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Visual Discourse Analysis Of Images From Israel And Hamas

Abstract

Since 2005, the world has witnessed Israel- Hamas war that majorly culminates into hostage-crises. The issue of hostages is considered emotional for both Israel and Palestinians. However, not much research has been done on the narrative propagated by both sides during the hostage crisis. This narrative is mainly propagated through various images coming from both sides. The images from each side creates opposing discourse that needs to be analyzed visually. Thus, equal number of images were taken from each side and analyzed using Kress and van Leeuwen's Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis. The findings showed that, Hamas tries to portray a good image of self through various photages, while Israel tries to create a negative image of Hamas through photages that it provides to med

1.1   Introduction of the Study

The armed conflict between Hamas and Israel has been taking place since 7th October, 2023. Presently this War has turned into a hostage crisis situation as there has been abductions of civilians at both sides (Mckinzea, 2023). This crisis has been extensively covered by various media outlets around the world (Scott, 2023). According to Singh2023, Hamas is adept at information warfare, which was visible through how the attack on Israel was live streamed. In the same way Hamas shared videos of the hostages in their captivity. These videos and images from Hamas drawn mixed reactions from the viewers (Singh, 2023). Which is why, these images need to be analyzed through Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Kress and Van Leeuven (2006), which is also used as framework for this study. According to Kress and Van Leeuven (2006), images have many modes that come together to form complete meaning. Through Kress and Van Leeuven (2006), the images from Hamas and Israel is analyzed through this study.

Thus according to Kress(2006), it is no longer possible to create meaning in isolation and thus the combined potential of various modes needs to be studied if we want to understand the way meaning is constructed. In this connection, the extratextual context in which communication is produced is considered as part of the communicative act itself (Kress, Leeuven, 2006). Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) has to account for the co-occurrence of different modes, which interact to create meaning. The meaning is created mainly on the levels that was provided by Halliday (1994). These level are; ideational, interpersonal and textual. The later approaches to MDA more or less follow the same pattern (Mestre,2015). This creates the need for MDA to analyse the many images provided by the Hamas and Israel to analyze the technique of narrative building by both sides in regards to hostage crisis. This study will help investigate hidden ideologies in the narrative of both Hamas and Israel through images, to help better understand the hostage crisis and the plight of the Palestinians.

1.2 Problem statement

The ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict that started in October, 2023 is unprecedented as both sides are engaged in conventional as well as unconventional warfare. By employing unconventional warfare, Israel and Hamas are struggling to dominate media with their own narratives (B, 2023). These opposing narratives have divided public opinion in the west and also widened the gap between the West and the Middle East (Conboye, 2023) (Laure, 2023). Both parties have made use of various footages that keeps on coming from both sides, especially during the hostage crisis. To truly understand the purpose of each side, the self-portrayal through these images needs to be analyzed. This will help create critical awareness among the viewer to better understand the hostage crisis at both sides.

1.3 Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following:
  i. To explore the narrative of both Israel and Hamas through images of self-portrayal, with the use Kress and van Leeuwen's Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis (MDA).
  ii. To help create critical awareness among the viewer to better understand the hostage crisis at both sides through images.

1.4 Research questions
  i. How does Hamas portray itself to the viewer through the images while handling Israeli hostages?
  ii. How does Israel portray Hamas through the images it releases to media?

1.5 Significance of the study

The narrative of both Hamas and Israel surrounding the hostage crisis is poorly understood in term of propagation of personal ideologies. The focus of the media is treatment of hostages by Hamas rather than the plight of Palestinians. The real issues like the bombardment of Palestinians by the Israel is hijacked as hostage crisis deepen. This study will help investigate hidden ideologies in the narrative of both Hamas and Israel through images, to help better understand the hostage crisis and the plight of the Palestinians.

Literature Review

Hamas is an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement which is a political and ideological movement in Palestine against Israel. This organization was created in 1987 and since 2007 it has ruled the Gaza Strip after winning elections (Morgia, 2018). Throughout its rules of Palestine, Hamas has always made affective use of media (Morgia, 2018). It has its own web page and different accounts on almost any social media platform available today (B, 2023). Much literature is being written about Hamas as a political, ideological and terror group, however that is mostly related to field of political science or International Relations.

In recent years, Hamas related discourse has become subject of analysis for many linguists as well as media studies. Pamela (2018), in Hama's Staements; A Discourse Analysis has found that the discourse of Hamas is mainly one of ideology of resistance. Jungblut and Zakarevicuite (2018) researched online coverage of Israel-Gaza conflict of 2014 through multimodal quantitative content analysis, where both text and images were analysed. Their study showed that the applied visual and textual frames initially correspond with each other thematically. However, during the course of the conflict the textual mode more or less upheld its original framing of the

events, but the visual level intensified the framing strategy it has adopted since the escalation of the conflict began.

In case we say when both sides have made use of media, this leads to understanding of the term 'media', which typically denotes to books, magazines/ journals, journalism/ newspaper, television, radio and other social media (Arackal, 2015, p. 3). Thus, semiology can be considered as one of the major branches of the analysis of image. It is a method that presents media in a new challenge through the analysis and interpretation of data to show how media create meanings from the images (Bouzida, 2014, pp. 1003-1004). Images are very important in media, images are used to say things that they cannot be said in language (Çoşkun, 2015, p. 42).

Thus according to Kress (2006), it is no longer possible to create meaning in isolation. The combined potential of various modes needs to be studied to understand the way meaning is constructed. In this connection, the extra-textual context in which communication is created is considered as part of the communicative act (Kress, Leeuven, 2006). Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) has displays different modes, which interact to create meaning. Halliday (1994) provided meaning created by different levels. These level are; ideational, interpersonal and textual. The later approaches to MDA more or less follow the same pattern (Mestre, 2015). This creates the need for MDA to analyze the many images provided by the Hamas and Israel to analyze the technique of narrative building by both sides in regards to hostage crisis.

Research Methodology

3.1   Research Design

This study employs Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis to analyze images released by Hamas and Israel to propagate their own narrative surrounding the ongoing hostage crisis.

3.2   Framework

Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis employs three main visual categories to analyze images. These categories are; Representation, Interaction, and Composition.

The category of Representation focuses on 'Visual resources' (Kress, Leeuwen, 2006) that is people, places and things as well as the relation between them. The category of Interaction focuses on resources that construct relation between viewer and the maker of visual text and those represented in the text. The third category which is Composition focuses on pattern of representation and interaction integrated into a meaningful whole.

3.3   Population of the study

The population of the study is 10 images from both Hamas and Israel. These images were circulated by their own perspective media during the ongoing hostage crisis.

3.4   Sample

Two images related to hostage crisis from each side of Hamas and Israel are taken as sample for the study.

3.5   Data Collection

As this study researches an ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, data for research could be taken from credible news websites. The four images have been taken from Aljazeera, TRT World, BBC and The Economist.

3.6   Data Analysis Procedure

The images will be analyzed using Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) three categories of Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis.

Data Analysis

The procedure adopted for analysis is qualitative which relies on Kress and Leeuwen Multi-Model Discourse Analysis. For the purposes of analysis, two images from both Hamas and Israel are selected from official websites of Aljazeera, TRT World, The Economist and BBC.

The images will be analyzed using MDA framework by Kress and Lueewen (2006), which is showed in the diagram.

Table 4.1: Selected categories of Kress and Lueewen's MDA

Category	Sub-category	Minor sub-category
Representation	Narrative	Action (Actor ---Goal) Relational (Actor ---Goal)
	Conceptual	Analytical Symbolic
Interaction	Contact (Gaze)	Demand Offer
	Social distance	Close Shot Medium Shot Long Shot
	Attitude	Horizontal Angle Vertical Angle
	Information	Left/Right Top/Bottom
Composition	Value	Center –Margin
	Salience	Fore ground/ Background Color Contrast

4.1   Images from Hamas

4.1.1 Image No. (1)

This image is a still from a video released by Hamas's armed wing showing hostages, named Yocheved Lifshitz, left, and Nurit Cooper before their release from captivity on October 23, 2023 (Bachner, 2023). In terms of Representational structure there are four participants. Two participants are armed soldiers of Hamas, each standing beside the hostages, holding them. The soldiers carry guns and are laden with other explosive devices. In the image the Actors are the soldiers of Hamas and vector is there hands that connect to the hostages. Hostages here act as goals. This is a transactional process as the hostages in return also hold the hands of the soldiers. This shows how Hamas propagates their own narrative as unlike the usual, where hostages are treated as criminals and held from shoulders. However, in this image the hostages can be identified as older citizens and are supported by the Hamas' soldiers as they stand. Another vector are the pair eyes of the hostages, which leads to interactive analysis of the image. One of the hostage looks straight in to the camera, and another hostage looking down. Thus it invites the viewers to identify with the hostages. According to social distance, the image is medium shot as the two participants on the left side of the image are pictured knee up. This medium shot is considered as close distance between the participant and the viewer. The picture is taken vertical, which creates a relation between the viewer and the participant.

In compositional terms, the image uses information value system that is Centre/margin system. This is created by the transactional process, where focus is on the vector that leads to holding of hands. In this way, Hamas has tried to create a narrative in the first batch of release of hostages.

4.1.2 Image No (2)

This is a still image from a video released by Hamas to the media, taken from the trt world news media. To analyze the image based on representational structure, it can be seen that there are two kinds of participants. The first kind of participant is the number of people in the image and the second kind of participant is the automobile in the background. The two female hostages, mother and daughter, are waving back to Hamas soldier. Here, two vectors can be found; one is the waving of hands by both Hama soldier and hostage to each other, and second vector is the hostage's eyes that look smilingly at the soldier. This shows that the hostage's time with the soldiers was cordial. The vectors also show that the relation was that of transactional one, where actors are the hostages and the goal is the soldier of Hamas. Thus, helping Hama build the narrative that they are non-violent and their only goal is free Palestine.

With regards to interactional analysis, none of the participants look at the viewer. Thus, this image can be classified as 'offer' to the viewers as it provides information to the viewer about the interaction between or among the participants. The image is one of medium shot, thus creates closeness between the participants and the viewer. The image is taken on vertical level thus creates no power play between the viewer and the participant. This once again help propagate Hamas's narrative, which is one of peace.

To analyze the image on conceptual level, the image utilizes Centre/margin scheme of Information value. The hostages are placed in the center, where as the soldier back could be seen. The hostages thus form the nucleus of information while other participants are subservient.

4.2. Images from Israel

4.2.1 Image No. (1)

This is image taken from Aljazeera website, where Israeli soldiers could be seen looking at photos of people killed and taken captive by Hamas fighters during an attack on October 7 on southern Israel near Kibbutz Re'im on November 28 (Aljazeera, 2023).

According to representational analysis, there are again two kinds of participants in the image: people and the photos of people. Here in the image, the participants have non-transactional process as one participant observes the other inanimate participant. Thus, the soldier is the actor and pictures of people are the goal. The eyes of the soldier forms vector that connects them to the goal or photos. The goal in the image is used by Israeli media to propagate there narrative, that is Hamas is a terrorist group and has only killed and kidnapped people.

On the interactional level, the eyes of soldier is directed towards the photos of those killed or kidnapped and not towards the viewers, thus offering the idea that Hamas has indeed killed and kidnapped as many people as those photos. The image is a long shot, it includes soldiers and photos. According to the model, it creates a distance between the participants and the viewers, giving a view that there are many other people killed and taken hostages apart from the ones seen in the image. According to the attitude, the picture is taken in horizontal angle that creates sense of involvement between the participants and the viewers.

To analyze the image on compositional level, salience is represented with fore grounding the soldier and some photos while some photos and soldiers are back-grounded. This could also be seen as the soldier eyes, creating a vector that connects to the photos, are focused by the camera and the rest are out of focus.

4.2.2 Image No. (2)

Police officers evacuate a woman and a child from a site hit by a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip, in Ashkelon, southern Israel, on October 7, 2023. As for representational structure, the image has two kind of participants; people and a car on fire. Two people can be identifies as police and two people as civilians (mother and child). One of the police officer holds the mother, thus creating a vector. Creating the second vector, the mother could be seen holding her child. The third vector can be seen created by the second police officer, who is moving towards the mother and child. The second participant is the car that is on fire, after being hit by a rocket shot from Gaza. Here, the white strip on the pavement also creates a vector that leads to the burning car. The people are being moved away from the areas that are being hit by Hamas. Thus, creating the narrative that Hamas is a violent organization and the reaction from Israel is that of self-preservation.

On interactional level, none of the participant look at the viewer which creates an idea of offering information about the adversary the people face at the hand of Hamas. The social distance can be judged from the long shot. The people are nearer with a burning car in the background. This leads to attitude, that is the image is also horizontal taken at frontal angle that creates a sense of involvement for the viewer.

With regards to conceptual level, the mother and the child is center or nucleus of the image. This way they become the focus of the viewer. The two other police officer are subservient to the other two people. The people and the burning child are both in foreground. The rest of the scene is in background or out of focus.

Discussion
The analysis of the images, taken from various sources, is done based on Kress and Leeuwen (2006) three main visual categories of MDA analysis.

5.1 Representational level
On representational level the images from Hamas are more narrative than conceptual. The images have many vectors that show transaction between actor and goal. In one of the picture from Hamas soldier is the goal of the hostages which in itself is unexpected in times of war. On

the other hand Israel focuses on symbolic attribute, as in one picture Israeli soldier stands in a middle of many inanimate photos. While in the second picture from Israel, the burning car is conceptual representation as it is symbolic of the atrocities of Hamas.

5.2 Interactional Level

On interactional level the images from Hamas are different from the images of Israel. The gazes of the participants meet with those of the soldiers or the viewers, thus creating sense of demand. The images again differ on the basis of social distance. The images from the Hamas are mainly medium shot, thus creating a sense of closeness between the viewer and the participants. While the images from Israel are long shot, which creates sense of distance from the participant two create more space for symbolic destructive presence of the Hamas. All the images from both Hamas and Israel are horizontal frontal angle thus creating sense of involvement for the viewer.

5.3 Compositional Level

In the images from Hamas the hostages are the center while the soldiers of Hamas are shown as subservient to the hostages. While image from Israel has a soldier, who observes the pictures of the kidnapped, is the center. In the next image the nucleus are the civilian that are being evacuated from the affected areas. In the images from Hamas, the faces and smiles of hostages are in focus. While the images from Israel focused more on the grieved faces of the participants. The symbolic things like photos and burning car are also focused in the images.

5.4 Findings

Israel's narrative tries to compare Hamas hostage treatment with that of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Whereas, Hamas propagates the narrative of following the Islamic Law for war hostages, that is one of fair treatment.

5.5 Concluding remarks

In the light of findings from the above analysis the images from both Hamas and Israel proves that both are trying to create a narrative that suits their own motives. The findings in the discussion show that the images from the Hamas are more interactional as compared to Israel. While images from Israel focus on symbolic presence of Hamas through photos of killed or kidnapped and burning car or fleeing civilians. The propagation of their own narrative by both Hamas and Israel can be critically understood using Kress and Lueewen (2006) Multi-Discourse Analysis.

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