A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL POSTERS OF THE PAKISTANI GENERAL ELECTION 2024

Imran Ali (Corresponding Author**)**
Lecturer, Institute of English Language and Literature,
GC University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
Email: imran.ali@gcu.edu.pk
Dr. Ahmad Sohail Lodhi,
Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research,
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
Atiq-ur-Rahman
Lecturer, Hailey College of Commerce,
University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Abstract

This study focuses on the role of multimodality in online political posters designed by different political parties during the 2024 general elections in Pakistan. The endeavor of this article is to highlight how the political parties influence the voters, using the visual and linguistics devices and urging the people to cast the vote in favor of a particular party. Kress and Van's (2006) visual grammar are important to analyze the visual and linguistic strategies in the political posters. For this purpose, the qualitative data in the form of three online posters of three main stream political parties such as Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML N), Pakistan Tehreek-e- Insaaf (PTI) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) from their official Facebook web pages were chosen. The results indicate that political parties use various multimodal devices in online political posters to influence voters and shape their opinions in order to gain their support. This paper also illustrates that the online political poster is considered an important tool used in the election campaign since a large population in Pakistan is more engaged in online activities.

*Keywords: **Multimodal Analysis, Visual Grammar, Political Posters, Political discourse***

Introduction

With the ever-changing phenomenon in information technology, people have become more conscious of using different online forums to raise their voices all over the world. The people of Pakistan are no exception. They like others utilize various social media platforms to project themselves and their products. Industrialization has now introduced new and novel ways to sell their products, making them accessible to every person. They exert their influence over the public

through persuasive language and visual images which make up their mind for the products. In this regard, Language is a powerful tool for shaping an individual's social, economic, and educational status, as well as influencing society as a whole. (Sinar, 2023).

Language has been a sign of power in every age. Politicians who enjoy political power try to control social media to construct their own narrative. They embellish their language with different rhetorical figures, visual images, semiotic modes etc. to persuade the people to get the desired results. They know language used in political discourse leaves more effects on the minds of the people than anything else. They use social media in such a way that affects a large population which is not accessible due to time limitation. Social media as a potent force has become the voice of all segments of society. People formulate their opinion to choose political candidates on the basis of their projection on social media. With reference to Pakistani politics, political candidates during electoral process seem to align their manifesto and association with the national narrative.

Politics in Pakistan got stirred when the election was announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan in 2023. All political parties started working on their manifestos and making contact with the people. Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML N), Pakistan Tehreek-e- Insaaf (PTI) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are the three main stream political parties in Pakistan. Realizing the importance of social media, all political parties started establishing their own social media cells in order to influence the anticipated voters. Digital advertising is becoming increasingly popular due to the support of numerous new data sources, allowing advertisers to more accurately target their desired audiences (Dommett, 2019). The social media cells designed different political posters to project their leaders with different visual images such as Qaid-e-Azam, Allama Iqbal and Zulfiqar Ali Buttto to convince the people for voting them. Moreover, the statements of the candidates including some verbal and non-verbal signs made the posters different from one another. The political poster is a prime example of a multimodal text because it combines multiple modes of communication: written text and visuals (Lirola, 2016).

A multimodal text incorporates both written text and visuals. In linguistic terms, multimodal refers to the understanding of the meaning which is conveyed not only through language but also through other semiotic modes such as visuals, sounds and gestures. (Fattah, 2020). The multimodal text is a compact one in which both verbal and non-verbal elements serve the purpose of producing effective meaning. Everything which includes font, color, place of the image, words, syntactic structure etc. constructs the meaning. In Pakistani politics, candidates appear on the posters with various verbal and non-verbal signs to exert their influence on the viewers.

Literature Review

The role of multimodality in political posters is quite evident in the previous researches which draw our attention to the visual grammar as framework. The multimodal text, according to Lirola (2016), is understood as a whole in which the mixture of the different modes such as the written and the visual serves the purpose of creating meaning in an effective way. To uncover the semiotic meanings, different frameworks serve the different purposes, but Kress' (2006) model of visual grammar highlights representational, interactive and compositional meanings to grasp the text of posters.

Representational meaning shows the relationships between participants, forming a visual syntax. This may be in the form of narrative and conceptual process. Narrative process refers to action verbs and vectors to connect participants while conceptual process depicts participants with respect to their class, structure or meaning, conveying concepts visually. Elsanhoury, Seddek, Riham, and Debian (2020) determined the representational meaning in their article, stating that the combination of verbal material processes and non-verbal narrative action processes is revealing which portrays Donald Trump as a man of action.

Interactive meaning is concerned with the sources of visual communication which establish and maintain interaction between the producer and the viewer. It is realized through some factors such as contact, social distance and attitude. Contact shows the relationship between an image and its viewer, defining how images address their viewers. There are two types of image acts based on gaze: demand (participants gaze at the viewer) and offer (absence of gaze). Koksal and Erisen (2023) argue that the eyes of the image under analysis are not looking directly at the viewers; rather towards something else. Therefore, this is an example of "offer" image. With regard to social distance, the image pertains to a medium close shot which shows less intimate and personal relation. Attitude is concerned with the angle of the gaze. The image under analysis shows equality.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) analyze how visuals are composed and the meanings conveyed by different compositions. They explain that composition connects the representational and interactive meanings of an image through three principles: information value, framing, and salience. Al-Azzawi and Saleh (2020) analyzed political posters from the 2020 American election. The image of Donald Trump is appeared on the right of the poster, according to the information value. Framing is described in terms of background color of the image. The color of Donald Trump's suit is blue which is in harmony with the written text. Salience shows that Trump occupies a small size in the poster.

Political posters are designed to serve different purposes. For this, political parties hire professional posters developers who use different sings, symbols, images, gestures, colors to capture the attention of the people. They also use emotive words to stir the emotions of the public. Kress (2011) said that Multimodal discourse analysis provides us some tools to develop our understanding of the relationship between apparent meanings and their semiotic interpretations. Visual grammar as a framework plays a significant role in surfacing the verbal and non-verbal devices used by the poster developers. The use of semiotic devices makes the posters different from one another.

Aims of the study

- To deconstruct the Multimodal strategies used in political posters to influence the voters
- To make the comparison of the political posters on the basis of Multimodal devices to influence the voters

Research Questions

1. What are the Multimodal devices employed in political posters to influence the voters?
2. How do the Multimodal devices make the political posters different from one another to influence the voters?

Methodology

In this paper, the qualitative method is applied to make the analysis of the political posters. Qualitative research is defined as "research in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview, and document analysis are used, and a qualitative process is followed, to reveal perceptions and events in a natural environment in a realistic and holistic manner" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).   The data were collected in the form of three posters of the core political parties such as PML(N), PPP, PTI from their official webpages of social media such as Facebook. The posters were uploaded on Facebook from January 22 to January 26, 2024. The writer selected the posters, using purposive sampling.

The analysis was done, using Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), three main visual categories are selected to analyze the present data. These three main categories are as follows: representation, interaction and composition.

This model, visual grammar, may be the most appropriate to enlighten the viewers about the semiotic devices used by the political parties to exert their influence on the general public. The

appearance of different party symbols on the posters consistently reminds the viewers of their vote for the party. Moreover, the use of devices may vary from one poster to another, considering the importance of party policy.

Analysis of the Political Posters

Figure 1. Political poster of PML (N)

With reference to representation, a narrative is constructed on basis of visual images through actions or vectors. The represented participants in figure 1 show action process. The founder of the party, PML (N), is presented as a Major actor whose waving hand shows a vector between him and the viewers. Having smiles on his face creates another vector which illustrates the purpose of showing pleasure of having the supporters. The background image of another participant shows another example of vector. The president of the party smiles at the supporters which reflects another transactional process. The Goal is to urge the presumed viewers to cast their votes in favor of the party. Conceptual representation is projected in the form of other images such as Quaid-e-Azam and Allama Iqbal in this poster which have some symbolic attributes. This symbolic attribution establishes an ideological link between the present political party and the one that created Pakistan. The symbol of lion develops some metaphorical relationship between the party head and the image itself. The slogan such as, "پاکستان کو نواز دو" (Pakistan ko, Nawaz do) and the backgrounded sketches are written and drawn in green color. Green color may be

transcoded as it is the part of national flag. PML (N) constructs a national narrative through this symbolic attribute. The sketches of industry below the foregrounded images highlight the focus of the party that is dwindling economy.

In terms of interactive meanings, figure 1 shows the strong interaction between the represented participants and the viewers because of eye docking. Eye docking with a smile between the participants in the image and the viewers shows the idea of request for approval. Social distance is also created in this poster through close-up shots which reflect the personal friendly relationship between the participants and the viewers. From the perspective of horizontal angle, the represented participants are photographed at landscape angle. As a result, this landscape image urges the viewers to be involved in the participants' focus on development of the country. In this way, the viewers feel intimacy and empathy for the participants. As far linguistic devices, the slogan "پاکستان کو سچے منشور سے نواز دو" (Give Pakistan a true manifesto) appears below the images of the candidates. The green color of the words "پاکستان کو نواز دو" (Bless Pakistan with Nawaz) is quite compatible with the green color of the national flag which symbolizes the majority of the Muslims in Pakistan. Moreover, the embedded slogan "پاکستان کو نواز دو" is the main focus of the party.

At compositional level, figure 1 consists of some important information that is central. As there is an obvious vector in the represented images of the two politicians, a request is made to the viewers to cast their vote in favor PML (N) for the development of the country. Salience, another feature of compositional meaning, is realized by the placement in the foreground or background. The foregrounded image in the poster makes the participant prominent. The white color of the image and the color of the dress of the foregrounded participant is quite compatible with each other.

Figure 2. Political poster of PTI

Figure 2 expresses another political party, PTI which has made its position in the main stream political parties within a few years in Pakistan. At representational level, this visual shows the participant as a Major actor whose hand reflects the idea of vector between him and the viewers. The Goal of waving hand is to get the support of the viewers or supporters. Concept classification explains the dominant position of the political leader in the party. The symbolic attributes expound the additional meaning of the visuals present in the poster. The colors and the sign of crescent in the party flag entail some important information. The green color and the sign of crescent are the part of national flag which reinforces the idea of national narrative. The red color in the party flag symbolizes revolution. The other different signs appeared on the flag remind the viewers of the signs on which they are expected to put the stamp. The image of the ballot box and the date of election on the right and left side respectively urge the viewers to cast their vote in favor of PTI.

With respect to interactive meanings, figure 2 shows the eye docking between the represented participant and the viewers. The participant in the poster seems to be standing at a higher place, waving and looking at the viewers. This posture exhibits him as a person who is asking for obedience. Social distance is depicted in the size of the frame which highlights the social closeness of the viewers and the represented participant in the image. The close-shot image is

depicted in which the body of the politician from knee up is visible. This shows how close he is with the viewers. From the vertical perspective, the represented participant displays a sense of equality with the viewers. The linguistic expression such as "ظلم کا بدلہ ووٹ سے" (Revenge of cruelty with vote) appears on the left corner of the poster. The white color writing symbolizes peace. It seems that PTI as a political party strongly believes in the democratic process. The backgrounded red color is in perfect harmony with one of the colors of the party flag which represent revolution.

The compositional meaning depends on the information value. The represented participant in the poster is center or margin. In this central image, the waving hand carries an important information which expresses the aim of the poster. The participant seems to thank the viewers and expect them to cast their vote in favor of his party.   Salience is represented in the form of foregrounded image of the participant which makes him the center of focus. As for framing, the figure shows his connection with the other elements in the image such as his waving hand to the viewers which shows relationship with them.

Figure 3. Political poster of PPP

Figure 3 shows the image of the Major actor, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, whose posture does not show any vector. Having smile on his face, he is felt satisfied. The Goal is to galvanize the viewers to cast their vote in favor of PPP through the slogan "چنو نئی سوچ کو" (choose a new leadership) and the image of the party symbol with a stamp. As for concept representation, the symbolic attribution is highlighted through the different colors used in the party flag which have strong symbolic attribution as green color represents Muslims (part of national flag), black color represents poverty, ignorance, unemployment and injustice which the party aims to abolish, and red symbolizes revolution. The badge of national flag on the left side of his coat builds the concept of national narrative. The red and black color of his pocket hanky is in harmony with the party flag. The blue color of his dress and coat reinforces the concept of democrats. The green color of his watch strap is compatible with the color of national and the party flags which represent Islam.

The interactive meaning pertains to the eye docking of the Major actor with the viewers. The image lacks in it as the Major actor appears to look to the other side which shows the absence of gaze. The close-up shot shows his social closeness with the viewers. From the perspective of attitude, the vertical angle of the Major actor is seen at eye-level by the viewers showing a relation of equality between the main actor and the viewers. Linguistically speaking, the main slogan of the party "چنو نئی سوچ کو" (Choose a new leadership) is targeted to the young generation of Pakistan which forms the greater part of the population. The use of Urdu and the Sindhi language indicate the target audience. The sentence "کوئی خالی پیٹ نہیں سوئے گا" (No one will sleep on an empty stomach) in the Sindhi language show his commitment to eradicate poverty through a program at the level of Union Council from the Province Sindh.

The compositional meanings give some information value. The image of the Major actor is on the right side of the poster. As for salience, the foregrounded image of the Major actor is quite appropriate to attract the attention of the viewers. The framing feature finds harmony between the green color of the national flag and the party flag. It also shows that the Major actor appears to be very confident and satisfying due to his smile on his face.

Discussion

The poster designers following the party guideline seem to employ different visual devices such as narrative, conceptual, contact, social distance etc. to affect the viewers. The following table presents the idea of devices used by the designers to make the posters influential.

Table 1: Devices Used by the Poster Designers: Similarities and Differences

	Representation		Interaction			Compositional		
	Narrative	Concept	Contact	Social distance	Attitude	Information value	Salience	Framing
Figure 1	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Figure 2	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Figure 3		√		√	√	√	√	√

The vector in the posters of PML (N) and PTI exposes the strong relationship of the political figures with the supporters whereas the poster of PPP lacks in it. The symbolic attribution of the historical leaders in the posters of PML (N) tells the history of its political affiliation with them, but the posters of PTI and PPP are devoid of such historical figures.

Eye docking, social distance, attitude and linguistic choices make all the posters interactive. The Major actors in the posters of PML (N) and PTI share smile with the viewers, having eye contact with them. This feature reveals their satisfaction and hope for getting the favor of the viewers in the election.   The close-up images of all Major actors show their closeness with the viewers. Both verbal and non-verbal images reinforce the idea of interaction with the viewers. The candidates use specific linguistic and visual techniques in their political discourse as a genre designed to persuade people to choose them. (Saleh, 2021). The visual devices employed by PML (N), PTI and PPP in their posters also carry different party verbal slogans in the national election 2024. The Goal of all slogans is similar as to urge the people to cast their vote for them. PML (N) in its political slogan seems to highlight the indispensable need of the Major actor who can navigate Pakistan to development. The political slogan of PTI shows that change may only be brought through electoral process. PPP's political slogan highlights the importance of young leadership. Moreover, the Major actors appeared on the posters reveal their position in the parties.

The composition of the political posters consists of some important information to influence the viewers. The foregrounded images and the linguistics choices illustrate the position of the political figures and their preferences in the election. The poster designers consider both the

language and visual elements, aiming to combine them into an effective and inspiring image. (Qasim & Saleh, 2021). The contrasting color scheme used in the images and text reveals its ideological alignment with the national and party flags. All images seem to be constructed on the notion of nationalism as the Major actors have worn a national dress. They get the attention of the viewers, considering the nationalistic images of the Major participants.

Conclusion

The political discourse in the form of posters demonstrates the power of visual and linguistic characteristics to convince the viewers to vote. Owing to the importance of multimodality, political parties in Pakistan construct their political discourse in such a way that is influential on the viewers. The viewers make up their minds to decide their votes in favor of a political party. Therefore, political parties take much care of designing their online posters, mentioning their slogans and different signs. The image of the party head in a poster is purposefully used to seek the attention of the viewers. The three posters analyzed above successfully represent the political notions of the political parties. The candidates appearing on the posters not only represent their parties but also their country through the different colors in which they display their party flags. In addition, the composition of the posters makes them significantly interactive. The vector in the images of candidates gets the attention of the viewers. The satisfying smile on the candidates' faces show their friendly relationship with the viewers. Multimodality performs a critical role in the projection of political views in the revolutionary era of information technology. Using this medium of interaction, politicians not only in Pakistan but also in the entire world influence the public opinion. They avoid all the barriers of space and time in order to be accessible to the public. The developers of the online political posters design them according to the party's notions and ideology.

References

Ademilokun and Olateju 2015. A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Some Visual Images in the Political Rally Discourse of 2011 Electioneering Campaigns in Southwestern Nigeria *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language*. Retrieved February 14, 1015 from www.ijscl.net/article_14710_3010c06540ab7d35070352e76dd1248a.pdf

Adham, S. A. (2012). *A Semiotic Analysis of the Iconic Representation of Women in the Middle Eastern Media* (Dissertation). University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.

Dommett, K. (2019) The rise of online political advertising, *Political Insight*, 10(4), pp. 12–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905819891366.

Elsanhoury, Mohamed, et al. A multimodal discourse analysis of political speeches: The case of Donald Trump's 2016 election speeches. *Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 20, no. 2, 5 Oct. 2020, p. 168, https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.v20i2.2390.

Fattah, Ahmed Sultan Hussein and Sahar Abdul-Razzaq. (2020). A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Visual Images in Unchr Reports on Displaced Iraqis. *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology,* 17.

Harrison, C. (2003). Visual Social Semiotics: Understanding How Still Images Make Meaning. *Technical Communication*, 50, 46–60. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233555225

Hu, C. and Luo, M. (2016). A multimodal discourse analysis of Tmall's Double Eleven advertisement. *English Language Teaching*, 9 (8): 156-169.

Köksal, F. N., Erişen, H. (2023). "Multimodal Discourse: An Analysis of Two Political Advertising Visuals", *İMGELEM*, 7 (12): 249-268.

Kress, G. (2011). Discourse analysis and education: A multimodal social semiotic approach. Dalam An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education (hal. 205-226). Routledge

Kress, G. and Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge

Lirola, M. (2016). Multimodal analysis of a sample of political posters in Ireland during and after the Celtic Tiger. *Revista Signos*, 49(91): 245-267.

Qasim Obayes Al-Azzawi, & Saleh, Aziz Khalaf Abid. (2021). A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL POSTERS OF THE AMERICAN ELECTION OF 2020. Palarch's Journal of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology, 18(7)

Sinar, Meliana Siboro and T. Silvana. (2023). Towards Indonesia's 2024: A Multimodal Analysis of Presidential Election Online Posters. *LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research*, 4, 81-90.

Yıldırım, A., Şimşek, H. (2016). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri,* Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık