

“Russians are very sweet and nice”: corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis of representation of people in online travel reviews about Moscow

Ekaterina Ignatova

e.ignatova@lancaster.ac.uk

Lancaster University

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Why study online travel reviews about Moscow?

Ekaterina Ignatova,
e.ignatova@lancaster.ac.uk

- Moscow sometimes considered an unfriendly or unsafe travel destination (Andersen, 2019). Russian Government aim to increase popularity of the city.
- Tourism and travel are among worst affected industries by COVID-19 (Roland Berger, 2020).
- Tourism discourse shapes asymmetric power relations leading to social problems (Jaworska, 2016; White, 2007)
- Current crisis is an opportunity to reconsider tourism discourse.



Previous research

- Studies promotional or media discourse
- Hosts represented less frequently than guests (Dann, 1996; Ignatova, in press).
- Hosts usually represented as silent servers, performers, cultural markers (Galasinski & Jaworski, 2003; Jaworska, 2016).
- Guests represented enjoying themselves (Dann, 1996, Ignatova, in press) or as wealthy consumers (Wu, 2016).
- Internal tourism discourse can resist stereotypical representation (Amoamo & Thompson, 2010; Jaworska, 2016)

Research gap

Lack of studies:

- exploring cities, in particular, Moscow
- analysing user-generated tourism discourse
- Systematically analysing the representation of people in verbal and visual modes (headlines, texts, images, image captions).

Research aim

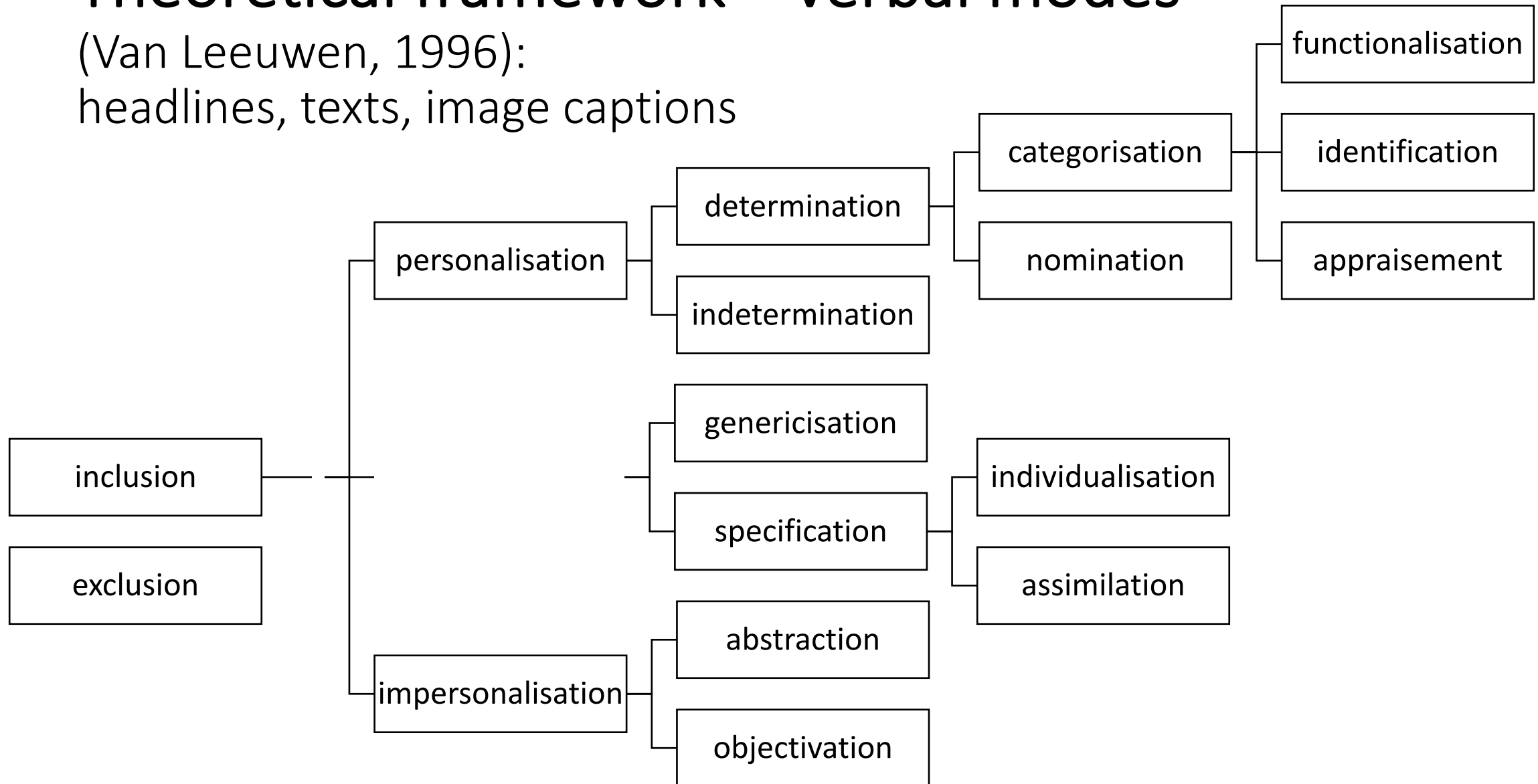
to analyse how hosts and guests are represented verbally and visually in TripAdvisor online travel reviews about Moscow

Research questions

1. How are guests and hosts represented in a) headlines, b) texts, c) images, and d) image captions of TripAdvisor reviews about Moscow?
2. Are there any similarities/differences in representation of people across the modes?
3. What do these representations tell us about power relations shaped by the reviews

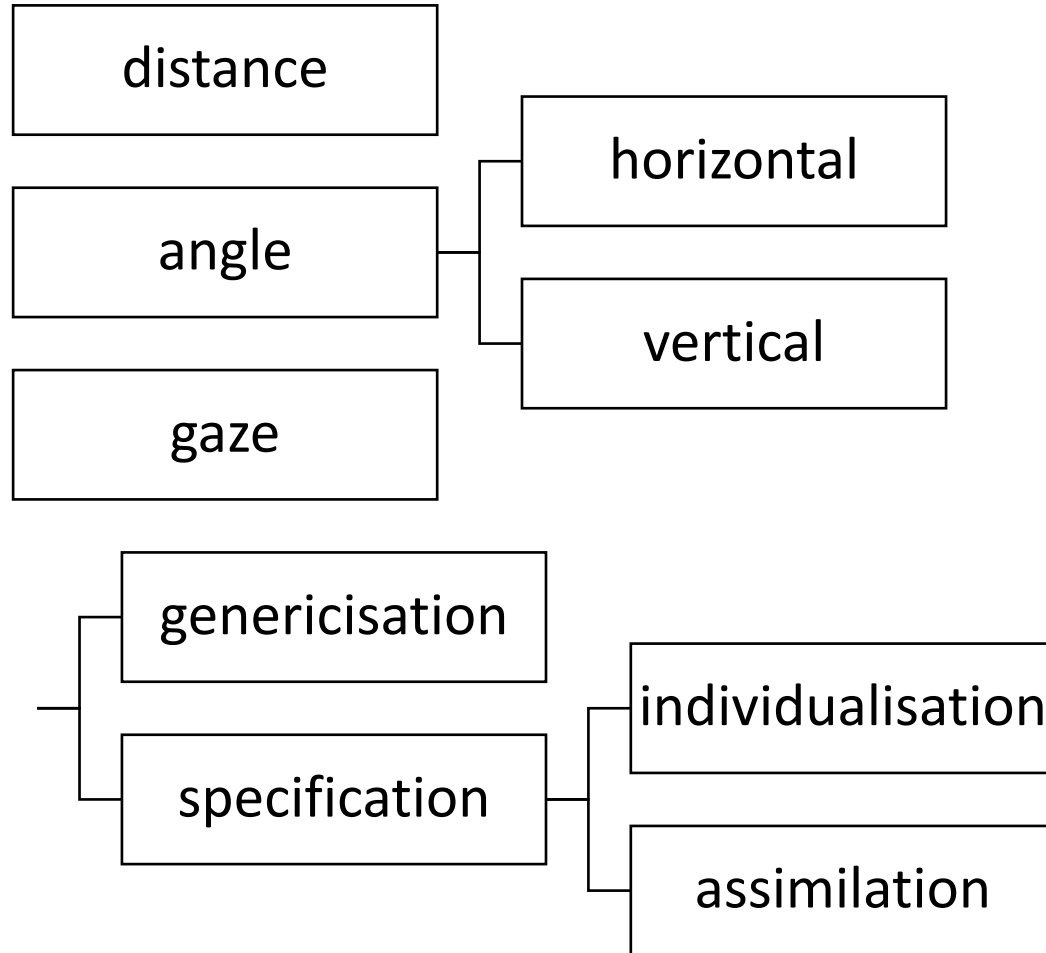
Theoretical framework – verbal modes

(Van Leeuwen, 1996):
headlines, texts, image captions



Theoretical framework – visual mode

(Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Machin & Mayr, 2012):
images



Data sources

“Beautiful as expected”

Reviewed 2 days ago

NEW

Headline

The cathedral is the best visual metonym for Russia. haven't we all seen the onion-shaped domes since childhood be it in magazines, TV or movies. It's just as I had expected, colourful and towering. The inside has some beautiful paintings and a lot of historical reflections. However I found it a little cold in March. There is a fee to enter. It is iconic and unavoidable. If you don't want to spend money don't go inside because it is similar to the other Russian cathedrals. Great photo ops from the Red Square. We went on cloudy mid-days so can't comment on the sun-rise and sunsets from this location. The hop-on Hop-off bus stops at that point....

Review
text



Images

Visited March 2017

Data sources

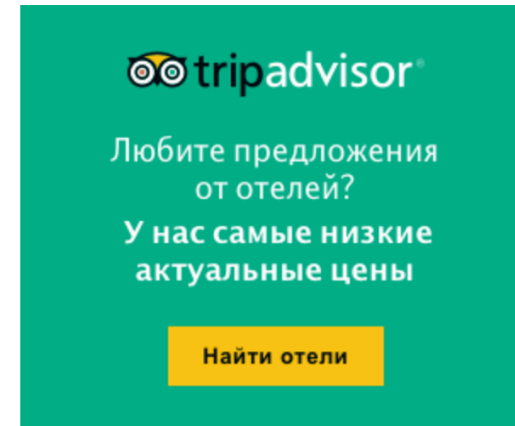


5 green circular icons representing a rating.

"Escalator going deep underground"

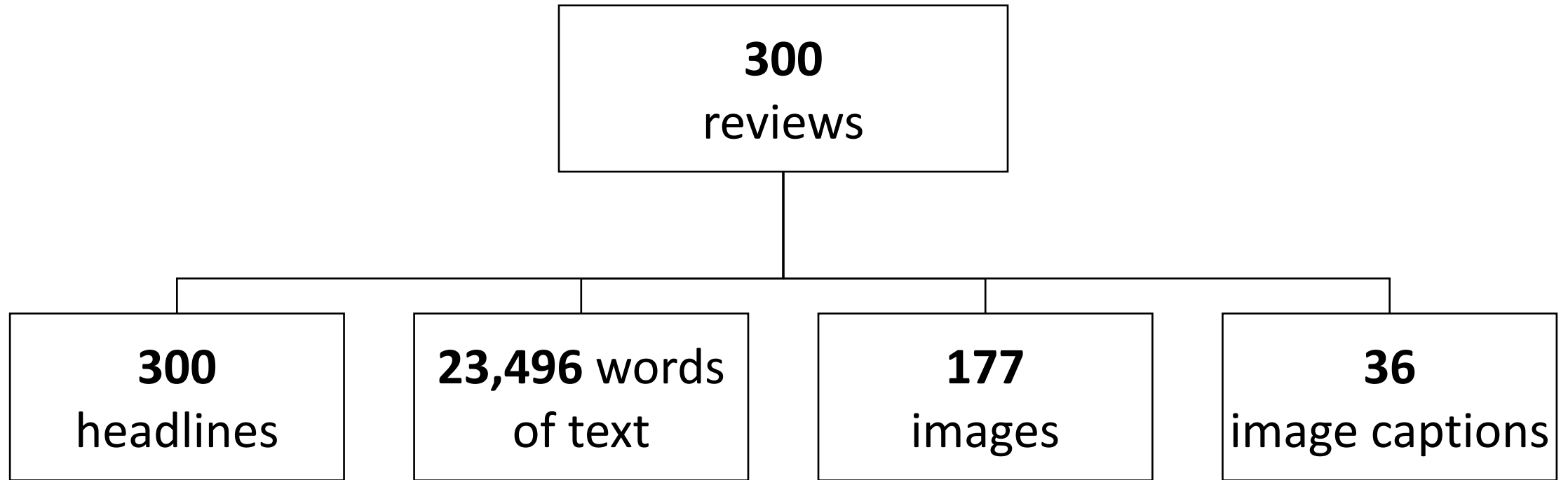
Фотография предоставлена путешественником kakati_a (апр. 2017 г.)

Image
caption



Image

Multimodal corpus



Methodology – texts and headlines

Corpus software - #LancsBox v.4.5 (V. Brezina, Timperley, & McEnery, 2018):

1. Annotated with integrated TreeTagger (Helmut, 1994; Schmid, 1995) to enable searches for parts of speech and colligations
2. Generated with KWIC tool lists of concordances of all nouns and pronouns
3. Manually selected social actors representing guests, hosts, people in general
4. Categorized social actors using verbal theoretical framework

Methodology – images

1. Quantitatively analysed if images included/excluded people (significantly cropped=exclusion)
2. Categorised represented participants into guests, hosts, general
3. Qualitatively analysed images including people following visual theoretical framework



Methodology – image captions

1. Manually categorised following verbal theoretical framework

Methodology – across modes

1. Quantitative analysis of inclusion/exclusion of people in each mode of the review (headline, text, image, image caption)

Main findings

- People are backgrounded, tourist attractions are foregrounded.
- Guests more frequently included than hosts:

Guests:

- 31 headlines (35 occurrences)
- 255 texts (1,378 occurrences)
- 33 images

but

- 0 image captions

Hosts:

- 23 headlines (25 occurrences)
- 192 texts (522 occurrences)
- 14 images

but

- 5 image captions

Hosts - verbally



Hosts - verbally

- Excluded – 108 texts (36%), 277 headlines (92%), 31 captions (86%)
- Group or generic representation (361 occurrences, 69%)
- Functionalised as servers, helpers, performers, guards
- Anonymised (70 occurrences, 15%) – *they, their*
- Impersonalised (67 occurrences, 13%) – *service, hotel*

But also:

- Specific individuals (161 occurrences, 31%)
- Called by name (members of staff, country rulers, artists)
- Thanked
- Appraised positively (*friendly* - 20 collocates, *helpful* - 17 collocates) and negatively (*immoral, harsh*)
- Identified as friends (3 occurrences), colleagues (1 occurrence)

Hosts - visually

- Excluded – 163 images (**92%**)
- Groups of people (13 images, **93%**)
- Represented as strangers (oblique angle – **100%**, long shots – 13 images, **93%**)
- Objectified (no eye contact – 12 images, **86%**)
- Portrayed as hotel or restaurant staff





Hosts

- **But also 1 image**
 - Social relationship (middle distance)
 - Interaction (eye contact)

Guests - verbally



Guests - verbally

- Refer to reviewer, companions, other guests, reader (potential traveller)
- Portrayed as “performers”, consumers of places, services, experiences
- Functionalised as travellers, customers
- High status occupation (*business man, architects*)
- Companions identified as family members, friends
- Enjoying themselves
- Other guests objectified (*line, queue*)
- Represented as obstacle (*crowd*)
- Discriminated (*accused Australians as being the worst (even worse than Americans)*)
- Excluded - 45 texts, (15%), 269 headlines (90%), 36 captions (100%)

But also:

- Sharing advice and travel tips
- Actively planning, making arrangements
- Non-elitist (*You don't have to be an expert to enjoy this...*)

Guests - visually

- Excluded – 120 images (68%)
- Focus on attractions and experiences
- Consumers of places and experiences
- Other guests as a homogeneous group, objectified
- Represented as strangers (long shots – 23 images, 70%)





Guests - visually

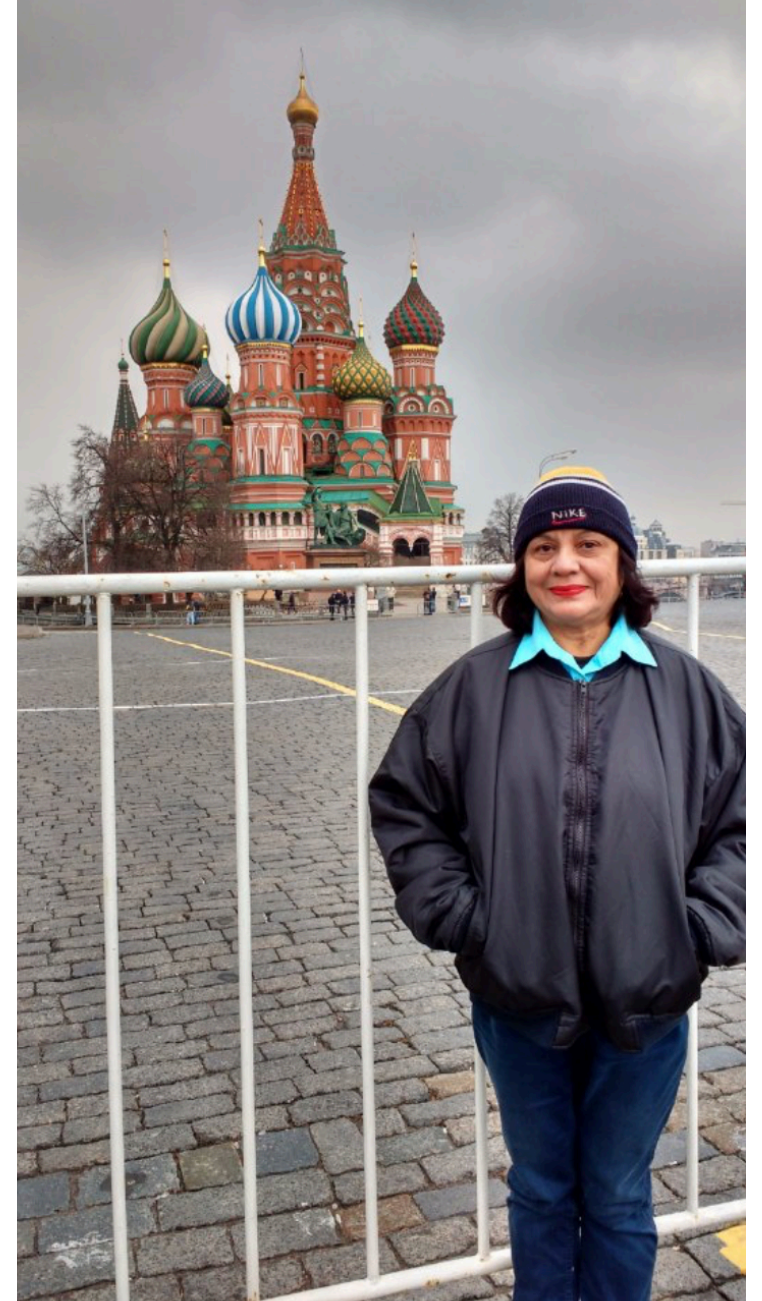
Photos of reviewers and companions:

- Can imply interaction (eye contact in 21 images, 64%)
- Can imply closer relations (medium distance – 7 images, 21%, close distance – 3 images, 9%)
- Still foreground tourist attractions and experience

Main findings

- Different modes can represent people differently

The Cathedral



Main findings

- Exclusion of people in headlines, images, and image captions

Great find

[...]The place is cute and it is an all round self service so don't go sitting and expect server to approach. [...] We especially enjoyed the crab meat with cheese and the black one (I think it was boar and something).



the black one is the boar and something, and the elongated looking one is the crab and cheese

Conclusions

Representation of people in online travel reviews about Moscow:

- reinforces the stereotypes created by promotional and media discourse,
- creates asymmetrical relationship of power by excluding people and foregrounding tourist attractions,
- portrays guests as consumers of places and experiences,
- portrays hosts as inferior to guests and can jeopardise hospitality.

But also can express resistance to dominant imagery by:

- portraying people as unique identities, part of the viewer's reality.

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Ekaterina Ignatova
@IgnatovaKat
e.ignatova@lancaster.ac.uk