
A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Endangered Tigers in WWF Posters

Annisa Indah Sukma, Zakie Asidiky, Agung Farid Agustian

annisaindahsukma@gmail.com

English Study Program, Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing YAPARI-ABA Bandung, INDONESIA

Abstract

This Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) research examined World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) posters campaigning for tiger protection, whose population has been fewer than 5000 in recent years. It uses a qualitative descriptive method with Kress and van Leeuwen's compositional meaning theory (2006) to explore how the composition of the posters delivered messages to readers. Besides, it also tried to reveal the ideologies depicted in those posters critically. The number of data analyzed was 6 (six) tiger posters taken from the adsoftheworld website (<https://www.adsoftheworld.com>) with the keywords 'tiger' and 'WWF.' As a result, the salient elements of the selected posters represented a critical state of the tiger population. They could also convey to readers that the extinction of tigers can be prevented with a wise life. In addition, both verbal and visual elements depicted several ideologies: (1) the tiger was seen as property, not as a living creature, (2) people could choose to fight for or destroy the tiger, (3) power hierarchy made people unable to act, and (4) the tigers are in endangered states. Hopefully, this research can be used as a theoretical reference for further research on environmental and animal issues in the multimodal field. Besides, visual communication practitioners can imitate or follow the analyzed posters in this research to make any content concerning any life issues by paying more attention to the salient elements in their posters.

Keywords: multimodal discourse analysis; compositional meaning; WWF posters; tiger

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Introduction

Panthera tigris, known as the tiger, is one of many endangered animals worldwide. In 2021, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature

(WWF) explained that poaching, retaliatory killings, and habitat degradation are all constant threats to tigers. Tigers must fight for space with a dense and frequently expanding people population. People's actions have

destroyed, degraded, and fragmented their environment. Accordingly, tiger habitats are endangered by the removal of forests for agriculture and lumber, as well as the construction of road networks and other development activities. Since the tiger has enormous home ranges and is fiercely territorial, they require vast swathes of habitat to survive. Fewer tigers can live in small, isolated patches of habitat. However, it increases the risk of inbreeding and renders tigers more vulnerable to poaching as they expand their territories beyond protected zones. This risk emphasizes maintaining habitat connectivity between the tigers' territories.

As an international non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses on the field of wilderness preservation and the reduction of human impact on the environment, WWF is now working to conserve tiger populations and their habitats through a range of strategies, including anti-poaching efforts, habitat conservation, and engaging local communities in tiger conservation. In addition, WWF also uses posters in cyberspace to broadcast and promote various messages related to endangered tigers to protect endangered tiger species and their habitats (WWF, 2022).

Posters advocating for the protection of endangered tigers can reach many people familiar with the tiger and the locals. Posters can be an effective tool for raising awareness about endangered species and their conservation needs. They can be displayed in cyberspace, public spaces such as schools, community centers, and public transportation hubs, where they can reach and speak as directly and succinctly as possible to their intended audience (Saunders *et al.*, 2020).

Linguistically speaking, WWF's posters are considered multimodal texts since they were composed of pictorial and linguistic modes. These modes play essential functions in conveying meaning to the audience. The pictorial mode, including all the visual elements of the poster, such as images of tigers, can capture the audience's attention and convey meaning quickly and efficiently, often more effectively than words. On the

other hand, the linguistic mode includes all the text elements of the poster, such as headlines, slogans, and body copy providing information about the issue or message being promoted, often in more detail than can be conveyed through images alone.

Critically speaking, the posters published by WWF have particular messages for the audiences. In addition, the posters have several ideologies instilled behind the pictorial and linguistic modes. Ideology is the principal scheme to organize several concepts and consumption to control the thought of a group, representing their primary characteristic based on their identities, goals, values, positions, and resources (Asidiky & Puspa, 2020). Moreover, ideology is a multi-accented and contentious term in and of itself. There is a neutral sense in which ideologies are shared systems of knowledge. Still, it is more commonly used to denote false consciousness or distortion in the service of dominance regarding gender, ethnicity, race, and the concept of people's morality, intelligence, and aesthetics (Woolard, 2020).

Furthermore, based on the explanation above, this research aimed to examine the published WWF posters to prevent the extinction of tigers, whose population has been about 4500 species in recent years (WWF), utilizing the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach. The MDA approach can investigate discourses construed in those posters comprising verbal and visual elements to represent the world, communicate, gather thoughts for action, and reveal identity (Paltridge, 2012).

The MDA can enrich and expand social communication techniques to some level as a brand-new analysis approach in discourse analysis (Yu, 2019; Bi, 2019). According to Asidiky (2022), MDA can be concluded as an approach to determine how meaning is constructed in multimodal texts. This approach can also uncover the cultural meaning created by a social group. However, when applying this approach, discourse analysts must use some theories as analytical tools to reveal every meaning behind the multimodal texts they are examining.

One of the analytical tools utilized in MDA is Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (VG) theory or visual meanings. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006 & 2021) argued that visual meanings, like language, are classified into three meanings: *representational*, *interactive*, and *compositional*. This model was developed using references from Halliday's Systemic Functional Language (1985), which states that language is part of social semiotics and consists of ideational, interpersonal, and textual components.

Some previous studies on MDA with environmental issues about humans and animals on posters were done by Dallyono and Sukyadi (2019), Zhdanova *et al.* (2020), Mohammad (2020), and Nurfaizah and Harti (2022). The four studies examined the multimodal analysis of verbal and visual components with environmental themes for humans and animals. As a result, the findings showed that posters could be used to express opinions regarding the precarious state of the world's environment through protest campaigns posters.

Pratiwi *et al.* (2021) conducted another preliminary study and found that attractive posters can increase empathy and minimize animal harm from forest destruction. In addition, Wenjun (2019) found that the current design preference in endangered animal-related campaigns is to generate scenes of a hostile atmosphere and conflicting human-nature relationships by using violence and negative images of human characters. Using this strategy excessively may result in a rote scene that can be perplexing or even extreme.

Moreover, Mulyadi and Sudana (2021) also examined a campaign with the MDA approach. They found that posters on paper can express and communicate humanitarian messages. The poster's ability to communicate its messages more effectively will be enhanced by using multimodal resources that consider semantic elements, pronoun devices such as social distance, compositional arrangement, and the interaction between visual and verbal modes.

Unlike the preliminary studies above, this MDA research focused on how the compositions of the WWF posters concerning endangered animals, especially wild tigers, delivered messages to audiences and revealed their instilled ideologies with the following research questions.

1. In what ways are the compositional meanings organized to deliver the messages in the WWF's posters?
2. What ideologies are depicted in those posters?

Methodology

This research used a descriptive qualitative method. It generates descriptive information through people's written or spoken words and observable behaviour. Rather than collecting data to test preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories, this method develops concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in the data (Taylor *et al.*, 2015).

Moreover, the data of this research were 6 (six) tiger posters taken from the *adsoftheworld* website (<https://www.adsoftheworld.com>). The keywords used to search in the website are *tiger* and *WWF*. 6 (six) Tiger images appeared with these keywords, which were then all used as data in this study.

Furthermore, each poster was analyzed with Kress and van Leeuwen's compositional meaning of Visual Grammar theory to investigate how the compositions of the WWF posters deliver messages to audiences. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the compositional meaning of multimodal texts is organized through *information value*, *salience*, and *framing system*. *The information value* is different placements providing different values, such as whether the information is on the right or left, up or down in the text. *Salience* attracts the viewer's attention through different degrees, placements, sizes, contrast, sharpness, etc. Meanwhile, *the framing system* connects every element in the multimodal text. The more strongly an element is framed, the more it is presented as a separate unit of information. In addition, after analyzing the compositional

meanings of each poster, the ideologies depicted from the posters were then discussed.

Results and Discussion

This part provides the results and discussion of the analysis of 6 (six) tiger posters following the research questions that focused on (1) exploring how the composition of the posters delivered messages to readers and (2) revealing the ideologies depicted in those posters.

Compositional Meanings of the Posters

The following analysis elucidates the compositional meaning in every selected poster using Kress and van Leeuwen's theory (2006), comprising the analysis of informational value, salience, and framing. The following is the discussion.

Poster 1 Analysis

From the perspective of compositional meaning, the informational value of the following poster 1 is ideal-real (Top to Bottom). The ideal part is the appearance of a tiger (Top) with something pressing against it. In real life, the figure is typically photocopier output. Meanwhile, the sentence below the tiger that invites people to save paper is the real part (Bottom). Tigers live in the forest; paper comes from trees. So that if humans waste the use of paper, some people will cut down more and more trees in the woods. It is not that people should stop using paper; people must also consider the condition of the origins of paper because many living things need trees.



Image 1. Poster 1 taken from <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/tiger-186b2d5c-f347-4e3e-a153-f68196b731ec>

On the other hand, the salience of poster 1 is the image of a pressed tiger which depicts two meanings. Firstly, the tiger being pressured to be photocopied means that it is constantly being pressured to adapt to humans who use the forest for their needs, one of which is making paper. Secondly, it could mean that the tiger has been pushed back because its habitat is getting smaller, so humans must be able to use the land while sharing it with other species. Tiger's life is increasingly unworthy, symbolized by the greyscale background (the forest is no longer green). Meanwhile, the following linguistic element of the poster has another meaning even though it is not the salient element of the poster.

(1) the more paper you waste, the less space they have

The above linguistic element (1), shows that in the forest, the tiger does not have the freedom to express its natural behavior as well as freedom from discomfort. Habitat, which should be the safest place, gradually shrinks and threatens their lives.

In addition, the poster is dominant with the grayscale color in the framing, which means that the grayscale background does not make the verbal and visual components illegible. Although the sentence writing is too small, the two have no barrier. Therefore, the framing of this poster is *connected*, which means that all the semiotic elements are presented as a single unit of information (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006)

Poster 2 Analysis

The following poster 2, released in 2017, was published in Indonesia and was created by WWF. It shows the forest's burned condition, leaving only charred trees. The burning forest took many victims, including the life of the tiger.



Image 2. Poster 2 taken from <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/burning-tiger>

The informational value of this horizontal poster is also ideal-real (Top to Bottom). The poster shows a burning forest with smoke and a dark sky (Top). No tiger in sight, whether alive or its corpse, but the image producer made this burning tree forming a tiger who was screaming, but there was nothing else to do because it was all gone (Bottom).

In addition, the salient part of this poster is a tiger-shaped tree. There is no primary tiger color (black and orange) here; the only tiger can be seen from the burning trees. The poster shows the condition of the forest was burned, leaving only charred trees. The producer placed the charred tree like a tiger screaming sadly, asking for help, but it was too late to represent irreplaceable wildlife lost. This

poster uses a grey and dark background, symbolizing forest fires that occurred and harmed many parties so that not a single living thing could be seen. The text written on the poster is as follows:

(2) We lose more than just trees. Help prevent forest fires.

Clauses in (2) show that tiger cannot get their right to be free from hunger, fear, and pain and express their natural behaviour. The burning forest can take the lives of both tigers and other animals. If the animal that is their food is burned, then the tiger will experience hunger. If the tiger were burned, it would have a life with an injured body. The tiger cannot express its natural behaviour if the habitat is burned down. Ultimately, the local people will become targets for the tigers because they have no choice. They will be considered victims, and the tiger's life is finally threatened again.

Moreover, all the semiotic elements of the poster (the image and text) can be seen clearly by using only shades of grey and white. Nothing overlaps with taking the spotlight. There is an invitation link to be part of the WWF Tiger Warrior. Therefore, the framing of this poster is *connected* or presented as a piece of integrated information (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006)

Poster 3 Analysis

This poster was released in 2017, published in Romania, and created by WWF. In this horizontal poster, the tiger's stripes fill all over the poster, accompanied by WWF's logo and some linguistic elements.



Image 3. Poster 3 taken from <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns>

The informational value of this poster is Given-New (Left to right). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), Given and New's relationship is shown with the slogan 'Freedom For Animal' on the bottom left (Given) and a little explanation of how circus animals spend their lives behind cages (New). In line with the *New*, the stripes of the tiger that fill the posters convey the meaning that circus animals, especially the tiger, are confined by cages that do not give them freedom.

Meanwhile, the orange and black tiger pattern is the most salient element of the poster as the color is so striking, filling the entire poster. Even so, the color does not ignore the slogan in the bottom left corner. The slogan below uses a typical circus font to attract attention, along with some brief information provided at the bottom right of the poster. The text in the poster is:

(3a) *Freedom for Animals!*

(3b) *Because on an average, a circus animal spends 350 days a year in chains, behind bars, and the rest working.**

(3c) *according to a University of Bristol study, endorsed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals, conducted on 153 circus companies across the world*

Linguistically speaking, the slogan in clause (3a) shows that tigers do not get the freedom to act according to their natural behavior and freedom from fear. Besides, clauses (3b) and (3c) can mean that tigers may also not be free from hunger and thirst because of the cruel training of circus animals, and the show times are no exception. Only a few of them would have escaped or been finally released if not for their owner, who does not want to take care of them anymore (Paw, 2022).

In this poster, stripes of a tiger pattern fill the entire poster. With the text in the bottom left in the same background without any separation, the framing of this poster is *connected* or a single unit of information.

Poster 4 Analysis

This poster was released in 2016 in France by WWF. There is a hand holding a smartphone with an image of the Bengal character in *Pokémon Go!* Along with writing, 'Pokémon are real. Save 'em all.'



Image 4. Poster 5 taken from <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/bengalix>

The informational value of this poster is also given-new (left to right). This horizontal poster shows a cute animation of a Bengal tiger named Bengalix (Left), complete with a background where it lives in the wild. *Pokémon Go's* signature features add to the impression that the Bengal tiger is already rare and needs to be sought, but they must live in the wild according to their habitat without invasion. Meanwhile, the new part is the 'Pokémon are real'. Save 'em all.' (Right) written boldly in capital letters with black and white color. This text is placed very clearly without any ornamentation to be read clearly.

In addition, the salient element of this poster is Bengalix. It is a character name for a Bengal tiger in this campaign poster. *Pokémon go!* is an augmented reality game in which gamers use their mobile phones to look for Pokémon characters in the real world. The characters will emerge as cartoons when the user puts the game camera in the hideout of the Pokémon (2016), the endangered bengal tiger, as part of a campaign that encourages people to search for tigers together. It is, however, risky, so avoid searching directly. With the willingness to search, it is anticipated that a will to protect the Bengal tiger in India

would emerge. Meanwhile, the linguistic element in the poster is as follows:

(4) *Pokémon are real. Save them all.*

The above clauses in (4) indicate that the Bengal tiger is going through discomfort, pain, and fear. The text that says to look for a tiger indicates that the Bengal tiger is already hard to spot. They hide from people so as not to be caught, killed, and able to live their lives. Because if the tiger is numerous and lives comfortably, it will not be endangered and hard to find.

Moreover, the background of this poster is red, with dark red gradations around the edges. This poster features a *connected* framing with bold white and black capital lettering alongside a hand holding a mobile phone. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:204), the connected framing indicates that all the poster's elements form a single unit of information.

Poster 5 Analysis

The next poster, 5 (five), was released in 2014 in Australia and created by WWF. This vertical poster depicts the pyramid of people with its various economic levels.



Image 5. Poster 5 taken from <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/>

The informational value of this poster is ideal-real (top to bottom). A rich man who enjoys the final product of tiger hunting, tiger skins transformed into fashion, is at the top. His body was clothed in tiger skin and carried a glass, symbolizing his wealth (Ideal). Three-

level persons handle the tiger until the people can consume it with higher social status. The hunters are at the bottom of the last one, indicating that they are the start of this activity (dealing directly with the tiger). In addition, the following clause (5) is the *real* part (bottom). The clause can mean that people are one step ahead in protecting the tiger by stopping consuming or even supporting products derived from the tiger.

(5) *Stop one, stop them all.*

Moreover, the salience of this poster is a pyramid of people holding onto the tiger part they handle. Despite the objects having the same body scale, a social hierarchy is evident in who stands on top and what is being held. This poster illustrates the ranks of people who wish to rise and grow despite what occurs below. A gun, a knife, a severed head, a hand holding a tiger's mouth with its sharp teeth, topless and barefoot; those people did not fear the tiger. Figures of people from various ethnicities are also shown, indicating that tiger hunting is not limited to one race but to who leads it. This poster shows people invading the tiger's freedom from pain, discomfort, fear, and distress. The tigers were captured and eventually killed to fulfill the ego of the hunters' leader. The tiger may not get a proper slaughter, so that it will feel the pain longer.

Furthermore, this poster has two colors, sky blue and ground brown. With the image mainly in the sky and half on the ground, followed by the text on the ground, this poster's framing is also connected, indicating the single unit of information.

Poster 6 Analysis

The following poster (6) six was released in 2012 in China. Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar theory, this vertical poster's informational value is *ideal-real* (top to bottom). This poster shows a Caspian tiger with several symbolic objects behind it, like a city silhouette, foliage, and other cultural ornaments that imply the journey of its life before extinction (ideal). Under the tiger, there is a paragraph sentence which is the last word from the tiger. By affixing the signature of the tiger and the year

of extinction, this poster gives a sad impression (*real*).

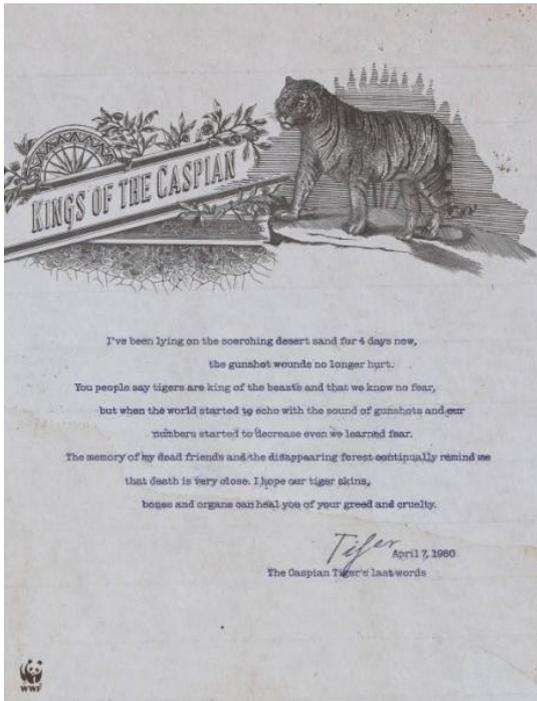


Image 6. Poster 6 taken from <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/last-words-of-the-caspian-tiger>

Furthermore, the salient part of this poster is the letter. The Caspian tiger is already extinct, but this is a warning to people that other tigers can continue their life or will become extinct like the Caspian tiger. This letter's content is a poem describing the last tiger who was helpless due to people's activities.

(6) *I've been lying on the scorching desert sand for 4 days now, the gunshot wounds no longer hurt. You people say tigers are king of the beasts and that we know no fear, but when the world started to echo with the sound of gunshots and our numbers started to decrease even we learned fear. The memory of my dead friends and the disappearing forest continually remind me that death is very close. I hope our tiger skins, bones and organs will heal you of your greed and cruelty.*

*Tiger
April 7, 1980
The Caspian Tiger's last words*

The above letter indicates if the Caspian tiger wrote a condition before its extinction. The letter has also shown that the Caspian tiger felt hungry, in pain, injured, stressed, persecuted, was no longer free to act according to its natural behavior, and feared losing a fellow tiger due to people's activities. Everything is contained in the letter on the poster.

Moreover, writing and pictures are the main objects in this poster. With beige color, a trace of water stain looks like old paper; viewers can see the verbal and visual components. Therefore, this poster's framing is also *connected*, showing a single unit of information (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

The Ideologies Depicted in the Posters

The following explanations are the ideologies depicted from the six posters' analysis results critically connected to the social and cultural contexts where the endangered tigers live. In line with what Asidiky *et al.* (2022) stated, those ideologies are expected to be socially and cognitively accepted by people to make them realize that tigers are endangered and start to help conserve them by echoing the messages on the posters. The ideologies of the posters are as follows.

The tiger was seen as property, not as a living creature.

The pictorial modes of the pressed tiger in poster 1, burnt trees resembling a tiger body in poster 2, and tiger bodies that were hunted in image 5 show that despite humanity's intelligence, life's complexity requires many victims. Forests burn and kill the tiger's life resulting in the extinction of the tiger, demonstrating that many people still cannot appreciate nature and life. In those images, people seem as if they let the tigers suffer. The tigers seem forced to leave the forest to escape the flames burning their home while avoiding human-set traps. Some tigers were saved, while others were injured after being captured in traps and rescued.

In addition, people also still believe that tiger parts are precious and suitable for decoration and fashion. Meanwhile, the tiger's claws, moustaches, and teeth can bring good luck, making them uncontrollably hunted. Because of this, humans no longer see tigers as living things with a right to exist but as people's property.

People could choose to fight for or destroy the tiger.

The salient elements, the pictures of the pressed tiger in poster 1, the orange and black tiger pattern skin in poster 3, and a cute animation of a Bengal tiger (Bengalix) in poster 4 also indicate that people can subjugate animals to satisfy their egos or allow them to destroy their natural lives. People can capture a tiger, kill a tiger, watch a deadly circus, or refuse to support every activity. People have the option of fighting to conquer the tiger or fighting alongside the tiger.

For instance, many people must choose to destroy tigers instead of protecting them, perpetrators of poaching and trade of tigers in Sumatra are often arrested and charged with imprisonment and fines, but they are never deterred. They are still rampant in doing this illegal activity. Even though the officers had been clearing the tiger snares, someone always put them back on.

Power hierarchy made people unable to act.

The salient element in image 5 shows that people's conduct is dictated by a leader or people in positions of power, particularly where influential people act. People from the lower classes who do dirty jobs are not compensated if they do not do it. Upper classes people, on the other hand, will do anything to gratify their egos, including ruthlessly killing animals by simply commanding others to do so.

The tigers are in endangered states.

All pictorial and linguistic elements in all posters depict violation people committed against the tigers, such as the violation of the freedom from hunger and thirst shown in

Images 2 and 3. The violation of the freedom from discomfort is shown in Images 1, 4, 5, and 6. The violation of the freedom from pain, injury, and disease is shown in Images 1, 2, and 5. The violation of freedom to express natural behaviour is shown in images 1, 2, and 3. Image 5, in particular, shows that there are tigers who do not get the right to live their life. Finally, the violation of freedom from fear and distress is shown in all images.

The posters convey that if humans did not interfere with tiger life, tigers—with all of their distinctive characteristics—would undoubtedly be considerably more common. Since tigers are the forest's natural keepers, their population decline will significantly affect the natural order.

Conclusion

This MDA research focusing on WWF posters to protect tigers has provided the readers with valuable insights into the critical state of the tiger population. Similar to what Dallyono and Sukyadi (2019), Wenjun (2019), Zhdanava *et al.* (2020), Mohammad (2020), Pratiwi *et al.* (2021), Mulyadi and Sudana (2021), and Nurfaizah and Harti (2022), the pictorial and linguistic modes employed in these posters could serve as powerful messages and campaigns to readers since the visual representations of the dangerous circumstances surrounding the lives of tigers were composed well. Furthermore, the representation of that state effectively communicates the urgency and vulnerability these tigers face. So, people are expected to take early action to prevent the tiger extinction.

Furthermore, the analysis of these posters has revealed the presence of underlying ideologies embedded to protect tigers within the pictorial and linguistic elements. These ideologies subtly shape people's perceptions and attitudes toward tiger conservation, highlighting the complex interplay between human values, cultural beliefs, and environmental concerns.

In addition, critically speaking, it is also crucial to recognize the significant role of the posters in shaping public awareness and

actions regarding tiger protection. The findings from this research underscore the importance of strategic and conscious design choices when developing visual campaigns for wildlife conservation. By harnessing the power of multimodal discourse, it is hoped that people will continue to raise awareness, challenge dominant narratives, and foster a collective sense of responsibility toward safeguarding the future of tigers. Moreover, future research may delve deeper into the nuances of visual representation concerning other endangered animals besides tigers, considering the influence of cultural contexts, societal values, and audience interpretations.

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