

# Religious Tourism in a Key Multimodal Discourse Analysis Perspective

Authenticity and Cultural Heritage

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## Keywords

Religious tourism  
Jubilee 2025  
Tourism discourse  
Multimodality  
Discourse Analysis

## Abstract

In the last few decades, religious tourism has become a relevant sector for the international tourism industry, with pilgrimages counting 240 million travelers per year. These figures increase during specific events, as is the case with the Catholic Jubilee, which was held in Rome in 2025. In order to investigate the communicative strategies used to promote major pilgrimage destinations, the present study conducts a visual and verbal analysis of the official Jubilee 2025 website. More specifically, the study investigates its homepage and the web pages dedicated to Exhibitions, presented as cultural and spiritual preparation for the main event. The visual analysis employs Baldry and Thibault's (2006) model to examine the intertextual relationships and meaning-making functions of the homepage and the web pages, while Dann's (1996) framework is used to investigate patterns of tourism discourse in the verbal component of the Exhibitions' web pages. The research objective is to examine the communicative strategies used by the Holy See to articulate the Jubilee's spiritual significance within the broader landscape of contemporary travel. It specifically analyzes how the Vatican navigates the tension between mass mobility and spiritual pilgrimage, following Pope Francis's pastoral call to transform the 'tourist' experience into a 'pilgrim' journey. Findings reveal that the website constructs the Jubilee as a hybrid experience situated between sacred pilgrimage and cultural tourism. Visual and verbal choices frame participation in the Exhibitions as a symbolic journey of preparation, aligning cultural engagement as integral to the spiritual path with promotional conventions typical of tourism communication.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Religious travel has been a significant part of human history, with pilgrimages as journeys undertaken for religious reasons to perform specific spiritual practices (Turner 1973).

<sup>1</sup> The three Authors contributed to the full article. However, for the formal division of the writing process, Daniela Cesiri was responsible for Abstract and Section 4. Sections 2 and 5 were a joint effort by Ninfa Pagano and Walter Spezzano. Sections 1, 3 and 6 were a joint effort by the three Authors.

Historically, the Middle Ages represented an important era for religious tourism and pilgrimage, characterized by an unprecedented surge in both the number of travelers and the established routes.

According to Jebb (1986), during the Middle Ages, traveling was almost exclusively religious, and pilgrimage was generally understood as a voluntary journey to a holy site, undertaken with the expectation that it would be difficult and challenging, often serving as a moral or spiritual exercise (Turner and Turner 2011). Pilgrimages were intended both as acts of penance and as processes of spiritual purification (Laing and Crouch 2011), taking place over the course of the journey itself, such as along the *Camino de Santiago de Compostela*. Usual medieval destinations included Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, and Canterbury, all attracting large numbers of pilgrims. For instance, it is estimated that about 300,000 pilgrims visited Rome in 1300 (Sharpley 2018). Despite the decline in medieval pilgrimage, Italy remained a key intellectual and religious center in Europe through time (Turner and Ash 1975).

Contemporary pilgrimages to religious and holy places have become an increasingly significant sector of the international tourism market, with around 240 million people undertaking pilgrimages annually (Olsen and Timothy 2022). This growth is facilitated by improved accessibility to sacred sites, as well as the increased promotion of these places by a range of stakeholders – including governments, tourism organizations, and religious institutions – recognizing their cultural and economic significance (Mintel 2012; Vukonić 2002). For instance, in the context of major Catholic pilgrimage events, the Holy See can also play an important communicative and promotional role in shaping the visibility and narrative framing of pilgrimage destinations in collaboration with local institutions, even though its primary objectives remain religious rather than explicitly tourism-oriented (Gasparini and Mariotti 2024).

Within this evolving landscape, the Catholic Jubilee 2025 represents a compelling case for investigating how religious and cultural narratives intersect in digital tourism communication. The Jubilee, a major global religious event centered on pilgrimage and forgiveness, is also a celebration of Rome's cultural and artistic heritage. The 2025 edition was proclaimed by Pope Francis with the theme 'Pilgrims of Hope,' a time for Catholics to renew their faith and seek hope in a world facing challenges. The official proclamation, a papal bull titled *Spes non confundit* (lit. Hope does not disappoint), was issued in May 2024, formally announcing the Holy Year.

The official Jubilee 2025 website, created and updated by the Holy See's Dicastery for Evangelization,<sup>2</sup> serves not only as an informational portal but also as a strategic

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en.html>. Last visited 11/06/2026.

communication platform. Through its visual design and linguistic choices, the website simultaneously promotes the spiritual significance of the Jubilee and highlights Rome's cultural, artistic, and historical attractions. In so doing, it frames the Jubilee experience as both a pilgrimage of faith and a cultural journey, thus inviting engagement from practicing Catholics as well as broader audiences interested in heritage tourism.

This study examines how the official website constructs and communicates the dual identity of the Holy Year as both a sacred and cultural event. The analysis focuses on the English version of the website, with particular attention to the homepage and the sections dedicated to four cultural initiatives, scheduled in the two years before the Jubilee itself. By adopting a multimodal discourse approach that draws on Baldry and Thibault's (2006) *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis*, and by conducting a verbal analysis by means of Dann's (1996) *Language of Tourism*, the study investigates how religious values are articulated alongside the promotion of the tourism experience that inevitably accompanies the event (Sharpley 2018). The aim is to uncover how digital tourism discourse balances religious authenticity with cultural heritage promotion, thus revealing the persuasive communicative mechanisms that underpin institutional communication in the context of contemporary religious tourism.

Findings from this research contribute to both discourse studies and tourism studies by demonstrating how religious tourism websites function as multimodal communicative tools that both inform and persuade. Results also highlight how sacred and secular narratives converge within institutional promotion and how they influence representations of religious tourism in digital spaces. Ultimately, the study provides insights into the discursive strategies shaping the Jubilee 2025 experience for global audiences and sheds light on the evolving role of digital discourse in mediating contemporary religious tourism.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 frames the study against the state-of-the-art of religious tourism, with particular attention to its relationship with pilgrimage, cultural heritage, and digital tourism discourse; while Section 3 presents the study's aims and methodologies. Section 4 contains the visual analysis of the Jubilee's homepage and the Exhibitions' web pages with Section 5 presenting the discourse analysis of the corresponding verbal components of the same web pages, which were selected as peculiar case studies. Finally, Section 6 illustrates some general remarks on the findings and concluding remarks on future research.

## 2. Theoretical background and literature review

### 2.1 Understanding religious tourism and pilgrimage

While pilgrimage has historically been defined as a journey to a sacred site motivated primarily by religious devotion (Reader 2015; Eade and Sallnow 2000), contemporary perspectives acknowledge overlapping motivations that blend spirituality, culture, and leisure (Olsen and Timothy 2022). The scope of religious tourism, therefore, extends to hybrid forms such as heritage visits to sacred monuments, festival attendance, and participation in events like the Catholic Jubilee, which combine spiritual significance with cultural engagement (Olsen and Timothy 2022; Collins-Kreiner 2010).

The historical roots of religious tourism are deep, with pilgrimages being one of the earliest forms of organized mobility (Rinschede 1992). Over time, however, the sector has undergone significant transformations, becoming more professionalized, international, and intertwined with broader tourism economies (Stausberg 2011). Recent estimates suggest that religious and pilgrimage tourism accounts for hundreds of millions of trips worldwide each year, making it one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of global tourism (Singh and Bhuyan 2025). Such growth reflects the increasing overlap between religious and cultural tourism, as travelers increasingly seek experiences that combine faith, heritage, and cultural enrichment (Digance 2003).

Traditional pilgrimages are motivated by religious or spiritual quests, while contemporary religious tourism may involve overlapping motivations. Pilgrimage is often considered a serious, authentic experience with strong spiritual significance, whereas tourism is frequently perceived as more superficial (Pfaffenberger 1983). Nevertheless, “the difference between tourism and pilgrimage lies not so much in any radical phenomenological difference between them [...] but rather in the culturally-supplied language of symbols in which travelers are obliged to express their peregrinations” (Pfaffenberger 1983, 72). Building on this, religious tourism is defined not by the physical act of travel, but by the symbolic framework that allows the traveler to interpret their movement as a ‘sacred journey.’ Within this framework, the shift from ordinary to non-ordinary time and space (Sharpley 2018) provides the necessary linguistic and ritual structure for travelers to articulate their experiences as spiritually significant rather than merely recreational. In this sense, secular holidays may function similarly to religious festivals in traditional societies, framing travel as a form of contemporary pilgrimage both as an experience and as a promotional narrative.

Pilgrimage itself has been theorized as a structured process. Turner (1973) described it in three stages: *separation*, *liminality*, and *reintegration*. The first stage involves detachment from ordinary life, paralleling travel to a destination. The second, liminality, involves crossing

thresholds into a state of *anti-structure*, where everyday social order is suspended. The third stage, reintegration, marks the return to normal life, yet often with spiritual or psychological benefits. Most tourists may thus experience forms of spiritual regeneration similar to those of pilgrims, highlighting the continuity between sacred and secular journeys.

Religious sites may also offer multi-faceted experiences. Churches, basilicas, and cathedrals allow visitors to engage in spiritual contemplation, ritual, or communal worship, while simultaneously serving as spaces of architectural, artistic, and cultural interest (Eade 1992; Urry 1990). Sharpley (2018) identifies at least four motivations for visiting religious sites, namely *spiritual/religious purposes*, *cultural interest*, *participation in special events*, and the *symbolic significance of iconic sacred landmarks*. The simultaneous spiritual and cultural functions of religious sites require careful management to balance the needs of pilgrims and tourists, and underscore the intertwined nature of faith and heritage in contemporary religious tourism (Shackley 2002).

## **2.2 Religious tourism and cultural heritage**

The interaction between sacred and secular dimensions is central to the study of religious tourism (Polus and Carr 2024). Scholars have highlighted that visits to sacred places are often motivated by both spiritual devotion and cultural curiosity, forming a continuum rather than a strict distinction between pilgrims and tourists (Reader 2015; Collins-Kreiner 2010). This hybridity raises questions of authenticity and commodification, as religious sites are increasingly marketed as both spiritual experiences and cultural heritage, while the leisure dimension is typically excluded from this kind of communication (Della Dora 2012; Lo Presti and Petrillo 2010).

Contemporary pilgrimage reflects a process of “dedifferentiation” (Collins-Kreiner 2010, 442), in which boundaries between religious and secular travel are increasingly blurred. Travelers may seek experiences that are spiritual, cultural, or both, combining personal reflection and engagement with heritage sites. This ongoing shift underscores the evolving nature of pilgrimage as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon.

From a promotional perspective, research shows that destinations often co-construct heritage and spirituality within the same tourism product. Sacred spaces are promoted as universal cultural treasures and as sites of personal or collective faith (Raj and Griffin 2015). In Rome, for instance, the Jubilee tradition merges ritual practice with cultural diplomacy, positioning the city as both a sacred destination and a global heritage capital (Semeraro, Maffi and Gregorini 2025). As religious sites cater to a spectrum of visitors – from pilgrims to culturally curious tourists – they face challenges in balancing genuineness, heritage preservation, and the

expectations of diverse audiences (Polus and Carr 2024). This demand highlights the importance of interpretive strategies that respect both the sacred and cultural dimensions of these destinations.

Such a positioning also illustrates how religious tourism serves as a communicative bridge between faith, culture, and tourism economies, while also generating tensions around the management of visitor expectations and authenticity.

### ***2.3 Digital tourism discourse in religious contexts***

Effectively communicating the sacred and cultural dimensions of religious tourism is central to managing visitor expectations and preserving authenticity (Bondi and Sezzi 2021). Institutional and promotional messages – ranging from brochures to digital platforms (Maci and Sala 2017) – mediate how pilgrims and tourists perceive destinations, shaping experiences and guiding engagement with heritage and spiritual practices. This highlights the importance of examining tourism discourse in religious settings, especially in contemporary digital contexts where websites and multimedia content play a key role in presenting both sacred and cultural narratives. Institutional websites, in particular, are central to tourism promotion, functioning as authoritative voices that both inform and construct persuasive tourism narratives (Hallett and Kaplan-Weinger 2010).

Tourism discourse has been widely examined as a form of persuasive communication. In his seminal work, Dann (1996) argues that:

Tourism, in the act of promotion, as well as in the accounts of its practitioners and clients, has a discourse of its own. Seen in this light, the language of tourism is thus a great deal more than a metaphor. Via static and moving pictures, written texts, and audio-visual offerings, the language of tourism attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in so doing, convert them from potential into actual clients. (1996, 2)

Subsequent research has expanded this perspective, showing how narrative structures, evaluative language, visuals, and emotional appeals construct attractive destinations. Francesconi (2007) examines persuasive representations of Italy, showing how genre conventions, vocabulary choices, and rhetorical devices serve promotional purposes. Manca (2016) proposes methodological approaches grounded in systemic functional grammar, visual semiotics, corpus analysis, and cultural perspectives to investigate how tourism websites convey national identity and culturally embedded values. Maci (2020) highlights the evolution of digital tourism discourse, particularly the rise of hypertextual communication and euphoric promotional strategies that reflect broader changes in the tourism industry. Cappelli (2023)

explores how tourism discourse uses linguistic strategies to shape destinations and meet audience expectations, fulfilling the persuasive aims of promotional communication.

While much research exists on promotional tourism discourse, fewer studies have examined religious tourism from a discourse perspective. Notable exceptions include studies of linguistic landscapes at sacred sites (Boamah-Boateng and Anderson 2024), analyses of cathedral websites exploring how cultural and religious heritage is linguistically disseminated to non-expert audiences (Bondi and Sezzi 2021), and investigations into the interplay of language, spirituality, and sustainability in tourism communication (Supatmiwati, et al. 2021). However, research on how digital platforms integrate pilgrimage guidance with cultural and heritage promotion – such as the Jubilee 2025 website – remains limited. The digital communication of religious tourism remains underexplored, particularly regarding how institutional websites balance sacred authenticity with cultural and heritage appeal – a gap of growing importance as digital platforms increasingly mediate access to religious events and shape global perceptions of pilgrimage.

The Catholic Jubilee 2025 provides a unique case to address this gap. As a globally significant mega-event, the Jubilee combines ritual and pilgrimage with cultural events, exhibitions, and artistic programs. The official website functions as a central communication tool, addressing a heterogeneous audience whose motivations range from explicit devotional commitment to cultural and experiential interest, while framing Rome as a city of faith, heritage, and artistic production. This study contributes to the literature by integrating research on religious tourism, pilgrimage studies, cultural heritage, and tourism discourse, applying multimodal digital discourse analysis to examine how the Jubilee 2025 website constructs interconnected sacred, cultural, and tourism narratives. In doing so, it illuminates how institutional digital communication negotiates the sacred–secular interface, shaping contemporary pilgrimage experiences in an increasingly mediated world.

### 3. Methodology and aim

This study conducts a visual and verbal analysis of selected pages of the official Holy See's website dedicated to the 2025 Jubilee: the Homepage, selected as it is the first page visitors encounter, and the Exhibition pages, chosen because they form part of the touring experience within the religious pilgrimage. The titles of these Exhibitions are:<sup>3</sup> “El Greco in Rome,” “Dalí's Christ in Rome,” “Chagall in Rome,” and “100 Cribs at the Vatican.”

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<sup>3</sup> On the website, the Exhibitions are featured in the order illustrated in Figure 3. This is also the order followed in the visual analysis of the corresponding web pages. Here, the Exhibitions are listed in chronological order, which is also the order followed in the verbal analysis.

The visual component of these web pages is investigated by using Baldry and Thibault's (2006) model to examine the intertextual relationships created and the structure and visual composition of the web pages, particularly in terms of clusters as meaning-making structures, in order to assess the browsing experience the website offers to international visitors and whether information is easily and visually accessible both on the homepage and on the pages dedicated to the Exhibitions.

The verbal component of the same web pages is investigated through discourse analysis drawing on Dann's (1996) approach. The analysis explores how the linguistic choices on the web pages construct narratives that position these events within the broader themes of spirituality, cultural heritage, and tourism. Dann's approach conceptualizes tourism as a discourse designed to persuade and influence traveler perceptions through three rhetorical domains: verbal, visual, and combined. The present research focuses exclusively on verbal techniques, identifying mechanisms such as comparison, keywords, testimony, and ego-targeting. This selective focus is particularly suited to analyzing the Holy See's communication, as it allows for a decoding of how institutional authority is linguistically asserted to transform the reader from a secular observer into a devoted pilgrim.

In promoting Rome as a religious and cultural destination, tourism discourse is applied to foster visitors'/pilgrims' engagement with specific cultural events, including the Jubilee experience and its preparation for it; the latter, in the case of our study, is conveyed by the Exhibitions. Notably, these exhibitions were scheduled in the years 2023/2024, therefore before Jubilee 2025, and are defined on the website as a "pilgrimage to beauty," aiming, as already noted in the previous Sections, at a sort of pilgrims' spiritual preparation towards the Jubilee main religious event. During one of his speeches in September 2024, after proclaiming the 2025 Jubilee, Pope Francis urged young people to be "pilgrims not tourists,"<sup>4</sup> both in life and during the Jubilee visit to Rome. Therefore, it is worth noticing that, on the Jubilee website presenting the religious event, the Holy See would also include sections dedicated to initiatives closer to a tourism experience. Hence, the study analyzes these sections to assess how these Exhibitions are promoted to pilgrims. All these considerations prompted an investigation into how the language used to describe these Exhibitions aims to contextualize their presence within the Jubilee.

A key aspect of the methodology involves identifying recurrent patterns in language use, particularly how lexical choices and rhetorical devices—more specifically: nouns and pre-post-modifiers, as well as figures of speech—contribute to the construction of an authoritative,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cathstan.org/faith/be-pilgrims-not-tourists-in-life-pope-urges-young-people>. Last accessed October 30, 2025.

inviting, or emotionally charged discourse that frames the narration within the broader frame of pilgrimage and religious-cultural tourism. Following Dann's (1996) work, special attention is devoted to what he defines as "properties of the language" (1996, 34), which can be both convergent and divergent. Among these properties, the study considers: euphoria (in particular the use of highly positive evaluative language), tautology (i.e., pre-structuring the visitor's expected experience), monologue, and lack of sender identification—reflecting an authoritative, one-directional communicative stance. The framework also considers communicative functions (e.g., referential, poetic, emotive, and conative), structure (i.e., the use of binary oppositions), tense choice (with a specific focus on how the verbal component of the web pages strategically employs present, past, and future tenses to communicate different aspects of the tourist experience), and magic (i.e., symbolic or transformative language that contributes to constructing the experience as extraordinary or exceptional). In addition to these linguistic properties, Dann (1996, 171) identifies rhetorical "verbal techniques" such as comparison, key words, testimony, humor, languaging, and ego-targeting, which further support persuasion.

By examining how these features surface across the selected web pages, the analysis explores whether verbal discourse reinforces the hybrid positioning of the Jubilee – as a pilgrimage, a cultural event, and a tourist experience – and how it contributes to shaping visitor expectations and affective engagement. As these events were scheduled as pre-Jubilee exhibitions, the analysis investigates how their inclusion is presented as preparation for the Holy Year, thus contributing to the larger narrative of the Jubilee as an ongoing expression of faith and artistic excellence.

## 4. Visual analysis<sup>5</sup>

### 4.1 The homepage

According to Baldry and Thibault (2006, 118-119), a website's homepage serves as its principal point of entry and central navigational framework. It provides the primary links that facilitate user navigation to all other subpages on the website. Given its role as the gateway to the website's content, significant design emphasis is placed on its semiotic construction. The function of this design goes beyond mere information delivery since it is frequently employed to evoke associations with cultural institutions or physical places, thereby influencing the users' navigational patterns through the physical space that is vicariously anticipated, digitally and

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<sup>5</sup> No copyright information was available on the Jubilee's website. Daniela Cesiri made all efforts to trace copyright holders and obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material. The Author apologizes for any errors or omissions in the paper and would be grateful for notification of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this article. All images, web pages and contents are accessible at <https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en.html>, last visited on 30/11/2025.

virtually, by the website itself. The integration of verbal, visual, spatial, and sometimes even auditory components contributes to the web pages' interpersonal appeal, the creation of a specific atmosphere, the evocation of affective responses, and the indexing of social values. Specific features – such as the use of specific combinations of colors, spatial perspective, or the depiction of landscapes and specific represented participants – all function as tools to establish this interpersonal orientation between the website and the viewer. For this reason, the genre schema they propose takes into account the meaning-making trajectories used by homepage creators to attract the viewers' attention and generate a 'story' from the homepage that should connect all the other web pages composing the website. In addition, the visual components (colors, images, graphic elements) that compose the page design contribute to the creation of this narrative.

The analysis of the homepage and Exhibition web pages on the Jubilee websites focuses on these elements. Starting from the Jubilee homepage, this is shown in Figure 1.

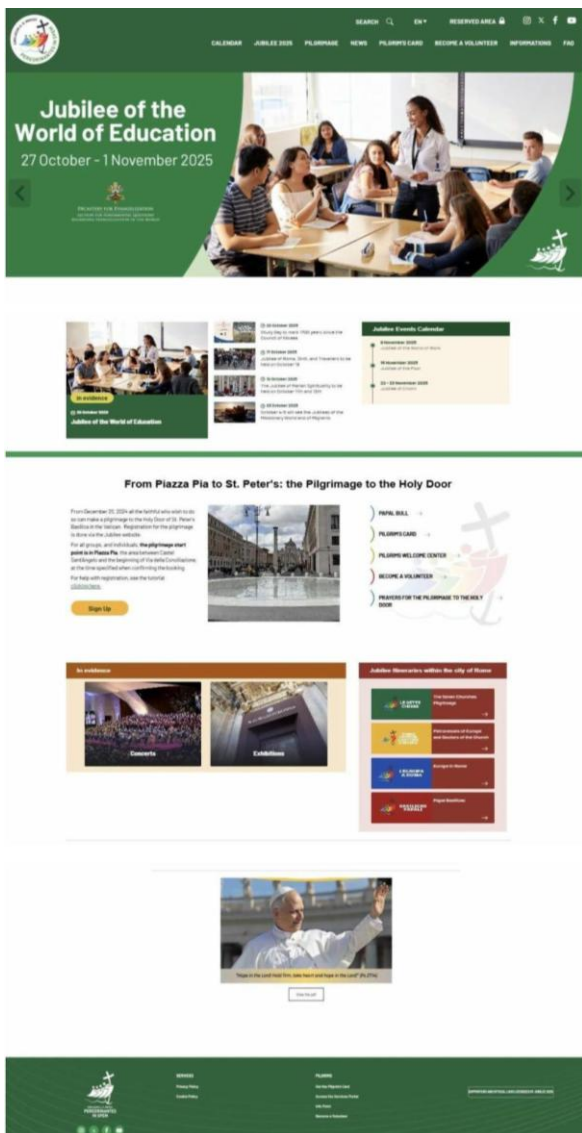
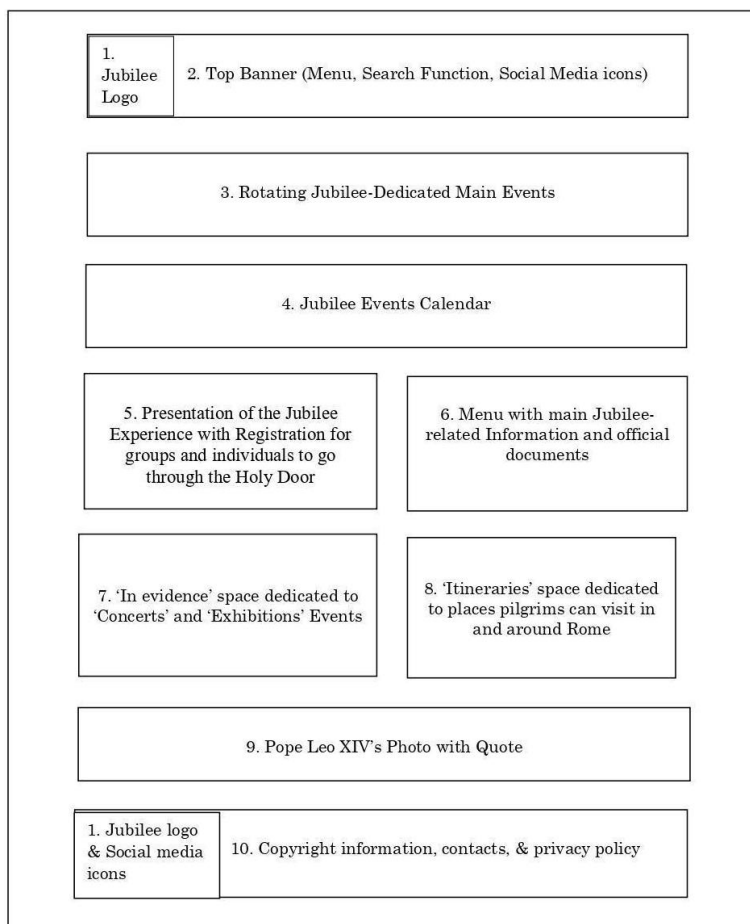


Fig. 1: Jubilee Website: Homepage

Following the framework and genre schema provided by Baldry and Thibault (2006), the layout composition of the Jubilee website’s homepage can be identified as shown in Figure 2, which also facilitates the cluster and visual analysis of the page.



**Fig. 2:** Jubilee Website: Homepage Genre Schema

All clusters contained in the homepage include elements that respond to mouse click and take visitors to new pages on the website, thereby enhancing the connectivity experience within the website itself, and forming parts of a larger narrative surrounding the religious experience of the Jubilee. Even though the Jubilee logo is repeated in the Top Banner (Cluster 1) and at the bottom of the homepage (next to Cluster 10), the religious dimension is spread across the homepage but never in a predominant way. Visitors browsing the homepage, in fact, have to scroll down to reach Cluster 9, containing the Pope’s photo, while Clusters 3 to 6, even though they refer to Jubilee-dedicated events, are organized in such a way that they might refer to general tourist experiences rather than to religious events, as testified by Figure 1 and as confirmed by Clusters 7 and 8, which contain, respectively, more tourist-like information on Concerts and Exhibitions, and suggestions of Itineraries.

The color palette chosen for the page is also significant. The predominant colors are green and white. Green is used in the Top and Bottom Banner Sections, while white is used for the

backgrounds of the central pages. They were chosen to remind of the Jubilee's official colors with green specifically symbolizing pilgrims' hope<sup>6</sup>, while white is the traditional symbol of "light, goodness, innocence and purity" (Appiah, Ezzo and Agyarkoh 2022, 52), and the Jubilee's mascot is indeed called '*Luce*' (literally meaning Light in Italian)<sup>7</sup>.

From the visual viewpoint, the Homepage presents visitors with a composite narrative that strategically integrates typical promotional elements – such as registration portals (Cluster 5) and suggestions for social events and itineraries (Clusters 7 and 8) – with the core religious components of the Jubilee experience. This hybrid structure serves as a deliberate communicative strategy to address a heterogeneous audience. However, according to Baldry and Thibault (2006), a website homepage functions as the website's primary entry point and acts as its central navigational framework, while it also creates a specific atmosphere, evoking affective responses, and indexing social values. Therefore, by blending such diverse resources together, i.e., typical tourist elements (registration tools and suggestions for social events and itineraries) with more spiritual-oriented events typical of the Jubilee, the website provides a visually confounding experience for the prospective pilgrims, thus contradicting Pope Francis's pastoral call to be 'pilgrims, not tourists' and – at least visually – failing to frame the Jubilee website as a mediating tool that would transform the traditional tourist gaze into a more profound pilgrim journey.

As already anticipated in the Introduction and in Section 4, the next Section analyzes the web pages dedicated to the Exhibitions. The aim of this part of the analysis is to understand whether the structure and visual component of the page are consistent with the structure of the homepage. Therefore, a cluster analysis is conducted on these pages to determine whether the visual narrative constructs a hybrid experience, balancing the spiritual aims of the Jubilee with the cultural and tourist-oriented elements previously identified on the Homepage.

#### **4.2 The exhibitions' web pages**

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the web pages presenting the Exhibitions. Figure 3 contains an overview of all the Exhibitions, while Figure 4 illustrates the pages of the individual Exhibitions. For space constraints they are shown in one Figure with the Bottom Banner as in Figure 3 that had to be deleted. However, on the website, they are fully accessible on separate web pages (see Primary Sources in the References Section).

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.iubilaum2025.va/it/giubileo-2025/logo.html>. Last visited on 04/11/2025.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.iubilaum2025.va/en/notizie/comunicati/2024/luce-mascotte-ufficiale-giubileo-2025.html>. Last visited on 04/11/2025.

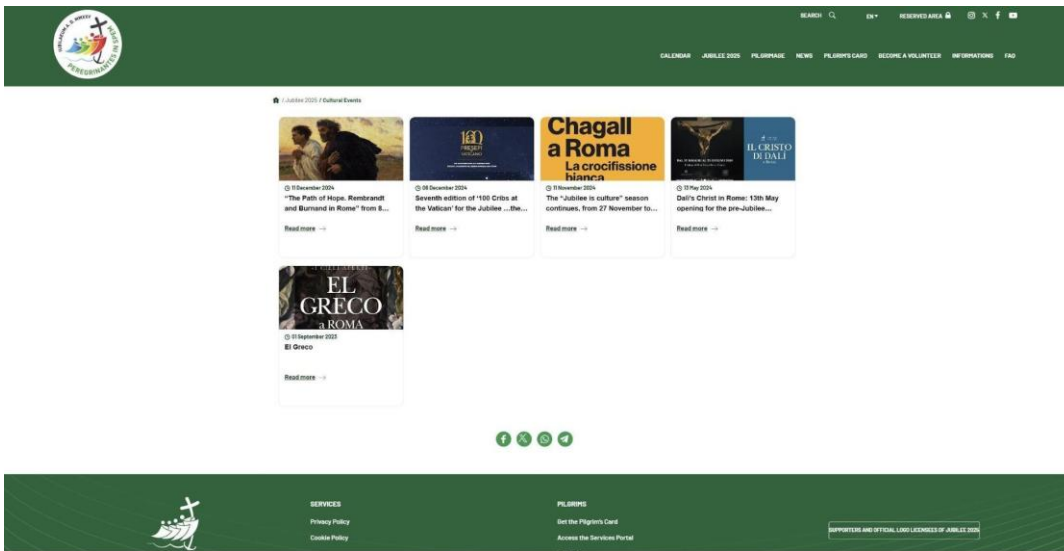


Fig. 3: Jubilee Website: Exhibitions Web Page

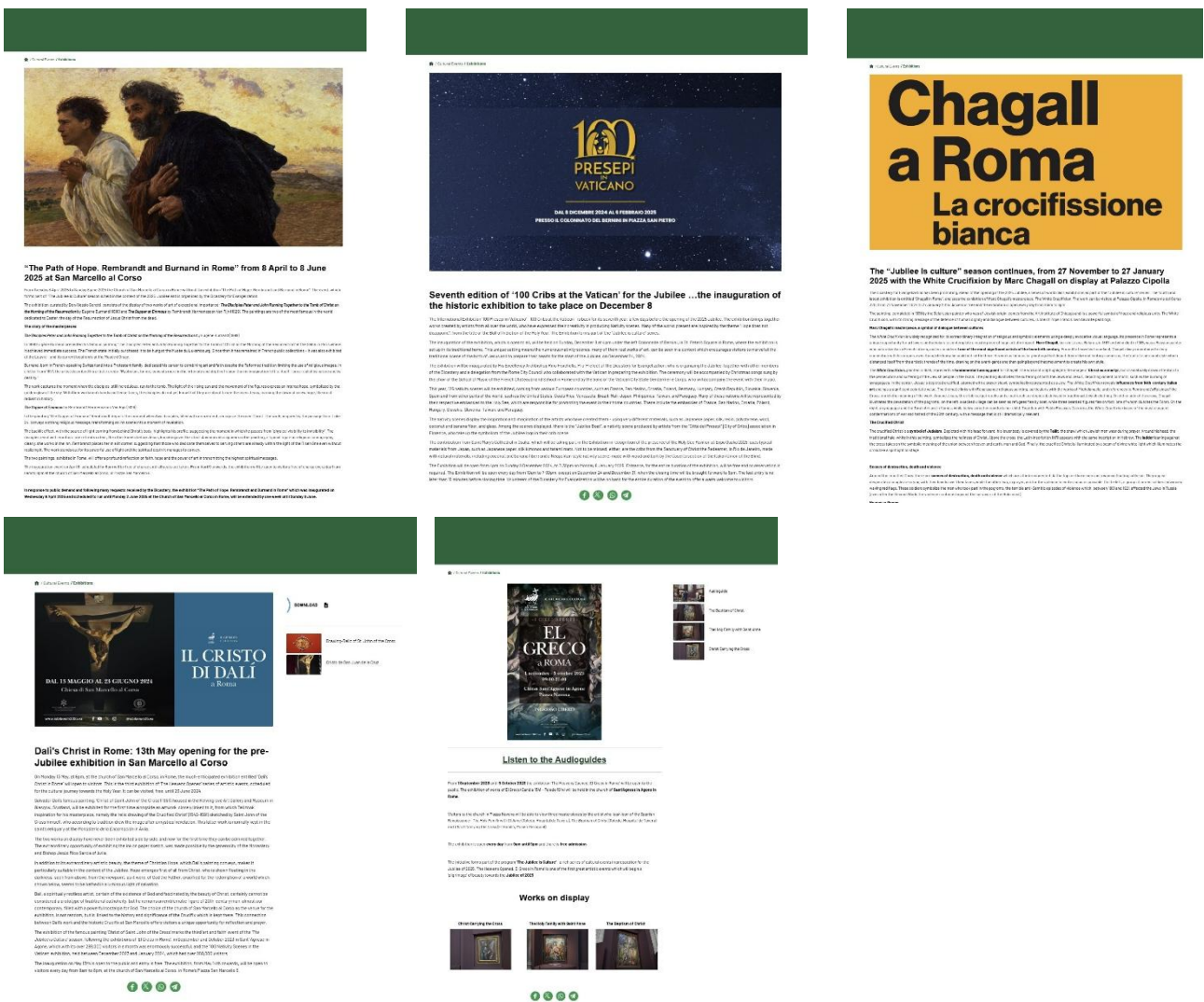
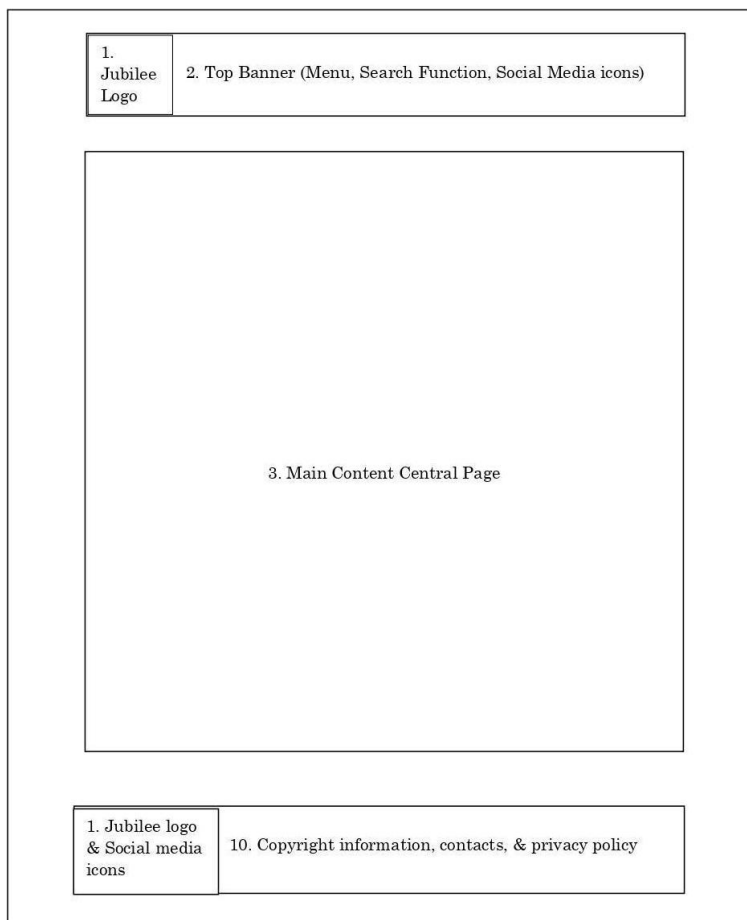


Fig. 4: Jubilee Website: Individual Exhibitions Web Pages

The structural analysis of the Exhibition web page and of the individual pages generates the schema represented in Figure 5.



**Fig. 5:** Jubilee Website: Exhibitions General and Individual Web Pages Genre Schema

The structure of these web pages reveals a much simpler organization than that of the homepage, as confirmed by Figures 3 and 4. The color palette (green and white) matches the homepage and reinforces the website’s overall symbolism, serving as a reminder of the Jubilee’s general symbolism. However, it is evident that the verbal component prevails over the visual one. The only clusters that respond to mouse clicks are those in Top and Bottom Banners, taking visitors back or forward to the other pages on the website. Slightly greater connectivity is naturally present on the web page that leads to the single Exhibitions but, as for these individual pages, they can be considered static text-based pages since they are all composed of a picture and text that do not contain any hyperlinks. The only exception is the page dedicated to the “El Greco” exhibition, since, when clicking on the image, visitors are directed to a YouTube video on the same exhibition.

From the structural and visual perspective, it is worth noticing that neither element of the narrative experience created on the homepage, i.e., the religious, spiritual event and the tourist experience is reinforced here. These pages are mere presentations of events that might be found

on a city event board or on every art enthusiast's presentation page. They are not particularly attractive to religious pilgrims or tourists.

## 5. Verbal analysis

Building on the visual findings presented in Section 4, which showed how the official Jubilee website visually combines elements of religious symbolism with conventions typical of promotional tourism communication, this section examines how meaning is linguistically constructed across the four exhibition web pages. The analysis applies Dann's (1996) framework of the *Language of Tourism*, which identifies a series of discursive properties and rhetorical strategies that shape how tourist experiences are promoted. As will be highlighted, among Dann's rhetorical strategies, key words seem to dominate by clustering around semantic themes related to faith ("hope," "redemption," "resurrection"), cultural values ("masterpiece," "artistic experience") and suffering linked to World War II and Jewish identity ("persecution and suffering of the Jewish people").

### 5.1 "El Greco in Rome"

The text accompanying the Exhibition "The Heavens Opened. El Greco in Rome" displays many of the linguistic features associated with tourism discourse as theorized by Dann (1996). Although the official Vatican website is not specifically built as promotional material, it nevertheless employs linguistic strategies that make the text acquire a promotional function as well. The aim of the webtext is that of attracting visitors to Rome and to the Jubilee experience, by also focusing on the various artistic experiences proposed even before the Jubilee year: such artistic experiences serve both as spiritual preparation for the Jubilee itself and as a factor of attraction.

One of the most salient features is euphoria, which manifests through evaluative expressions that elevate the exhibition beyond a standard cultural event. The wording "three masterpieces" and the description of El Greco as "an icon of the Spanish Renaissance" position the artist and the works as culturally prestigious and unquestionably valuable. Similarly, the initiative is described as "one of the first great artistic events," a formulation that emphasizes importance, scale, and exclusivity. The event is additionally framed as part of "a rich series of cultural events," a phrase that reinforces the positive framing and aligns with the Jubilee's broader celebratory discourse.

The property of lack of sender identification is also present. No explicit author, curator, or institutional speaker is identified; rather, the text appears as a neutral institutional announcement. The text also exemplifies monologue, offering no interactive elements,

questions, or dialogic structures, and instead constructing a unidirectional flow of information addressed to an implied audience of prospective visitors. The audience is indirectly instructed – through information on times, accessibility, and location – on how to organize their visit. For instance, phrases such as “Visitors [...] will be able to view” and “The exhibition is open every day” pre-structure the reader’s behavior while reinforcing the message that attendance is easy and expected.

Subtle forms of tautology emerge through prescriptive framing of the expected experience. The artworks are pre-labelled “masterpieces,” preparing visitors to perceive them as such. If visitors later encounter the works in person, their experience will likely reproduce the evaluative framing provided by the text, thereby completing the tautological circuit described by Dann (1996).

Elements of magic appear through metaphorical and symbolic constructions. The exhibition forms part of the thematic series titled “The Heavens Opened,” which implicitly constructs a spiritual or transcendental dimension. Additionally, the text concludes with a metaphor describing the cultural program as a “pilgrimage of beauty leading up to the Jubilee of 2022,” highlighting the role of the Exhibitions as spiritual preparation. This metaphor performs two persuasive functions: it aligns the cultural initiative with the spiritual significance of pilgrimage and symbolically merges artistic appreciation with spiritual preparation.

Regarding tenses, the text predominantly employs present and future constructions. Present-tense forms project immediacy and timelessness, while the future-oriented framing supports anticipation and forward planning. These temporal structures also contribute to promotional engagement, encouraging readers to imagine themselves while attending the Exhibition.

Key words are the most salient rhetorical strategies. The repetition of evaluative terms such as “masterpieces,” “icon,” “great artistic events,” and “rich series of cultural events,” along with lexical items associated with religious and cultural registers (e.g., “pilgrimage,” “preparation,” “Holy Year,” “beauty”), clearly position the Exhibition within both cultural and spiritual semantic fields. Although the text does not explicitly address readers using second-person pronouns, there is implicit ego-targeting through accessibility cues such as “open to the public” and “free admission.”

Overall, the web page constructs “El Greco in Rome” as more than an artistic exhibition: it is framed as a prestigious cultural and spiritual encounter that contributes to a symbolic “pilgrimage of beauty” aligned with the Jubilee. This framing establishes a conceptual pattern that continues in the subsequent web pages.

## 5.2 “Dali’s Christ in Rome”

Building on the discursive features observed in the previous subsection, the web text presenting “Dali’s Christ in Rome” combines informational content with a strongly evaluative and promotional tone that is characteristic of tourism discourse as theorized by Dann (1996). The Exhibition is framed as a major cultural event anticipating the Holy Year: it is introduced as “the much-anticipated exhibition” and as “the third exhibition of “The Heavens Opened” series of artistic events, scheduled for the cultural journey towards the Holy Year.” This wording situates the exhibition within a broader pilgrimage trajectory, aligning it with the Jubilee’s spiritual objectives while highlighting its cultural prestige. Again, art plays the role of preparation toward the spiritual experience of the pilgrimage to Rome in the Jubilee year.

In terms of properties of the language of tourism, the text clearly displays euphoria: the exhibition is repeatedly associated with uniqueness, exceptionality, and high artistic value. Expressions such as “much-anticipated exhibition,” “extraordinary opportunity,” “extraordinary artistic beauty,” and “enormously successful” construct a hyperbolic evaluative frame. The uniqueness is strengthened by the emphasis on the unprecedented nature of the event: “the two works on display have never been exhibited side by side, and now for the first time they can be admired together.”

The property of lack of sender identification is also present. Although the institutional context is implicit, no specific curator or authorial figure is named. The text appears as an anonymous institutional monologue, consistent with other web pages. The narrative also mobilizes tautology. As Dann (1996) suggests, tourism discourse anticipates and prefigures the experience that visitors will later “confirm” on site. Here, emotions and behaviors are pre-defined: visitors are told the exhibition “offers [...] a unique opportunity for reflection and prayer” and that the works can “be admired together.” Magic also surfaces through thematic references to mystical revelation, relics, and divine visual imagery (“floating in the darkness,” “bathed in a luminous light of salvation”). These features construct an atmosphere of sacred exceptionality. Temporal structures alternate between present and future tense, thus encouraging anticipation through future-oriented forms (“will be exhibited,” “will be open”), while present-tense constructions (“is the third exhibition,” “is normally kept”) serve a referential function.

Key words and metaphors reinforce the artistic-spiritual framing through lexical clusters such as masterpiece (“Dali took inspiration for his masterpiece”), hope (“the theme of Christian Hope”), salvation (“bathed in a luminous light of salvation”), reflection (“offers visitors a unique opportunity for reflection and prayer”), and pilgrimage (implicitly evoked through the framing of the event as part of “the cultural journey towards the Holy Year”). Some foreign terms (e.g.,

“Monasterio de la Encarnación”) function as mild languaging (Dann 1996), indexing authenticity, while implicit ego-targeting emerges through references to “visitors.”

Through euphoria, keywords, metaphor, and temporal framing, the Exhibition is positioned as an essential step in a “cultural journey towards the Holy Year.”

### **5.3 “Chagall in Rome”**

Compared to the preceding texts, the web page presenting Chagall’s White Crucifixion offers greater discursive complexity and more explicit interpretive framing for the reader. It serves not only as an informational announcement but also as an interpretive guide that pre-frames visitors’ perceptions.

Euphoria is dominant throughout the text. The Exhibition is introduced as a “world class” initiative, and the painting is repeatedly designated a “masterpiece.” Hyperbolic phrasing such as “one of the most eloquent condemnations of war and hatred of the 20th century” intensifies emotional framing. Tautology emerges as the text tells visitors not only what the painting represents but also how it should be understood—spiritually, morally, and emotionally. Monologue and lack of sender identification follow the same pattern as previous sections, reinforcing institutional authority. Magic appears through symbolic and transcendental language: e.g., “divine white light,” “mystery of the cross,” “victory over death.” These metaphors position the exhibition as a spiritually transformative encounter. Temporal structures alternate between past (biographical and historical context) and present tenses, thereby supporting the work’s framing as timeless and continuously relevant.

Keywords dominate the rhetorical strategy by clustering around semantic themes of faith (“hope,” “redemption,” “resurrection”), cultural value (“masterpiece,” “artistic experience”), and suffering linked to war and Jewish identity (“persecution and suffering of the Jewish people”). Languaging is more prominent than in previous examples, including Hebrew terminology (“Tallit” and “Torah”), religious inscriptions (“INRI”), and cultural references to Jewish tradition. Ego-targeting appears implicitly in the final paragraph, framing the viewer’s experience as a personal opportunity for reflection and spiritual meaning.

Overall, the verbal text positions the Chagall exhibition as a deeply meaningful cultural and spiritual event aligned with the Jubilee narrative of hope, reconciliation, and remembrance.

### **5.4 “100 Cribs at the Vatican”**

The final exhibition text reinforces many of the discursive strategies previously observed while shifting emphasis toward inclusivity, diversity, and communal participation. The exhibition is

described as part of the Jubilee's preparation and framed as both a cultural celebration and an invitation to spiritual reflection.

Euphoria is evident through expressions such as “real works of art,” “unique setting,” and “encourages visitors to marvel.” Here, the emotional tone leans toward wonder, celebration, and shared joy. Tautology is activated by prescriptive phrasing, which encourages visitors to “prepare their hearts for the start of the Jubilee,” thus framing emotional response as prescribed. Monologue and lack of sender identification remain consistent. The web page operates as declarative communication without interactive elements or personal signature. Magic appears in ritualized language: inauguration, ceremony, choir, and the reference to the symbolic setting beneath Bernini's colonnade construct a ceremonial and sacred framing. The use of tenses combines a timeless present (“is back,” “forms part”) with forward-looking perspectives of opening times, while prompting participation.

Keywords and semantic clustering emphasize three core themes: (i) spirituality and hope (e.g., “Hope does not disappoint,” “prepare their hearts,” “birth of Jesus”), (ii) artistic craftsmanship and materiality (e.g., “real works of art,” “Japanese paper, silk, resin ... coconut and banana fiber,” “inspiration and imagination”), and (iii) global representation and cultural diversity (e.g., “artists from all over the world,” “France, Poland, Japan, Paraguay,” “embassies ... promoting the event”). Languaging is present through references to culturally specific materials (i.e., tatami, kimonos, and coconut fiber), reinforcing authenticity and multicultural inclusiveness. Ego-targeting clearly appears through invitations such as “open to all,” references to a “warm welcome,” and emphasis on accessibility and lack of reservation requirements, thus implicitly addressing each individual personally. Overall, the text constructs the event as a celebratory encounter that merges artistic appreciation with spiritual preparation and communal inclusion.

## 6. Final remarks and conclusions

Overall, from a verbal perspective, tourism discourse blends elements of artistic promotion, religious framing, and affective persuasion, thus enhancing the contextualization of the four exhibitions within the Jubilee event. Although tone and detail level vary across the Exhibitions, recurrent use of euphoria, key words, monologic structure, and anticipatory framing reveals a coherent discursive strategy that presents the exhibitions as integral steps in a spiritual-cultural pilgrimage toward the Jubilee. This positioning aligns with the broader communicative aims of the website and reinforces the Jubilee's identity as a pilgrimage-centered religious event communicated through culture and tourism discourse.

In conclusion, this study has examined how the official Jubilee 2025 website constructs the Jubilee as a pilgrimage event articulated through sacred, cultural, and tourism-oriented semiotic resources. By using a multimodal discourse analytical framework, the research explored how visual and verbal choices collaboratively frame the homepage and four pre-Jubilee Exhibitions' web pages as part of a symbolic journey of preparation leading toward the Holy Year, therefore merging art and spirituality in the travel experience.

The first part of the analysis conducted on the structural and visual organization of the Jubilee website's homepage and the web pages dedicated to the Exhibitions has revealed that the website's designers created a semiotic space at the intersection between the promotion of a religious event and of a tourist destination. The apparent tension between Pope Francis's appeal to be "pilgrims, not tourists" and the website's adoption of promotional conventions typical of cultural tourism should not be read as a simple inconsistency. Rather, it reveals the complexity of contemporary religious mega-events, which must simultaneously safeguard spiritual intentionality and address global audiences accustomed to digital mediation and experiential framing. The website negotiates this tension by re-signifying cultural participation as spiritually meaningful rather than recreationally autonomous.

As discussed in Section 2, tourism itself encompasses multiple, overlapping forms that address heterogeneous audiences with varying expectations and degrees of religious commitment. Recognizing this diversity allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the Jubilee website, not as oscillating between incompatible categories, but as operating within a spectrum of pilgrimage, religious tourism, and cultural engagement. The analysis has indeed revealed how it might sometimes be difficult to separate the two figures of pilgrims and tourists. The homepage of the Jubilee's website also confirmed this in its composite narrative, which mixes elements of the religious pilgrimage spiritual experience with more lay and mundane experiences (such as Rome itineraries), typical of mass tourism websites. This was also confirmed by the analysis of the web pages dedicated to the Exhibitions, which showed a structure and features typical of event promotion rather than of religious or spiritual representations.

The second part of the analysis on the verbal component of the Exhibitions' web pages shows a primary focus on the cultural role of the four Exhibitions as preparation for the Jubilee experience, combined with the artistic uniqueness of the places hosting the Exhibitions themselves. The preparation for the Jubilee spiritual experience is also conveyed through the artistic and moral values offered by the four cultural events, such as references to war condemnation and a highly critical attitude towards 20th-century violence and destruction. All this provides a further occasion for meditation and reflection on those historical events – such

as the Holocaust – which have heavily marked the century. Meditation and reflection, therefore, foster a form of catharsis, which acts as a further element of spiritual preparation for the Jubilee. Attendance at the exhibitions is discursively constructed as a formative stage in the Jubilee journey: through exposure to artistic representations of suffering, redemption, memory, and hope, visitors are invited to engage in reflection and moral contemplation, thereby aligning aesthetic experience with the Holy Year's overarching theme of spiritual renewal.

The integration of visual and verbal findings, therefore, reveals a specific communicative strategy: the website systematically positions the Jubilee as a “hybrid” experience where cultural heritage and spiritual practice coexist. The Exhibitions become discursive thresholds – bridging sacred and secular, artistic appreciation and faith formation, individual experience and shared ritual participation. Through these multimodal strategies, the Jubilee is not merely presented; it is staged as an unfolding journey supported and mediated by digital communication.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that the Jubilee is digitally constructed not solely as a religious ritual or as a cultural festival, but as a spiritually meaningful cultural journey. The website's multimodal discourse invites global audiences to participate in this unfolding process, positioning the Exhibitions as both encounters with artistic heritage and integral stages of a broader pilgrimage toward hope.

From a broader perspective, the analysis contributes to scholarship on religious tourism studies and digital tourism discourse studies by showing how institutional religious actors increasingly adopt communication strategies such as those identified by Dann (1996). The Jubilee website demonstrates how religious institutions may strategically employ promotional conventions to broaden reach, foster engagement, and frame participation in ways that resonate with both pilgrims and tourists – without fully resolving the tension between these categories.

## Bionotes

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