motion GIFs, only static visual memes were selected to enable consistency in applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework, focusing on the interpretation of the vector and elements contained in the static images and Goss's (1996) perception tendencies. Also, all analyzed visual images needed to contain one human figure to support the analysis of gaze, vector, and represented participant relationships.

3.3 Analytical Frameworks

The analysis draws on Visual Grammar (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) and the Perception Tendencies (Goss, 1996). Representational, interactive, and compositional meanings were examined to identify process types, participant interactions, and visual structure. Cohn's (2013) graphic morpheme model was applied to identify how thought and speech bubbles function as semantic units to understand how mental processes and speech processes are visually communicated. Finally, Goss's (1996) framework was applied to interpret the creators' perspectives through closure, familiarity, and expectation.

3.4 Steps of Data Analysis

The analysis followed three sequential steps: (1) visual grammar analysis using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions; (2) analysis of graphic morphemes (Cohn, 2013) for speech and thought bubbles; and (3) examination of Goss's (1996) perceptual tendencies: closure, familiarity, and expectation through narrative implication and stereotype construction.

For each meme, a structured coding sheet was developed to document narrative structure, visual relationships, and compositional layout. Table 2 outlines the analytical framework and coding criteria.

Table 2

Analytical framework and coding criteria adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen, (2006; Cohn, 2013; Goss, 1996).

Analytical Focus	Coding Criteria
Representational Meaning	Narrative process type (action, reactional, etc.); participant roles; vector presence; transactional/non-transactional Gaze (demand/offer), social distance (shot type), and camera angle
Interactive Meaning	Gaze (demand/offer), social distance (shot type)
Compositional Meaning	Salience (size, contrast), information value (placement), and framing (grouping/separation)
Graphic Morphemes (Cohn, 2013)	Thought/speech bubble type, placement, and alignment
Perception Tendencies (Goss, 1996)	Closure, familiarity, and expectation (stereotypical content)

Although the analysis was interpretative, it was systematically conducted using established theoretical frameworks shown in Table 2. Visual and textual elements were coded by two experts using structured criteria adapted from the established frameworks to ensure analytic consistency and methodological rigor.

4. Research Findings

The following section addresses findings regarding Research Question 1: How do the internet memes about Thailand on Farangs Gone Wild's page construct their meaning?

4.1 Representational Meaning

Some selected memes on the Instagram "Farangs Gone Wild" utilize combined processes in one meme.

4.1.1 Combined Processes in One Meme

The findings demonstrate references to more than one process within the same meme. As presented in Figure 1-2, for example, each represented participant performs two different processes.

A salient example in Figure 1 utilizes action and reactional processes to construct meaning. The meme depicts a man with a Thai beer-branded tank top mimicking a firearm gesture with his hand, thereby creating a directional vector. This gesture positions the man as the actor within the action process. However, the absence of a visible goal, the intended target of both the hand gesture in the action process and the gaze in the reactional process, introduces some ambiguity. By omitting the destination, the meme's composition forces viewers to infer meaning contextually.

Figure 1

Combined process in one meme (Meme 10: August 2024)

Nevertheless, textual and visual information clarify the ambiguity of gestures in the action and reactional process. The utterance, "a pint of the usual", discloses the authentic goal and phenomena (a glass of beer) in action and reactional process as the actor points his finger and directs his eyeline forming a vector. Also, apparel emblazoned with logos of a popular Thai beer brand worn by the man supplies additional information about his usual order expressed in both action and reactional process.

Figure 2 exemplifies the strategic interplay of multiple processes wherein three distinct, yet interrelated, meaning-making processes converge to produce a coherent multimodal text. First, the meme establishes a reactional process through the female figure who directs her eyes, the vector, to the man, the recipient of the vector. In addition, the utterance constructed by the female figure realizes the verbal process. This manifests the following functional elements: verbiage (the projected utterance I bet…), sayer (implied female figure), and receiver (the man). Furthermore, the thought bubble contributes

to the construction of the mental process. The man (senser) mentally imagines a semi-aquatic mammal (Moodeng), perceived as a culturally-specific referent in Thai popular culture, referring to a baby hippopotamus which has become a viral sensation in Thailand.

Figure 2

Combined processes within one meme 2 (Meme 14: September 2024)

Following the meme, the humor arises from a mismatch between the expected, thinking about another woman, "I bet he's thinking about other women…" and actual meanings, an absurd preoccupation (a hippopotamus).

Figure 2 also illustrates the thought bubble encasing the baby hippopotamus, functioning semiotically as an emergent structure with three key components: the carrier (the bubble), the root (source of the mental text), and the tail (linking the thought to the character's head). This structure signals cognitive activity and bridges both mental and verbal domains within the multimodal text.

4.2 Expressing Conceptual Processes

Many selected memes portray conceptual representations showing implicit messages, values, represented participants, and conceptual connections through the interaction of visual elements. Surprisingly, they represent classificational and analytical processes.

4.2.1 Expressing Classificational Processes

Figure 3 illustrates an example of a classificational process identified. It depicts a man surrounded by a group of individuals who are ironically analogous to the samples of Thai cultural challenges that he might encounter during his stay in Thailand. They are described as 'other unhinged foreigners,' 'Nana Plaza & Soi Cowboy,' 'bar girls,' 'Bangla Road sesh,' and others. In addition, the man's elevated physical placement, described as him trying to live a peaceful life in Thailand, reinforces his symbolic authority, as the group directs their attention toward him, placing them at a lower level.

Figure 3

A classificational process in the meme (Meme 7: June 2024)

Moreover, the ironic framing exposes tensions between individual agency and environmental threats. The visual-textual interplay thus underlines

expatriate experience as a schematic power structure, where cultural encounters are perceived as both comic and hierarchically organized dangers.

4.2.2 Analytical Processes

Similarly, the memes analyzed in this study employ analytical processes that visually construct part-whole relationships to convey meaning. In such structures, a central carrier (the whole) is decomposed into possessive attributes (its constituent parts), allowing the viewer to interpret how individual constituents signify broader institutional associations. For example, Figure 4 reveals the vertical stabilizer emblazoned with the logo of 'Bangkok Airways,' which is perceived as a visual synecdoche by which the part, the tail fin, portrays the whole entity, this aircraft's affiliation with Bangkok Airways.

Figure 4

Analytical processes in memes (Meme 3: June 2024)

In terms of multimodality, the visual representation and linguistic component are interrelated. The former implements an analytical process establishing a structural relationship, while the linguistic elements underline

the airline's monopolistic role with the caption "Bangkok Airways, when literally anyone wants to fly to Koh Samui".

Moreover, the image depicts a boy with a Jewish type hat, counting a considerable amount of money. In Thai culture, Jews can be analogously associated with intelligent acuity as presented in the Thai expression "smart like Jewish." Especially, it can also extend to the perception of their inherent financial acumen. This representational strategy reinforces stereotypical linkages between ethnicity, intellect, and financial success using a youthful male figure.

4.3 Interactive Meaning

The study found that the memes reflect interactive meanings representing the relationship between the viewer and the represented participants through contact, social distance, perspective, and modality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

4.3.1 Contact

The selected memes resort to contact, simulating interaction forged between the represented participant and the viewers through gaze. This visually constructs engagement. For example, in Figure 5, this incident occurs via a first-person perspectival frame. The meme depicts a lone individual who walks through an office space surrounded by employees (reactors) whose collective gaze (realized as vectors) converges on the unrevealed protagonist. The walking figure is unseen from visual representation, rendering it a non-phenomenon.

Regarding power relations, such a scene constitutes a panoptic social hierarchy. Despite his or her invisibility, the walking individual holds the attention of all viewers, occupying a position of dominance by commanding the collective gaze of the surrounding participants, rendering the observers passive.

Figure 5

Contact in memes (Meme 13: September 2024)

Concerning the interplay between textual and visual elements, this constructs a racialized tourist identity. The linguistic component, "the local taxi… you're farang", explicitly perceives the Caucasian traveler (farang) as a discursive subject, identity or role taken on by people due to the language, rules, and systems around them, regarding them as both a target of commercial appeal and an outsider. When coupled with visual elements, the combination suggests ethnocentric hospitality practice. Moreover, the multimodal perspective codifies structural reality in which whiteness (farangs) is perceived as a site of financial opportunity within the taxi service of Thailand.

4.3.2 Social Distance in Memes

It establishes that distinct interpersonal dynamics are constructed through shot composition. For instance, Figure 6 employs a close-up shot, which frames only the participant's head against Pattaya's nightlife backdrop. Consequently, this visual strategy creates a sense of psychological proximity between viewer and subject as it effectively simulates personal

engagement while contrasting the participant's isolated presence against the hectic backdrop.

In terms of textual elements, an utterance is produced: "Visiting Pattaya for the first time be like…". The verbal production strategically marks some incompletion (ellipsis). In turn, this can signal participation or create an interactive gap for the viewer to mentally complete the utterance, portraying a first-timer in Pattaya. The utterance and visual component engage in a dynamic interplay characterized by reciprocal reinforcement, in which the linguistic element functions as a schematic frame that enables interpretation of the visual content. This combination reflects a relationship exemplifying the constitutive interdependence of verbal and visual modes in the meme.

Figure 6

Social distance (close shot) (Meme 15: October 2024)

4.3.2 Expressing Perspective Dimensions

The selection of angles in the memes on this Instagram page is predominantly at eye level. This positioning creates the impression that the viewer is at an equal level with the events depicted in the memes, as discussed in the previous lines. This positions the viewer in the same context,

allowing them to perceive the experience as though they are part of the situation.

4.3.3 Expressing Modality Dimensions

This dimension is classified into three levels: low, medium, and high. Each of these scales examines the role of color, which is further categorized into color saturation, extending from full color saturation to achromatic colors, such as black and white; color differentiation, encompassing a maximum range of diverse colors to a monochromatic palette; and color modulation, varying from numerous shades of color to a singular hue. As Internet visual memes, they present a wide range of colors, making them appear "vibrant and playful."

4.4 Compositional Meaning in Memes

Composition meaning refers to how an image combines its representational and interactional meaning to create a meaningful whole, subdivided into three resources: salience, information value, and framing Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In this study, only salience was found in the memes.

4.4.1 Salience

Salience encompasses various factors that attract the viewer's attention using, for example, size, background, foreground, and color contrast. As observed in the presented memes, most of the depicted participants are positioned at the center, as the central placement guides the viewer's eye, helping them focus on the essential elements.

4.5 Perception Stimulating the Creation of Memes

The following results address Research Question 2: How do perception tendencies influence the construction of memes on the "Farangs Gone Wild" page?

Interestingly, the findings indicate that the creation of the memes is influenced by two dimensions of perception tendencies: closure and expectation.

4.5.1 Closure

This dimension belongs as a part of the cognitive principle of closure, a perceptual tendency wherein individuals mentally complete incomplete visual or conceptual stimuli to form a coherent whole. Within the context of visual communication, closure enables viewers to infer meaning from limited or ambiguous cues. In Figure 7, for instance, a single static image portrays a meatball vendor operating a motorcycle sidecar, with one linear arrangement of meatballs visibly detached and trailing along the road. While the image alone offers minimal narrative detail, the accompanying caption poses as a humorous yet skeptical remark about food safety. This helps guide the viewer toward his or her interpretation. Despite the absence of explicit evidence, the viewer can draw conclusions about hygiene and Thai street food. This interpretive act illustrates closure in action or a cognitive leap from fragmentary visual and textual input to a generalized cultural judgment. The meme thus becomes not only a site of humor but also a representation shaped by reductive perception, reflecting how limited visual stimuli can trigger broader, potentially biased, and cultural views.

Figure 7

Dimension of closure in memes (Meme 4; June 2024)

From a visual grammar perspective, the meme employs multiple semiotic resources to construct meaning through representational and interactive structures. The central image depicts a meatball vendor operating a motorcycle sidecar, with a linear arrangement of skewered meatballs. This visual narrative engages a reactional process, in which the vendor functions as a reactor, the vector is formed by the direction of the eyeline, and the phenomenon is the sequence of meatballs, thus conveying the vendor's attentional focus on the product. The reactional structure makes the viewer recognize the meatballs not merely as food items but as participants in a broader event. Additionally, the use of a long shot showing the entire scene of both the vendor and the sidecar establishes contextual salience and social distance. This framing emphasizes the mobility of the vendor's operation and situates it within the wider urban or roadside environment, contributing to the multimodal layering of meaning that combines humor, critique, and realism. In combination with textual elements, the caption underlines some significant expression, "Thai street food is unreal! What do they put on this meat?", which orients the viewer's interpretation, accentuating a tone of irony and curiosity. Consequently, the creator refers to an exclamatory sentence and a rhetorical question, which enable the viewer to engage emotionally while implying that Thai street food is unreliable. This textual modality works together with the visual narrative. It enhances the impact and shapes how the viewer can potentially construe the scene as humorous, ironic, or suspicious.
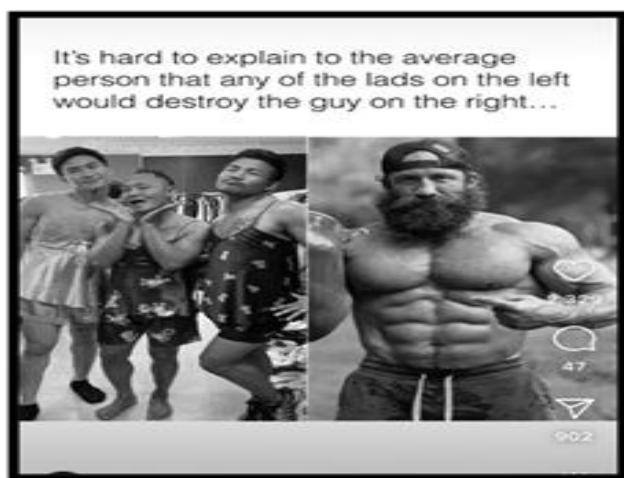
4.5.2 Expectation

Some memes reflect expectation, which is the tendency to maintain fixed mental images. They exemplify how cultural expectations and stereotypes are constructed and reinforced through internet humor. For example, Figure 8 employs a binary visual structure. The two panels juxtapose contrasting representations of masculinity and combat efficacy. As shown, the left panel depicts a group of men dressed in women's suits, whereas

the right portrays a muscular bodybuilder. This indicates a dichotomy between perceived femininity and hypermasculinity. Also, the caption conveys the creator's bias towards the female figures. The image highlights a normative expectation that links combat skills with masculinity. On the other hand, weak physiques commonly correlate with inferior fighting ability. In other words, the meme shows stereotypical cognitive views that link appearance with capability.

Figure 8

Dimension of expectation in meme 8 (Meme 18; October 2024)

However, humor's effectiveness depends on the audience's perception of these stereotypes, revealing how these expectations are deeply embedded within certain cultural contexts. The meme functions as perpetuation of gendered performance standards. Furtheremore, it challenges and reaffirms the link between appearance and ability. This underscores the complexity of meme culture as a site where social norms are reproduced. Nevertheless, this meme reflects the combination of processes. The left panel positions a group of men as reactors. Their collective gaze (vector) directing toward

the viewer establishes a demand image that engages the audience while framing them as a phenomenon. In contrast, the right panel displays a bodybuilder (actor) whose posture and extended index finger (vector) create a narrative image of action. Thus, his physique serves as the goal. The juxtaposition of these panels generates visual contrast because it reinforces the dissonance between societal expectations of strength (embodied by the hypermasculine figure) and the subversive reality suggested by the text (it's hard to explain… on the right).

5. Discussion

To answer the first question, this study indicates that the analyzed memes are constructed through representational, interactive and composition meanings. The findings highlight the interplay of multimodal processes in meme construction. Reactional processes (e.g., gaze and eyelines) combine with actional cues (e.g., pointing gestures), while explicit indicators of phenomena or goals are often omitted. This intentional ambiguity invites viewers to resolve meaning through linguistic elements, emphasizing the importance of multimodal coherence (Stöckl & Bateman, 2022) and the viewer's interpretive agency in integrating text and image.

Humor frequently arises from incongruity between visual and textual components, as seen in Figure 3. This mismatch is culturally grounded. Viewers who are aware of local norms are more likely to decode the humor effectively (Gal, Shifman, & Kampf, 2016). Thus, humor functions as entertainment and a form of shared cultural discourse. Additionally, the study reveals that memes rely on ethnic and cultural intertextuality. For example, the depiction of a Jewish boy counting money reflects the Thai expression "smart like Jewish." This may reinforce stereotypes about financial acumen, which may reinforce ethnic stereotypes related to financial acumen. For this sense, memes serve as sites of global-local meaning construction where international cultural symbols are recontextualized

within local discourses. Also, memes play a vital role as an instrument for critique and resistance. In one example, a meme challenges inequality in Thailand through a visual metaphor. This illustrates how memes allow users to express disagreement through cultural satire.

Language further contributes to identity construction. For instance, the sentence in Figure 5, "you're farang," displays dual function, as a descriptor and a discursive positioning (Winslade, 2005) that positions the Western tourist within an economic and racialized logic. This highlights the perception towards "farangs" as financially privileged outsiders and underlines how discourse shapes social roles.

Meaning making in communication occurs by the creator of the sign and by the viewer (Gualberto & Kress, 2019). This dual semiosis is illustrated in the depiction of a walking figure passing through Thai taxi drivers. While the meme creator encodes commentary on hospitality or tourist dynamics, viewers interpret the scene through personal cultural experiences.

The findings also show that memes often reinforce gender stereotypes. Narratives associate muscularity with strength, while female appearances are linked to weakness (Athoi, 2024). LGBTQ identities viewed as a cultural phenomenon in Thailand (Tomaž & Walanchalee, 2020) are frequently represented through ridicule and satire. Visually, most memes use eye-level framing conveying a sense of equality and interpersonal neutrality (Hafifah & Sinar, 2021). This compositional strategy invites viewers into an inclusive visual relationship to reduce perceived power distance.

To answer the second research question, it is found that perception tendencies, such as closure and expectation shown in stereotypical portrayals, reinforce public biases. These visual stereotypes act as barriers to intercultural competence and reflect deeper social ignorance (Matusitz, 2012; Ibrahim & Fahmy, 2025).

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