A Semiotic Study of Selected UNICEF Posters on COVID 19 Pandemic

Hend Abdel Salam Kandel

Affiliation: Modern University for Technology and Information (MTI)

Abstract

The present study inspects selected posters of COVID 19 pandemic published by the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF amidst the pandemic. In fact, the agency is mainly concerned with providing many humanitarian aids to children worldwide. The aids include disease prevention and childhood development in response to any calamity. Thus, one of its purposes is to help children and youth to face deadly crises such as COVID 19 disease. This research assumes that the visual images issued by UICEF amid the pandemic have been able to raise awareness concerning the preventive measures that reduce the chances of COVID 19 infection. This is achieved by creating cheerful and educative posters that boost the psychological state of its viewers, and can be delivered to various audiences with their diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The rationale of electing the posters stems from its importance in merging graphic and written styles to instruct people to deal with this dilemma. This is attained by performing a semiotic analysis of the images using Kress and Van Leeuwen framework for reading visual images (2006). This research hypothesizes that the analytical tools employed in the study tend to display the powerful effect of visual texts on the audience, more specifically, children and it could be combined into a coherent, meaningful analysis. The outcomes of the analysis prove that the framework applied in the study is comprehensive and has succeeded in delivering the intended messages in an innovative, different method, that are far away from any other stereotyping ones.

Keywords*: COVID 19 Pandemic; UNICEF; Semiotic Analysis*

تحليل سيميائي لبعض الملصقات الصادره من منظمه اليونسيف اثناء جائحه كوفيد ١٩

المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم تحليل سيميائي لبعض الملصقات الصادره من منظمه اليونيسف أثناء جائحه انتشار وباء كوفيد ١٩ , **وتهدف هذه الملصقات** من زيادة الوعي بشأن التدابير الوقائية التي من شِأنها تقلل من فرص الإصابة بــالمرض. و يتم تحقيق ذلك من خلال إصدار ملصقات تثقيفية تعزز الحالة النفسية لمشاهديها وفي نفس الوقت يمكن عرضها علي مختلف الجماهير بخلفياتهم الاجتماعية والثقافية المتنوعة. و من أجل تحقيق ذلك الهدف قام الباحث بتحليل سيميائي للصور بإستخدام الإطار النظري ل كريس و فان ليوون لعام ٢٠٠٦ لقراءة الصور المرئية . و يفترض هذا البحث أن الأدوات التحليلية المستخدمة في الدراسة تميل إلى إظهار التأثير القوي للنصوص المرئية على الجمهور ، وبشكل أكثر تحديدًا ، الأطفال وبالتالي يمكن دمجها في تحليل متماسك و هادف. وتؤكد الدراسه في مخرجات البحث أن الإطار المطبق قد نجح في إيصال الرسائل المقصودة بطريقة مبتكرة ومختلفة بعيدة عن أي قوالب نمطية أخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحيه :*كوفيد ١٩* ،*منظمه اليونيسف*، تحليل سيميائي

Semiotic Study of Selected UNICEF Posters on COVID 19 Pandemic

Hend Abdel Salam Kandel

Affiliation: Modern University for Technology and Information (MTI)

0.1 Introduction

COVID 19 is a continuing global <u>pandemic</u> which is caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus. It has toppled the lives of hundreds of children and their families across the world. It also has led to exceptional global challenge in public health sector, work life, food systems and social life. Moreover, it has resulted in various economic and social disorders; as throughout this crisis which started in 2019, people worldwide have encountered not only a health crisis, but a social, economic and humanitarian one. Actually, this pandemic has affected all segments of the population. Although studies have suggested that children are not the most affected categories by the virus, it has changed dramatically their day to day lives. As in order to reduce the spread of COVID 19 virus, a lot of preventive methods have been implemented such as quarantines, social distance, and travel limitation. Moreover, closing schools, universities and shopping malls, avoiding congested places and distancing themselves physically were from the implemented measures.

Consequently, the governments, organizations and institutions have resorted to handle the pandemic by improving its policies to manage this crisis. There have been many key challenges to cope with it. Resorting to digital platform instead of face to face interactions in schools and universities and working from home were from the main procedures that have been implemented to cope with the crisis. In fact, children are quite vulnerable when it comes to the side effects of this pandemic. Therefore, one challenge is to reach each child worldwide, with their different language and socio-cultural background. It is essential to inform them about the crisis and educate them about it in a pleasant way for the sake of their psychological state. Being at home for approximately one year, in front of screens, it was necessary to address them visually and not only by direct oral messages. One of the notable efforts is the one exerted by UNICEF. It has settled child –friendly COVID- 19 posters for different facilities. In fact, UNICEF has exerted much effort to convey dependable help to parents, educationalists, and all sectors to guarantee that they have the data and means they require keeping children in fine fettle and at the same time to keep the process of learning.

1.1 Significance of the study

Parents and children during COVID 19 pandemic have been subject to various challenges. One of the most important ones is coping with the negative effects of the quarantines which involve; the quality of life for children and individuals, low levels of physical activities in addition to the increasing levels of stress and anxiety among family members. United Nations Organization (2020) states that "beyond the catastrophic direct negative effects of the virus, other indirect mental and physical health concerns like depression, anxiety, and family violence appear to be increasing. The director of the OPS has claimed the Pan-American region is experiencing a "perfect storm" of events leading to an unprecedented mental health crisis. Uncertainty, stress, and stay-at-home orders may have exacerbated these issues that likewise may be underreported in the wake of reduced access to support and extension services.

In fact, the excessive exposure to screen time during the pandemic has been reported and noticed in each and every family; whether for education, entertainment or even socializing. According to Kress (2010), "image has been a part of human cultures-longer than script…image has been the subject of much interest, academic, or otherwise over millennia" (p.5). Therefore, using visuals images can have major influence on the young minds and can reach all sociodemographic categories with their diverse educational level in terms of raising responsiveness about the risks of the pandemic and encouraging families to cope with the stress to prevent the spread of the virus.

1.2 Objective of the study

The researcher in this study investigates qualitatively selected UNICEF posters on COVID 19 pandemic. The researcher desires to evaluate the effect of these posters on families in general and children in particular with their diverse socio-cultural backgrounds during this crisis. The study aims at investigating whether visual messages could have more or less influence on audience compared to verbal and linguistic ones. In order to achieve this goal, a qualitative and a descriptive approach of research has been employed by applying Kress and Van Leeuwen's framework (2006) for analyzing visual images.

1.3 Study Questions

The current study aims at answering the following questions;

1- To what extent has the UNICEF succeeded in raising the awareness about the risks of COVID 19?
2- How various semiotic resources have been used in conveying this message?

It is worth mentioning that the aim of the research is not to prove that semiotic analysis is better than traditional linguistic analysis. Neither does the study aims at boosting semiotic analysis against traditional one. The study is triggered by a desire to examine how images can be used as a universal language to address different audience with diverse backgrounds.

1.4   Data Collection

The data used in the analysis are four health posters. They are exhibited at the UNICEF official website (https://www.unicef.org). The posters are displayed at the website under the name of "what we should know about coronavirus disease (Covid 19 Posters).

1.5   Why have UNICEF posters been chosen?

The acronym UNICEF, according to (UICEF 2002), stands for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and now United Nations Children's Fund. Moreover, UNICEF plays an important role "to advance and protect child rights and to provide health care, immunizations, nutrition, access to safe water and sanitation services, education, protection and emergency relief." Actually, today "UNICEF works in more than 190 countries and territories to save and improve children's lives." In fact, during the pandemic era, people must be aware of new development of the virus. According to Cook (1992), the aim of the ads or advertisers, is "to push the product, via the world fiction and fantasy, into the real world of the consumer (p.177). Therefore, it is essential to study the power of these educative posters in helping the readers to follow the safety protocols and the visual guidelines. In addition, it is interesting to study how these posters make the public aware of the risks of the virus and enlighten the targeted audience to take a specific action.

2. Review of Literature
2.1 Review of Previous Studies

Many studies have been conducted to examine the role of semiotic analysis in analyzing visual images. Tsotra et al (2004) have employed the semiotic theory to expose hidden meanings in Internet marketing. They have examined two examples of Internet marketing and have clarified how probable customers with diverse social experiences observe the marketed product.

Another study is the one conducted by Wesam Ayada (2018), the researcher examines how using nostalgia as a communication strategy can support TV advertisements designers to impact the consumer behavior towards the product, and if it is a fruitful policy that lead them to use it over and over.

Another study has been done by Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf in (2018). This study detects not only the diverse depictions and semiotics that web news texts reflect, but also how these different sign structures could have impacts on meanings. To achieve this goal, she employed an approach by Bell (1998) who applied the semiotics analysis theory adopted by Bignell (2002) and Danesi (2002).

As for the UN refugee agency, an inspiring study has been conducted by Hussein, A., & Fattah, S. (2020). They have analyzed the representational, interactional and compositional characteristics of Seven images. They have utilized Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) model. The study concludes by finding out that images are administered by evidently visual grammar constructions that can be employed to interpret numerous connotations.

Abdeen (2015) has utilized not only the semiotic theory created by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) but she has also used this framework on the metafunction principles of Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). She has analyzed in details some Egyptian presidential election campaign posters released in 2012 and 2014. She has proved that social semiotic theory can be applied to reveal hidden ideology and to unveil the deeper level of meaning that is not stated directly or obviously.

Similarly, Muhassin (2022) has used a semio-pragmatic approach to analyze the Health Organization campaign posters against COVID 19. The researcher in this study aims at digging deep into the linguistic elements used to uncover hidden meaning. He has used also a qualitative framework to simplify the results of the analysis and to provide a better understanding to the reader.

It is obvious from the previously mentioned studies in this section that analyzing signs as a non-linguistic system is common and essential in communication. It could also encode hidden ideologies. Besides, the theory is socially flexible and can be applied in various topics and fields.

2.2 Review of Social Semiotics

The current study employs Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) theoretical framework for analyzing images. They have developed one of the most important theories in semiotic analysis. In fact, kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) show that previous studies on visual semiotics have focused on analyzing 'lexis' rather than 'grammar', that's why in this

book the main concern is to focus on the analysis of grammar and how all the syntactic elements are associated together to form a meaningful piece. They illustrate that " Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so our visual 'grammar' will describe the way in which depicted elements – people, places and things – combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension." (p.1). Consequently, the book offers "a usable description of major compositional structures which have become established in the course of the history of western visual semiotics, and to analyze how are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-markers" (p.1).

Kress (2010) points out that, the world of communication has changed and is changing still; and the reason for that lies in a vast web of intertwined social, economic, cultural and technological changes" (p. 5). He stresses the importance of semiotic theory, he outlines three fundamental points. The first "members of communities have access to the semiotic and other cultural resources essential to act in their social world". The second point is that members are "able to contribute to common purposes by dealing productively with constantly new culture, semiotic and social problems and by designing, representing and communicating their suggested solution of them". Third, "that in their social-semiotic actions, members of social group have a clear sense of the effects of their (semiotic) actions on others and act so as not impair the potentials for actions of others. (p. 18)

In the same vein, kress et al (1996), coined a state-of-the-art term; which is "satellite view of language" which means that linguists and analysts must step away from the outmoded vision of language. For them, language is not the only foundation for building meaning; it is just one means among others. Moreover, O'Halloran (2008) states that "The task of capturing and analyzing complex multimodal constructions of reality becomes imperative as the realm of the visual and the multimodal increasingly move alongside the linguistic through the advance of technology. (p. 470)

Consequently, it becomes clear that communication is multimodal: by speech at time, as spoken comment, an instruction or request; by gaze, by actions passing an instrument, reaching out for an instrument; by touch. At all times communications are a response to 'promote': A gaze might product a spoken comment that leads to an action; looking at the screen by both surgeons produces a guiding touch by one of the other's hand; an out stretched hand is met by an instrument being passed. Communications have happened when a participant's attentions have

focused on some aspects of the communications; she or he has taken that to be a message and has a framed aspect of that message as a prompt for her or himself. That prompt has been interpreted, becoming a new inward sign, and it in turn leading, potentially, to further communications action. The semiotic sequence of actions→ farming → interpretation is ceaseless; it involves all the participant's here, at all times, though differently in each case. The larger social event here can be framed in at least two ways – from a clinical and from a pedagogic perspective. (Kress,2010, p. 31).

On the whole, the following illustration of the visual image theory offered by Kress and van Leeuwen is taken as a basis for the analysis in this study

> Our approach to communication starts from a social base. In our view the meanings expressed by speakers, writers, printmakers, photographers, designers, painters and sculptors are first and foremost social meanings, even though we acknowledge the effect and importance of individual differences. Given that societies are not homogeneous, but composed of groups with varying, and often contradictory, interests, the messages produced by individuals will reflect the differences, incongruities and clashes which characterize social life (2006, p.20).

2.3   Kress and Van Leeuwen's Model for Analyzing Images

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) build their full system of visual communication on the theoretical notion of 'metafunction' from the work of Halliday & Matthiessen (2004). The three metafunctions which he posits are the "ideational, the interpersonal and the textual" (p.40-41). O'Halloran (2008) highlights the same idea when he states that "the metafunctional principle provides a basis for examining the functionalities of semiotic resources and for analyzing the ways in which semiotic choices interact in multimodal discourses to fulfil particular objectives (e.g. to construct knowledge in school textbooks; to persuade a consumer to purchase a product; to stir the public to violence in the name of a religious cause." (p.444).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) have used the concept of metafunctions, and established the three metafunctions in VG (visual grammar), the first is the representational meaning, the second is the interactive meaning and finally the compositional meaning. For Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), any image should come across the three metafunctions. This is achieved by signifying the world, then creating communication on various scales between the producer and the viewer,

on the one hand, and between the exemplified participants, on the other, and finally it should form a distinct method of text.

2.3.1 **Representational Metafunction**

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) define the representational meta-function, as the ability of semiotic systems to symbolize things and their relationships in the outside world; how things are encoded and presented visually in a certain context, event, or a situation. They added that, there are two types of participants in every visual image. Firstly, interactive participants who interact with the make images or view them. Secondly, the represented participants who create the subject matter of the communication. They are the people, places and things even nonconcrete things represented in and by the speech or writing or image. As for the process types, it could be either narrative or conceptual. The narrative process is distinguished by a vector or by a tree structure that connects the participants.

Figure 1 vector
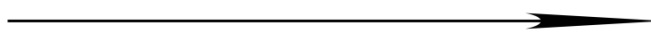
Figure 2 tree structure

Kress and van Leeuwen, (2006) state that "visual structures of representation can either be narrative, presenting unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements, or conceptual, representing participants in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning" (p.79). They illustrate that there are many classes of narrative processes: action, reactional, speech, mental, and conversion, depending on the types of vectors as illustrated above and participants involved. As for the actions, there are two types of actions, transitional actions and non-transitional actions. For them, "transactional structure… have the role of 'Actor and a goal'. (p. 52). However, non- transitional one is "formed by a (usually diagonal) depicted element, or an arrow, emanates from a participant, the Actor, but does not point at any other participant" (p. 74).

In regard to conceptual processes, Kress and Van Leeuwen explain that they "represent participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning, in other words, in terms of their generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, narrative patterns serve to present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements" (2006, p.59). Then, they are classified into classificational, analytical, and symbolic. They introduced the idea of taxonomy in which participants are related to each other by kinds of relations "classificational processes relate participants to each other in terms of a 'kind of' relation, a taxonomy: at least one set of participants will play the role of Subordinates with respect to at least one other participant, the Superordinate." (p.79). They are further categorized into covert and overt taxonomy.

Unlike conceptual processes, analytical processes attach participants in terms of a part and its whole. On other words a whole and its component parts. This is illustrated in the following quotation "Analytical processes relate participants in terms of a part–whole structure. They involve two kinds of participants: one Carrier (the whole) and any number of Possessive Attributes (the parts)" (ibid, p. 87). There are many other participants that the researcher will list it shortly as it is not the main scope of the study; "Unstructured analytical process, temporal analytical process, exhaustive analytical process, dimensional topographical accuracy, quantitative topographical accuracy, topological accuracy and finally abstraction" (ibid, p.104).

Finally, Symbolic processes portray what a participant is or what a participant represents. According to Kress and Leeuwen (2006, p. 105) symbolic attributes are related to one or more of the following characteristics;

- They are made salient in the representation in one way or another; for instance, by being placed in the foreground, through exaggerated size, through being especially well lit, through being represented in especially fine detail or sharp focus, or through their conspicuous color or tone.
- They are pointed at by means of a gesture which cannot be interpreted as an action other than the action of 'pointing out the symbolic attribute to the viewer' – here we can include also the arrows which can connect visual realizations of participants with verbal realizations of the same participant, or vice versa, for these also establish a relation of identity through 'pointing'.
- They look out of place in the whole, in some way.
- They are conventionally associated with symbolic values.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that analyzing a poster, an image or even a diagram resembles the analysis of any piece of writing, henceforth, various kinds of processes could merge together or could appear individually. It could also have multifaceted outline of analysis with different interpretations based on the culture, interpreter and the audience. This gives a clear indication and accounts of his/her critical opinion concerning a specific topic.

2.3.2 **Interactive Metafunction**

This metafunction studies the connection between various participants and the viewer inside the image, they assert that "the images (and other kinds of visual) involve two kinds of participants, represented participants (the people, the places and things depicted in images) and interactive participants (the people who communicate with each other through images, the producers and viewers of images" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p.114). In fact, the relationship between the image and its viewer is multifarious as it includes three kinds of relations "(1) relations between represented participants; (2) relations between interactive and represented participants (the interactive participants' attitudes towards the represented participants); and (3) relations between interactive participants (the things interactive participants do to or for each other through images). (Ibid, 2006: 114). There are three dimensions in the interactive metafunctions; namely, image act, social distance, camera angel and modality.

Regarding the "image act", it refers to the gaze, facial expressions and other non-verbal signs. The gaze direction could be headed to the viewer which states "a demand" or an "offer" if the represented participants are not directed or pointed at the audience

> It is possible to relate the meanings conveyed by 'demands' and 'offers' to the linguistic system of person. As we have seen, 'demand' pictures address the viewer directly, realizing a visual 'you'. But this is not matched by a visual 'I'. The 'I' is absent in pictures or, rather, objectified, hiding behind a he/she/they. The 'demand' picture therefore reminds more of the language of, for instance, advertisements and instructions, where 'you's' abound but 'I's' are rare, than, say, of the language of personal letters, where 'I's'and 'you's' are likely to be equally common. (p. 122)

Therefore, if the addresser wants the recipients to interact, images are portrayed to point at the viewer directly. This takes place through pointing to or gazing at the viewer to "demand" him to interact as in advertisements and Posters. However, offers orient the viewer in an indirect way. In this case, there is no gaze as the interacted participants in the image intermingle with the various other elements to achieve the target goal from the image.

The second dimension tackles social distance. Social distance is shaped by frame and size. The size of the frame, whether it is "close, medium, or long" is applicable on all kinds of images that include people, backgrounds, edifices or constructions. They are classified into six postures that could affect the ideological meaning in certain images. It could be "intimate distance" in which the face or the head are seen clearly. At "close personal distance" the head and the shoulders are shown. At "far personal distance" a person from the waist up is exposed in an image. As for "close social distance" the whole figure is exhibited. At far social distance the whole figure 'with space around it' is displayed. Finally, there is the "public distance" in which the torso of at least four or five people are presented and displayed to the viewer. (Kress and Leeuwen 2006, p. 125). It is clear from this illustration that this visual system is derived mainly from our everyday face to face contact with others and it resembles the conventional classifications of size of frame in television.

Another way in which images represent and signify the relationships between the viewer and the denoted participants is the choice between different camera angels. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) argue that it reflects the "point of view" of the image creator. Stoain (2015) acknowledges that Participants can be represented from numerous angles in order to specify a specific message. For instance, the horizontal angle can be frontal and indicate involvement or oblique and show detachment. Concerning, the vertical angle, it could be high and dispense authority to interactive participants, low and make represented participants more influential, or eye level and preserve equivalent relations

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p.148) summarize camera angles as follows

Involvement	frontal angle
Detachment	oblique angle
Viewer power	high angle
Equality	eye-level angle
Represented participant power	low angle

Table 1

Modality is the last element included in the interactive met-function. Modality in semiotic theory is achieved mainly through the use of colors. Kress and Van Leeuwen argue that "the concept of modality is equally essential in accounts of visual communication. Visuals can represent people, places and things as though they are real, as though they actually exist in this way, or as though they do not – as though they are imaginings, fantasies, caricatures, etc" (2006, p. 156)

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), there are eight scales that are considered as modality markers;

(1) Color saturation, a scale running from full color saturation to the absence of color; that is, to black and white.

(2) Color differentiation, a scale running from a maximally diversified range of colors to monochrome.

(3) Color modulation, a scale running from fully modulated color, with, for example, the use of many different shades of red, to plain, unmodulated color

(4) Contextualization, a scale running from the absence of background to the most fully articulated and detailed background.

(5) Representation, a scale running from maximum abstraction to maximum representation of pictorial detail.

(6) Depth, a scale running from the absence of depth to maximally deep perspective.

(7) Illumination, a scale running from the fullest representation of the play of light and shade to its absence.

(8) Brightness, a scale running from a maximum number of different degrees of brightness to just two degrees: black and white, or dark grey and lighter grey, or two brightness values of the same color. (p. 160-162)

They also introduce the concept of "hue". Hue is "a distinctive feature theory of color it becomes only one of the factors constituting the complex and composite meanings of color, (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 235). According to Caivano (1988, p.391), colors follow the same patterns as the dictionaries do as "Color order, but they have an organization that works not only on the expression plane…, but also on the content plane", he adds that,

> In the compilation of words in a dictionary there is a similarity on the expression plane among consecutive words, that is, they are lexically and phonetically similar, but their meanings may be completely different... In color

order systems, colors are usually arranged according to their similarities in hue, lightness, and saturation, but this organization also causes the meanings associated with colors to be related.

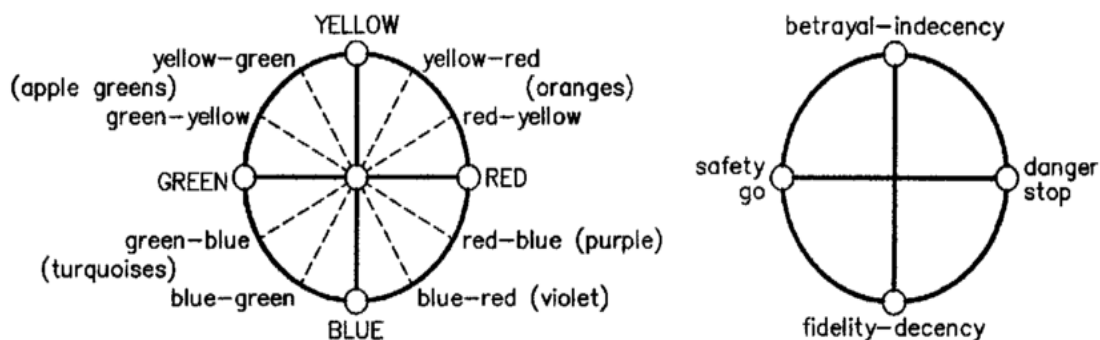This idea is illustrated and summarized in the figure below

Figure 3 Color wheel with opposite hue sensations and opposite conventional meanings (Caivano, J. 1988).

Caivano (1988) explains the above figure showing that "with the meanings assigned to each one, we realize that opposite concepts coincide with opposite hues. This is true of blue as a symbol of fidelity and decency, as opposed to yellow as a symbol of betrayal and indecency; also with red = danger, stop, as opposed to green =safety" (p. 398). Consequently, the way colors are arranged and represented reflect the semantic meaning of the presented images as the verbal dictionaries provide the syntactic level.

2.3.3 Compositional meta-function

The last dimension is derived mainly from Halliday's (1978) textual metafunction. Kress and Van Leeuwen define it as "the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole" (2006, p. 176). This dimension includes; firstly, "Information value". It refers to the method in which elements are set to provide them with the comprehensive informational values attached to the numerous 'zones' of the image: left and right, top and bottom, centre and margin. Secondly, "Salience" that focuses on how image makers are able to clasp the observer's consideration by many factors such as location in the foreground or background, relative size, contrasts in tonal value (or color). Finally, "framing" that shows the presence or absence of framing devices (realized by elements which create dividing lines, or by actual frame lines). (p. 177)

3. The Analysis

3.1 Representational Metafunction:

As for the ideational analysis, the images display transactional actions that show actors with a vector connecting them. It is a narrative representation not a conceptual one as the reactors in the four posters are of all ages and genders. They are presented as young ladies and house-wives with their kids are chatting in an open green area. The portrayal of nature in the images has a relieving reflection upon the viewers. In a qualitative study done by Ooi et al (2023), they find out that "several participants, young and old, found it 'therapeutic' connecting with nature, where some participants described that seeing plants grow symbolized a sense of time passing. (p. 11).

As for the other participants in the images, men wear suits as an indication of doing business. Some youth are exercising and playing basketball in an open campus. They are depicted as dressing a trendy sportive outfit. The posters highlight the idea of divergence and closeness. Not only do they address different audience with their diverse needs, but also the recipients can easily relate themselves to them. This idea is further confirmed as (Corral-Verdugo et al, 2021) assert that "The influence of family and social support appears to be reinforced during health crises, representing an important buffer against the negative effects of contagious outbreaks" (p. 3). This idea is clearly represented in the posters as the concept of socializing is highlighted and shown undoubtedly.

Amidst coronavirus worries, the posters displayed by the UNICEF have encouraged positive practices. Positive Environment (PE) is perceived as "a context that promotes individual and collective benefits and that also influences human predispositions to conserve—in the long run—the sociophysical structures on which life depends" (Corral-Verdugo and Frías-Armenta, 2016, p. 965). Consequently, the posters boost a foot-to-foot greeting instead of handshaking. It is noteworthy that the participants in the displayed posters are tapping their foot as a note for other people to do the same in order to reduce the spread of the deadly virus. Surprisingly, all participants are exhibited in the posters without wearing masks as the main message as written in the caption "is to keep your distance". Actually, the posters published are characterized with an emphasis on the idea of positivity and interaction.

From this multiple analysis, there is a multifarious set of relations that occur between the targeted posters and their viewers. In fact, the reactors are active, and they are involved in some activities; they are also energetic. These transactional structures are called by Kress and Van

Leeuwen (2006, p.66) "bidirectional", as "each participant playing now the role of Actor, now the role of Goal". According to (Corral-Verdugo, et al 2021) "the design and maintenance of PEs may represent a viable strategy for facing serious issues like the COVID-19 pandemic, while maintaining individual and group wellbeing. These concepts may further inform official response to other environmental challenges moving forward, like climate change" (p. 3).

To sum up, the posters demonstrate a multidimensional reaction by examining the relation between these processes and the circular representation of the children with their parents, in addition to the younger generation. The posters represent the participants as independent, trendy and effective. The major message of the posters is that any person can create a cheerful atmosphere despite the dull threats and news of the deadly virus. This idea is asserted by Ooi et al (2023), they explain that "some individual behaviours, such as those involving outdoor activities, have been shown to predict better well-being during the pandemic" (p.2). Subsequently, the viewer could feel cheered and comforted by viewing these posters as he/she can cope with the disaster by keeping the appropriate precautionary performances in the basis of environmental positivity.

3.2 The Interpersonal Metafunction

By digging deep in analyzing the presented posters, there are a number of representational and interactive relations. The study focuses on analyzing the gaze, camera angle and framing and finally modality as manifested by the use of colors, illumination and shading.

3.2.1 Gaze

By examining the four posters, it becomes clear that there is no direct eye contact between the represented participants and the viewers. In fact, the participants are not pointing at the viewers and not even facing them. This indicates that the image creators just want to offer and communicate information. They don't address the audience directly by giving traditional messages and instructions that was common during the pandemic, as the prevailing posters were merely direct instructions submitted by a member of the health institutions pointing directly to the audience and informing them about the virus. Instead the posters guide the viewers to interact positively during Covid 19 pandemic; and most importantly to cope with it, this is achieved by portraying the participants pleased, and energetic. According to Ooi et al (2023)

> How people deal with stressors reflect the concept of coping—crucial psychological and behavioural factors for how individuals draw on behavioural and cognitive

efforts to manage stress Various coping strategies have been theoretically identified, including problem-focused coping (i.e., use of planning, restraint, or social support for practical reasons) and emotion-focused coping (i.e., acceptance, denial, positive reinterpretation, or social support for emotions) (p.2)

Moreover, the participants' facial expressions, which is a non-verbal code, display their psychological state and attitude. It is clear that their body language is very spirited and cheerful. The posters emphasize the importance of being mentally positive in order to enhance your physical health. These kinds of messages and posters were not dominant during the outbreak of the virus. In fact, they are able to offer the required information to the recipients with their various social, cultural, economic background.

3.2.2 Camera Angle:

Camera angle is another semiotic signifier that indicates the type of relation between the participants and the viewer. It could be either horizontal or vertical, high angle or low one, frontal or oblique. A vertical image is the one that is bigger in height than in width. Unlike the horizontal ones, they have less capacity and they focus only on particular person to highlight it against the rest elements in the image. In deed "Where you place your camera, relative to a subject, will have a strong influence on what it looks like to your audience, and how they feel about it…even a slight variation from an eye-level position can affect the impact of a subject. (Millerson, 2001, p. 56)

As for the presented data in this study, they are posted in front and horizontally which cope with the human anatomy of the eye that moves naturally by making horizontal movements. This means from right to left and vice versa. This results to a better view and record to the visual information of the image. In fact this indicates "involvement". According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) "The horizontal angle encodes whether the image-producer …is 'involved' with the represented participants or not. The frontal angle says, as it were, 'What you see here is part of our world, something we are involved with." (P. 136). "The frontal angle is the angle of maximum involvement. It is oriented towards action." (145)

3.2.3 Social Distance:

In the four posters the represented participants are entirely visible and at the eye level of the viewer which suggests that they are at close social distance, but physically are not close by maintaining a safe distance. The viewer can feel that he/she is one of the participants. There is no superiority over them as the close social distance might indicate that the viewer can become acquainted with the participants and get close enough to as if he/she is one of them. Therefore, the shorter the distance between the participants and viewer the more intimate the relation becomes.

3.2.4 Modality as Represented by Colours:

kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) show that "what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and clause structures, may, in visual communication, be expressed through the choice between different uses of colors or different compositional structures. And this will affect meaning. Expressing something verbally or visually makes a difference." (p.2). This can be shown in the UNICEF Poster

s as colors are utilized in the posters to attain special effects in reference to the representation related to the colors.

Regarding the use of colors in the four images, they appear to have high modality that shows the images as if it is realistic. High modality is achieved by many modality factors. One of the most important factors is high saturation which is reflected in the choice of the participants' outfit colors, in the four images, it is rich, vivid and intense. The use of the blue, green and cyan colors to portray nature is very robust. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen "When color becomes more saturated, we judge it exaggerated, 'more than real', excessive" (2006, p.159). Nevertheless, the background is less focused and less saturated in color than the foreground as the main emphasis of the posters is to focus on the participants.

On the other hand, the virus is depicted by two colors dark purple and icky green. According to Caivano (1988, 397) "in the past, when purple was   very difficult and expensive to obtain, it was the color of royalty. In the Roman Empire, only senators, victorious generals, and the emperor himself were allowed to wear purple. Today, this indexical connection has disappeared".

This is true as corona virus in the posters is painted in purple and dark green. In this context, the purple color evokes intense emotions to the observer. It can develop feelings of pessimism, sadness, and frustration, as for the green color in this context; it implies rot and decay as an alert of coronavirus danger to everyone, although on other contexts, it reflects serenity and peacefulness. It is noted that the red color is used in two instances; a circle surrounds the virus and an arrow that warns the participants to keep two-meter distance. The red color, in this context, signposts danger and threat. It could stem from the direct exposure to the virus or by not keeping the appropriate social distance. It is very catchy and intense, as it can be spotted from distance by any individuals.

Another chief feature that conveys modality is contextualization. There are many marks that can be traced to purport high or low modality within each positioning. Topper (1996) mentioned in (Wilson & Landon-Hays, 2016) states

> that image with low contextualization often feature subjects placed against solid white backgrounds, whereas images with high contextualization feature subjects placed in specific settings characterized by spatial depth and richness of detail. Minimal contextualization often indicates higher modality in schematic images because their purpose is to strip away all elements of a phenomenon that are not necessary to an explanation (p.5)

This is reflected in the posters, as for the contextualization, the purpose of the posters is conveyed clearly without any explanation with effusively diverse range of colors with maximal degrees of brightness and there is not stiff shadows and glare on the eyes which indicates high modality. The maximum representation of details of participants such as emphasis on their gestures and facial expressions help impressively to provide the depictive meaning.

To sum up, the analysis of the interpersonal aspects have proved that images can be read easily and can show the relationship between the interactive participant on the one hand and various recipients on the other.

3.3 Compositional Metafunctions

This metafunction includes; the placement of information in addition to salient features and framing.

3.3.1 Placement of Information

The posters in this study can read from right to left, or left to right in a horizontal axis. The visual message is supplemented by the verbal notes

as there are captions on the bottom of three posters and on the top for one poster. It is written in white and the imperative mode is used to demand them to follow the rules and at the same time to give them instruction concerning the positive environment "PEs allow people to flourish and experience physical and mental wellbeing, while mitigating the negative consequences of stressful, painful, or unpleasant conditions (Valera & Vidal, 2017).

It is also noted that the captions are written in the white color, in fact this color has many positive donnotations in most cultures, however, the goal behind using the white color, which is not very catchy in the context of the posters, is to let the viewers focus on the images and not to instruct them directly to read the verbal text. Actually, the posters are targeted to address various demographic categories, for instance; kids, illiterate people, or even citizens who cannot understand the English language. So, it is not essential to be written in big fonts or bright colors.

3.3.2 Salience & Framing

The salient elements in the images are the people and their practices which are part and parcel in this dilemma. The idea is represented smoothly and all the visual elements are interwoven and appear as if it is a creative piece of mosaic. As for the size of the frame and the colors flow, they are connected together in harmony so there are no hard shadows or lines that separate the participants from each other.

3.4 Conclusion and Findings

To sum up, it is obvious from the analysis above that semiotics plays a very influential role in understating and reading countless images every day as we are surrounded and encountered by images everywhere that could encode multifarious messages and could encode hidden ideology.

Consequently, based on the visual analysis of the posters, the researcher finds that the UNICEF has followed new ways to warn people against this virus as it focuses on how to cope with the dreadful threats of the virus. The Posters are far away from the stereotyping images, that were spread amidst the outbreak of this pandemic, that portray a nurse or a doctor wearing masks and the macroscopic images of the virus with spikes. In fact, posters creators have resorted to educative posters instead of providing direct messages that warn families and children. They succeeded in delivering their message to all categories "big and small" as the caption says.

Actually, UNICEF posters have resorted to a friendly, joyful atmosphere that can create positive influence on the young minds and

their psychological state. The important role of physical and mental wellbeing is prized. The posters can reach all socio-demographic categories with their diverse educational level in terms of raising responsiveness about the risks of the pandemic, helping the viewers to follow the safety protocols and the visual guidelines and encouraging families to cope with the dilemma resulted from the virus by keeping their distance to stay safe.

References

Abdeen, A.A. (2015). Semiotic Analysis of some Election Posters: A Systemic Functional Grammar Perspective. *CDELT Occasional Papers in the Development of English Education*, 59(1), 199-224. doi: 10.21608/opde.2015.106608

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

Ayada, W. (2018). Using of nostalgia as a communication Strategy in TV advertising design campaigns to influence behaviour of brands consumers (An Analytical study on TV advertisement campaigns in Egypt). International Design Journal, 8(1), 335-351. doi: 10.21608/idj.2018.86321

Caivano, J (1988). Color and Semiotics: a Two Way Street. Color and Research Application. 23.390. 401.

Cook, G. 1992. The Discourse of Advertising. London: Routledge

Corral-Verdugo, V., and Frías-Armenta, M. (2016). The sustainability of positive environments. Environ. Dev. Sustain. 18, 965–984. doi: 10.1007/s10668-015-9701-7

Corral-Verdugo V, Corral-Frías NS, Frías-Armenta M, Lucas MY, Peña-Torres EF. (2021). Positive Environments and Precautionary Behaviors During the COVID-19 Outbreak. Front Psychol. 11;12:624155. doi: .3389/fpsyg.2021.624155. PMID: 33790838; PMCID: PMC8006288.

Halliday, M.A.K., & C. Matthiessen (2004). An Introduction to Functional Grammar (3rd ed), London: Hodder Arnold.

Hussein, A., & Fattah, S. (2020). A Multimodel Discourse Analysis of Visual Images in UNCHR Reports on Displaced Iraqis. PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology 17 (7):15761-83

Kress, G. (2010). Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication. Routledge.

Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design. London: Routledge.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). Reading images: The grammar of visual design (2nd ed.). London, UK: Routledge

Millerson, G. (2001). Video production handbook (3rd ed.). Oxford: Focal Press.

Muhassin, M. (2022). A Semio-Pragmatic Analysis of the World Health Organizations Campaign Posters against COVID-19. osiohumaniora. 24. 59. 10.24198/sosiohumaniora. v24i1.34748.

O'Halloran, K. L. (2008). Systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA): constructing ideational meaning using language and visual imagery. Visual Communication, 7(4), 443–475. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357208096210

Ooi L, Paul E, Burton A, Fancourt D, McKinlay AR (2023). A qualitative study of positive psychological experiences and helpful coping behaviours among young people and older adults in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. PLOS ONE 18(1): e0279205. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0279205

Sebeok, T. (1976). Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Stoian, C. (2015). Analysing Images: A Social Semiotic Perspective. Buletinul Ştiinţific al Universităţii „Politehnica" din Timişoara, Seria Limbi moderne. 14. 10.59168/VBYT1151.

Topper D. (1996). Towards an epistemology of scientific illustrations. In Baigrie B.S. (ed.) *Picturing Knowledge: Historical and Philosophical Problems Concerning the Use of Art in Science*. London: University of Toronto Press, 215–249

Tsotra et al.(2004). Marketing on the Internet: A Semiotic Analysis. The Tenth Americas Conference on Information Systems, New York.

UNICEF. (2002). About UNICEF-FAQ. What does the acronym UNICEF stand for? Retrieved 19 September, 2022. https://www.unicef.org/about-unicef/frequently-asked-questions.

United Nations Organization (2020). La Pandemia de COVID-19 ha Provocado una Crisis de Salud Mental. Available online at: https://coronavirus.onu.org.mx/la-pandemia-por-covid-19-ha-provocado-una-crisis-de-salud-mental (accessed 1 May, 2023).

Valera, S., and Vidal, T. (2017). "Some Cues for a Positive Environmental Psychology Agenda," in Handbook of Environmental Psychology and Quality of Life Research, ed. G. Fleury-Bahi (Berlin: Springer), 41–63

Wantoro, W. (2018). Semiotic Analysis of Space and Time in The Film "Time Machine". 10.2991/icobest-18.2018.78.

Wilson, A. A., & Landon-Hays, M. (2016). A Social Semiotic Analysis of Instructional Images Across Academic Disciplines. Visual Communication, 15(1), 3–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357215609213

Yusuf, Y. (2012). Different Representations and Semiotics Analysis of Web News Texts. International Journal of Language Studies. 6. 17-36.

Appendix 1

https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/what-we-should-know-about-coronavirus-desease-covid-19-posters

Poster 1

Poster 2

Poster 3

Poster 4