

PAPER

THE ROLE OF MULTIMODAL COMPONENTS ON SOCIAL NETWORK COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

In the contemporary social media communication landscape, there has been an increasing trend towards multimodal communication, where meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic, visual, graphic, and interactive resources. Among social network communication tools, Instagram stands out as a multimodal communication platform that emphasizes the visual, but also incorporates linguistic, graphic, and interactive elements. This study examines the role of multimodal elements in Instagram communication and how their interaction constructs meaning and engages users. The current study is informed by a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis approach, which is carried out on a corpus of Instagram texts that are purposively selected from publicly available data. The study examines the interplay between the verbal mode, which consists of the image captions and hashtags, the visual mode, which consists of the images and videos, the graphic mode, which consists of the use of emojis and layouts, and the interactive mode, which consists of the use of likes and comments. The study found that the visual mode is the main mode that attracts the audience's attention, followed by the image captions. Emojis and hashtags are also very important in the text and are crucial in the pragmatic and discursive construction of the text. Interactive elements are also crucial in the construction of the text.

Key words: multimodality; social media discourse; Instagram communication; multimodal discourse analysis; verbal–visual interaction; digital communication; media linguistics

Introduction

The rapid development of digital communication has profoundly changed the very essence of discourse in contemporary society. Social

networking sites have altered the focus of communication from being primarily verbal to being multimodal, where there is a coexistence of language, vision, and interactivity. In this new world of digital communication, Instagram

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is unique in that it is primarily visual, with the inclusion of other features such as captions, emojis, and interactivity. The theory of multimodality, as discussed by social semiotics, highlights the significance of meaning creation through the interplay of multiple semiotic modes, rather than just language. Researchers such as Kress and van Leeuwen have suggested that images, layout, and composition are used as systems of meaning creation, similar to verbal language. Further research on digital discourse has expanded the theory to incorporate the concept of social media, showing that online communication is based on the interplay of verbal and non-verbal elements.

Recent English-language studies have revealed that communication on Instagram is a case of this shift towards multimodal communication, where the main semantic load is placed on the image, while the caption, emojis, and hashtags are used for the interpretation of meaning, expression of stance, and creation of interpersonal relations. Research on social media discourse is concerned with the use of multimodal communication for identity formation, persuasion, expression of emotions, and audience engagement. Nevertheless, this research mainly focuses on visual communication or metrics of engagement, while the linguistic multimodal interface is not explored in depth.

In Uzbek linguistics, there has been a gradually increasing interest in digital discourse and multimodal communication in recent years. Researchers have studied media discourse, language use in online communication, and changes in traditional communicative norms in the digital age. However, there is a lack of multimodal studies on social media sites, especially Instagram, in Uzbek linguistics. Most studies on Uzbek social media communication have concentrated on either linguistic or media content aspects, but not on the combination of verbal and visual components as a semiotic system.

The present study is a continuation of the previous research on multimodality in social media communication, including the previous study that explored the interaction of the verbal and visual modes in Instagram communication and the development of media discourse in the digital sphere. Although the previous studies

have confirmed the interdependence of the use of captions, emojis, and images in Instagram communication, there is a need to conduct a more in-depth study of the functional potential of the multimodal elements in Instagram communication.

In this regard, the current research aims to examine the role of the multimodal elements in the process of Instagram communication, as well as the impact of the interaction of these elements on the process of meaning construction and user engagement. By drawing on the concepts of English-language multimodal discourse theory and Uzbek media linguistics, the current research aims to contribute to the field of digital discourse studies and extend the methodological application of the multimodal approach in Uzbek linguistics.

Research Design. In this study, a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis approach will be employed to examine communication on Instagram. Since Instagram is a multimodal platform, where meaning is made through the combination of visual, verbal, and graphic resources, a qualitative approach will enable a close analysis of the way semiotic resources work together in context.

Multimodal discourse analysis is particularly appropriate for this research, as it considers language, image, emojis, and layout as integrated modes of creating meaning, rather than separate entities. This approach fits well with current media linguistics and discourse studies in digital media, which focus on an integrated approach to semiotic means in online communication. The data sources used in this research were publicly available Instagram posts, accessed through open access accounts. The purposeful sampling method was used to ensure that the selected posts included those that clearly illustrate multimodal interaction. The selection criteria were as follows:

1. presence of visual content (images or videos);
2. inclusion of captions accompanying the visual material;
3. use of multimodal markers such as emojis and hashtags;
4. observable audience interaction in the form of likes and comments.

The data contains posts made within a specified time interval and covers a range of communicative settings. The focus on public posts

ensures compliance with ethical requirements and facilitates the examination of natural digital discourse.

The research uses a multimodal discourse analysis approach based on the principles of social semiotics and media linguistics. Each Instagram post is treated as a cohesive semiotic whole, with consideration of the interplay between the following modes:

1. Verbal mode: captions, hashtags, and comment threads;
2. Visual mode: images or videos, color schemes, framing, and composition;
3. Graphic mode: emojis, typography, and layout features;
4. Interactive mode: likes, comments, and engagement cues.

Rather, the focus of the analysis is on how these different modes complement, reinforce, or modify one another in terms of meaning. The analysis of the posts followed a series of steps. The first of these steps involved the analysis of each post to identify the various multimodal elements that made up the post. The second step involved the functional interpretation of the roles played by each of these elements in terms of their communicative context. In this case, special attention was given to the role of captions in the interpretation of images, the role of emojis in relation to emotional and interpersonal communication, and the role of hashtags both as discourse and organizational tools.

The analysis places more emphasis on functional interpretation and less emphasis on the frequency of the multimodal elements. In addition, where possible, the analysis of each post was compared to identify any multimodal patterns.

The ethical principles have been adhered to in all aspects of the research process. Only public posts on Instagram were used, and no private posts or messages were included in the research. User names and personal information were excluded from the analysis for the purpose of privacy. The research follows all the ethical guidelines for conducting research on social media. Results. Analysis of the Instagram posts indicates that communication on Instagram is essentially multimodal, and meaning is created through the combination of verbal, visual, graphic, and interactive modes of communication.

The results show that there are patterns in the way these modes of communication interact to create meaning and engage the audience. The results indicate that visual elements are essentially the attention-generating component of Instagram communication, and verbal elements are essentially used to guide interpretation. Images and videos are used to present the message, and captions are used to contextualize, clarify, or evaluate images and videos.

In several instances, captions not only describe but also frame the meaning of the image by providing it with emotional, ideological, and interpersonal connotations. In situations where images are semantically ambiguous, captions are seen to play a crucial role in influencing audience interpretation. On the other hand, captions are seen to draw on images to provide semantic completeness, suggesting that there is a symbiotic relationship between verbal and visual modes of communication.

Emojis are seen to be employed as a significant visual tool in Instagram communication. The research results suggest that emojis are employed as emotional intensifiers, stance, and verbal expressions. The use of emojis within captions is seen to be strategically located at critical evaluative points, which enhance the emotional tone of the message.

Instead of playing a purely decorative role, emojis play a part in interpersonal meaning through their association with friendliness, informality, or solidarity. Emojis also play a significant role in several posts in compensating for the lack of evaluative language.

Hashtags in Instagram posts carry out both discursive and technical functions. From a discursive point of view, hashtags play a role in making meaning through their use in emphasizing significant themes, values, or identities related to a post.

The findings revealed that hashtags in Instagram posts expand the semantic potential of captions through their capacity to link individual posts to broader social, cultural, or ideological contexts. In some cases, hashtags carry out a function of evaluative statements in a condensed form. The analysis shows that the role of visual composition

in Instagram communication is considerable. Such visual composition elements as color schemes, framing, and visual balance contribute to the overall coherence and aesthetic value of the messages.

The similarity in visual styles of the messages suggests that there are strategies of identity construction and branding.

The visual harmony and clarity contribute to the accessibility of the messages, and the visual elements enhance the effect of the messages and emojis.

Interactive features, such as likes and comments, operate as constituent parts of the multimodal landscape of Instagram. The findings show that those posts which have an optimal mix of visual aesthetics, concise textual content, and emotive use of graphics have higher levels of interaction. Although the quantification of interaction is not the focus of this study, the trends show that the richness of the multimodal landscape has a positive effect on the audience's engagement and response.

Discussion

The findings of this study verify that communication on Instagram is essentially multimodal in nature, and it is through the dynamic interplay of verbal, visual, graphic, and interactive components of messages that meaning is constructed. The findings of this study support the perspective of multimodal discourse studies, which argued that communication in virtual spaces cannot be accounted for through linguistic analysis because meaning is constructed through multiple semiotic modes.

The dominance of visual components of messages in this study is consistent with the perspective of social semiotic theories of communication, which argued that images play a central role in modern media discourse. However, it must be noted that this study also verified that visual dominance does not negate the role of language in any way and that it is through captions that audience interpretation is framed and meanings are reinforced and constructed, which is consistent with earlier arguments in multimodal discourse studies that verbal and visual modes of communication are interdependent.

The functional use of emojis, as evidenced in the

data, further supports the extension of linguistic resources in digital discourse. Emojis are used as pragmatic markers to signal emotional stance, interpersonal alignment, and evaluative meaning. These results are in line with English-language studies on digital pragmatics, which treat emojis as semiotic extensions of language rather than as mere decorations. However, the current study contributes to this body of research by showing how emojis interact with visual imagery and captions to construct cohesive multimodal messages.

Hashtags, as shown in the analysis, are used as linguistic, social, and technical resources at the same time. This dual function is a reflection of the platform-specific affordances of Instagram, where meaning-making is inextricably tied to visibility. From a discourse perspective, hashtags are used as units of condensed semantics that index themes, values, and affiliations. This finding is in line with previous studies on social media discourse, but it also emphasizes the need to consider hashtags from a multimodal perspective.

From the point of view of Uzbek linguistics, the results contribute to the developing trend in digital and media discourse research. Although prior Uzbek linguistic research has concentrated on linguistic features in an isolated manner, the current study extends the value of its analysis by including multimodal discourse analysis in social media communication. By investigating the interplay between verbal and non-verbal resources, the current research extends methodological practices in Uzbek media linguistics. The results extend prior linguistic research on multimodality in social media communication by specifying the function of the multimodal components in Instagram communication. Although prior research established the existence of multimodality in Instagram communication, the current study clarifies the contribution of specific resources in meaning construction, identity formation, and audience engagement. In this manner, the current research reinforces the importance of linguistically oriented multimodal analysis in digital discourse research.

In summary, the discussion above highlights that the discourse on Instagram is a reflection of the changes that are taking place in communication,

where meaning is being constructed through visuality, affect, and interaction. The findings above point to the need for interdisciplinary research approaches that bring together linguistics, media studies, and social semiotics to study digital communication.

Conclusion

This research has explored the role of multimodal components in Instagram communication, highlighting the role of verbal, visual, graphic, and interactive components in meaning-making. The results of this research have confirmed that Instagram communication is a multimodal form of communication in which meaning is made not through language alone, but through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes.

The results of this research have also shown that the visual component plays a central role in attracting the viewer's attention, while the caption provides an interpretive anchor for the visual component. The use of emojis and hashtags has been shown to extend linguistic expression by indicating emotional tone, interpersonal coordination, and thematic framing.

Interactive components also play a role in reinforcing engagement, positioning the viewer as an active participant in the communication process. Through the integration of multimodal discourse analysis and media-linguistic approaches, this research makes a contribution to the emerging area of digital discourse studies. It adds to English-language scholarship by offering a specific, functionally oriented analysis of communication on Instagram and makes a contribution to Uzbek linguistics by illustrating the analytical potential of multimodal research in the area of social media discourse.

The results also emphasize the methodological significance of considering Instagram messages as a unitary semiotic whole. This enables researchers to adequately grasp the complexity of modern digital communication and to gain a deeper insight into the processes of meaning, identity, and engagement construction in online communication contexts.

Future studies could extend this research by incorporating quantitative data on engagement,

cross-cultural or cross-linguistic differences, or multimodal communication in various social media sites. As the face of digital communication is likely to change, multimodal analysis will be key to understanding the dynamics of discourse in virtual environments.

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