



*A Semiotics Study of Icons in Facebook Posts about Gaza
Events*

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دراسة سيميائية للأيقونات في منشورات الفيسبوك حول أحداث غزة

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Abstract:

This research examines the semiotics of icons in Facebook posts regarding events in Gaza, utilizing Peirce's theory to decipher visual symbols. This analysis examines the manner in which images effectively communicate intricate emotions, ideas, and ideologies, surpassing plain visual depiction. The study demonstrates the diverse and nuanced ability of images to function as icons. The research emphasizes the importance of visual semiotics in digital communication, particularly in the setting of social media. The results illustrate the dynamic characteristics of online communication and the influence of visuals on molding public opinion. This research enhances our comprehension of the influence of visual communication in a connected digital environment.

المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث سيميائية الأيقونات في منشورات الفيسبوك المتعلقة بالأحداث في غزة، وذلك باستخدام نظرية بيرس لفك رموز الرموز البصرية. يدرس هذا التحليل الطريقة التي تنقل بها الصور بشكل فعال المشاعر والأفكار والأيدولوجيات المعقدة، متجاوزة التصوير البصري البسيط. توضح الدراسة القدرة المتنوعة والدقيقة للصور على العمل كأيقونات. يؤكد البحث على أهمية السيميائية البصرية في الاتصال الرقمي، وخاصة في سياق وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. توضح النتائج الخصائص الديناميكية للتواصل عبر الإنترنت وتأثير الصور في تشكيل الرأي العام. يعزز هذا البحث فهمنا لتأثير الاتصال المرئي في بيئة رقمية متصلة.

Introduction

Language has a crucial role in people's lives, as it is necessary for communication and interdependence. Individuals reside within a societal framework, and in order to establish various types of connections, they must engage in interpersonal communication. Language serves as the means by which these individuals are able to accomplish this (Triyogo 2016). However, linguistic diversity can pose challenges to effective communication, particularly when individuals from different geographical areas, regions, or even countries attempt to interact. In such cases, it becomes necessary to acquire a common global language, with English

being one of the most widely recognized international languages. According to Reddy (2016), there are 375 million individuals who are native English speakers, and an additional 750 million individuals who speak English as a second language. The majority of global information is disseminated in the English language.

Hence, in order to stay abreast with the current technological progress, it is imperative to acquire proficiency in the English language. English encompasses numerous academic disciplines, one of which is semiotics. According to Chandler (2007), semiotics examines the signs in language and other symbols that can have several interpretations. Signs are ubiquitous, even on platforms like Facebook. Facebook is a popular kind of

entertainment for individuals worldwide, and it also serves as a platform for studying and understanding different cultures.

Despite its importance, the semiotic analysis of Facebook posts regarding events in Gaza has not been explored, resulting in a neglect of the semiotic characteristics of this particular social media platform. Therefore, in order to close this divide, the current study seeks to focus on the following aspects:

1. Investigating the significance of images in the construction of meaning.
2. Analyzing the relationship between the signifier, signified, and object of each icon.
3. Exploring how the process of semiosis in each post depends on Peirce's theory.

This research posits that images play a crucial role in visually conveying ideas, emotions, and information. They engage our senses, facilitate rapid interpretation, evoke emotions, and serve as a universally understood method of communication.

1. Icons contain signifiers, which are visual representations, while the signified refers to the concepts they represent. The object, on the other hand, is the actual entity in the real world.
2. The images included in posts function as symbols that represent tangible items in the actual world. Different viewers interpret these symbols in various ways, depending on their personal context and understanding. This aligns with Peirce's

semiotic theory, which explores the relationship between signs, objects, and interpretations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Semiotics

The concepts of signs and signification have been extensively explored throughout the course of philosophical and psychological history. The term 'semiotic' originates from the Greek word that signifies "to signify". According to Sebeok (1976), the origin of semiotics may be traced back to its Greek form 'semeiotike' (sema meaning 'sign' and semeiotikos meaning 'observant of sign'). This term was originally used in a medical context to refer to 'symptomatology'. The term 'semiotics' was first employed in 1670 by Henry Stubbes, an English physician. Stubbes used this phrase to denote the branch of medicine that deals with the examination and understanding of symptoms. John Locke later used the term to elaborate on his threefold classification of science. It is noteworthy that the Arabic word "سمة" which means "sign" has a similar pronunciation and meaning to the word "semiotics". This is shown in the Quranic verse:

مَنْ أَنْزَلَ السُّجُودَ سِيَّمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ

"On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration"

)Al Fatah, verse 29(

Semiotics originated in the late 18th century and acquired significance in the 20th century as a result of the methodical examination of signals. Three prominent figures in Western semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Charles William Morris, made substantial contributions to the development of modern semiotic history. De Saussure uncovered that meaning resides within intricate interconnections, Peirce underscored the significance of semiosis, and Morris delineated semiotics as the examination of signs within the realms of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Semiotics is an academic discipline that specifically examines the theory of signifying and its several subfields. According to Crystal (2008), it refers to the scientific examination of the characteristics of communication networks, whether they are found in nature or created by humans. Semiotics formulates a comprehensive theory including all conceivable types of signs. A sign can be defined as "any symbol or object that represents or stands for another symbol or object." Therefore, the presence of smoke indicates the existence of fire, and a stop signal serves as a notification for traffic to cease movement at an intersection. Aside from the complete range of signals used in both human and non-human

communication, there exist other subcategories of signs, including visual signs,

auditory signs, verbal signs, food signs, fabric signs, and so on (Chapman and Routledge, 2009).

Semiotics encompasses the creation, transmission, organization, social role, and significance of signs. The focus is mostly on three key areas:

1. The examination of the sign in its own right.
2. The systems in which signs are ordered and organized.
3. The societal and cultural environments in which these indications function.

Semiotics is a broad field of study that incorporates diverse forms of meaning and communication. Semiotics encompasses diverse sub disciplines, including social semiotics, visual semiotics, zoo semiotics, musical semiotics, computational semiotics, and literary semiotics, among others (Crystal, 2008).

2.1.1 .Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of sign

Charles Sanders Peirce is renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to the field of pragmatism. His papers and texts, collated 25 years after his death, are collectively known as *Oeuvres Completes* (Zoest 1991) and give a full exploration of the general theory of signs. In contrast to Saussure, who coined the term 'semiology', Peirce put up the term 'semiotic', which he

believed to be equivalent to the idea of logic that centers on understanding the cognitive processes of human thought. Peirce's writings from 1931/1958 elaborate on this concept.

Logic, in its general sense, is, as I believe I have shown, only another name for semiotic, the quasinecessary, or formal doctrine of signs. By describing the doctrine as “quasi-necessary”, or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know, and from such an observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements, eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary, as to what must be characters of all signs used by a “scientific” intelligence, that is to say by an intelligence capable of learning by experience (LeedsHurwitz, 1993, p. 4)\.

Moreover, he asserts that there are three facets of the sign. The three components are representamen, object, and interpretant. Peirce asserts in the book that a sign is an entity that represents something else. Peirce defines a representamen as the sign itself, where the object is the entity being referred to, and the interpretant is the outcome resulting from the relationship between the interpretant and the object:.

Peirce’s Diagram of Semiosis

Peirce highlighted the significance of the human mind in interpreting signs and the limits that establish and differentiate

signs within our cognitive processes. He also emphasized the three-dimensional system (triadic/trichotomy) and the relative nature of the three typologies or taxonomies of signs (icon, index, and symbol) as depicted below-:

- a. Icon: Signs that have resemblance or exhibit similarity to the objects they represent.
- b. Index: Signs that exhibit a direct connection or correlation with the objects they represent.
- c. Symbol: Signs that possess an arbitrary or conventional association with their objects, relying on social or cultural conventions to convey their meaning.

2. Research Methodology

This investigation utilized a qualitative technique. This strategy often grapples with interpretation, which can be quite complex. According to Subana and Sudrajat (2005), the qualitative technique is primarily concerned with descriptive analysis rather than confirming or rejecting a premise. In their study, Subana and Sudradjat (2005) asserted that it is essential to adhere to a specific set of steps in the design of a study. These steps include formulating the research problem, determining the type of information to be gathered, establishing the data collection procedure, defining the data processing method, and drawing conclusions from the study. This research use descriptive analysis

to examine the data by employing the semiosis process and providing a detailed description of each individual datum in order to uncover its meaning. The semiosis is founded on Pierce's theory of semiotics, which highlights the trichotomy of signs in respect to the connection

between the representamen and its object. The trichotomy proposed by Pierce consists of three categories: icon, symbol, and index. This research will solely evaluate icons. The icon represents the photo or image featured in the commercial. The data utilized in the current investigation consists of intentionally selected posts from Facebook.

4.1 Analysis

Image No. 1



This image depicts a scene of humanitarian support, as individuals are distributing water. In the context of Gaza, it may

indicate the difficulties associated with water provision that the population frequently encounters as a result of infrastructure destruction and economic hardships. The video depicts a moment where the community demonstrates its ability to bounce back from adversity and provide assistance to one another. From a semiotic standpoint, the image is abundant in signifiers. The truck, water containers, and the people serve as symbols that express a feeling of immediacy and collective engagement. The signified refers to the fundamental meaning conveyed by these signifiers, namely pertaining to the limited availability of resources and the collective human reaction to this scarcity. The object, or referent, represents the tangible occurrence of water distribution in Gaza, emphasizing the severe conditions experienced by the local population. Charles Peirce's semiotic framework posits that semiosis entails comprehending the interplay among the signifier, the signified, and the object. The image functions as an icon due to its resemblance to the real-life situation it portrays. Furthermore, it serves as an indicator, as the dispersion of water signifies an urgent situation that necessitates rapid attention and assistance. Lastly, it serves as a symbol, tapping into the collective cultural understanding that access to water is an essential entitlement of every human being, thereby representing the wider humanitarian endeavors. The meaning is formed through a triadic interaction, relying on the viewer's cultural, societal, and personal information. This allows for numerous interpretations, contributing to the communal understanding of the situation.

Image No. 2



Initially, the image depicts a sudden and intense time of emergency, with the main emphasis on a youthful person carrying a youngster and another child tightly holding onto them. They exhibit signs of worry and urgency in their facial expressions. The unkempt environment, with scattered rubbish on the ground and indistinct persons in the distance, symbolize disorder and disturbance. These graphic features serve as indicators that immediately communicate a state of emergency and the urgency for prompt action. Regarding the signified, which refers to the underlying connotations evoked by these signifiers, it primarily conveys a sense of fragility and peril. The young individual's firm grasp on the youngsters symbolizes the assumption of a caretaker role in the midst of hardship.

The tumultuous surroundings and their countenances indicate apprehension and the desire for safeguarding. This graphic portrays a story of relocation and the harsh reality faced by individuals impacted by crisis situations, with a special focus on children who are symbolically depicted as the most susceptible

elements of society. In Peircean semiotic words, the object refers to the real action or scenario depicted in the image, which seems to be a pressing evacuation or a response to an imminent danger. The process of semiosis entails the interpretation of these signs within the framework of the image. The image functions as a symbol due to its resemblance to the genuine state of distress. It functions as a reference point for the dispersed wreckage and movement, which suggests the presence of a more significant, undisclosed emergency. The youngsters symbolize the innocence that is impacted by violence, making the image a symbolic plea for awareness and action. The interpretation of the image is not fixed, but rather emerges from the interplay of its constituent aspects as perceived by the observer, who brings their own personal experiences and cultural knowledge to the presented situation

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Image No. 3



A woman in the forefront closely embraces a child, both displaying discernible smudges on their faces that could perhaps be attributed to dust, dirt, or soot. Their countenances are filled

with intense distress and weeping, indicating the presence of recent distressing experiences. Additional folks in the vicinity also exhibit indications of suffering, including an individual with a bandaged head. The setting indicates the presence of either a medical or an improvised emergency facility, as evidenced by the existence of what seems to be medical apparatus and provisions. Furthermore, the signified, which refers to the underlying conceptual meaning of these signifiers, implies a recent catastrophe, potentially an assault or a mishap, based on the observable physical injuries and psychological distress. The woman's hug of the kid symbolizes a nurturing and consoling action, a universally understood expression of safeguarding the young and defenseless during times of danger. The scene's emotional impact is immediate and potent, seeking to evoke empathy and concern from the audience, while highlighting the human toll of battle or calamity. Ultimately, from a semiotic perspective, the image functions on various levels in accordance with Peirce's theory. The symbology is clearly apparent in the accurate portrayal of anguish and distress. The image serves as an indexical reference to an undisclosed occurrence of greater magnitude, which has resulted in the current state of distress. The artwork symbolically conveys a tale that explores the human condition, specifically focusing on the experiences of individuals trapped in crises. The semiotic process in this context entails the interaction of these sign components, wherein the observer deciphers the picture through their individual cultural and social comprehension, so influencing the overall significance of the photograph.

Image No. 4



The image depicts a group of children walking through what appears to be a refugee camp, with temporary shelters in the background. The ground is wet,

possibly from rain, and littered with debris. The children's attire and the makeshift tents speak to the living conditions they are enduring. At the heart of the scene are the children, who despite the grim surroundings, carry on with daily life activities, such as eating and walking around the camp. The boy in the foreground is holding a cup with a straw, and the girl seems to be eating as they walk. The wet and littered ground, coupled with the makeshift shelters, signifies the harsh living conditions of the camp. The presence of standing water also suggests recent rain, compounding the challenging environment. Add to this, the signified here is the resilience of the human spirit, particularly of children, in the face of adversity. Despite the apparent hardship indicated by the environment, the children are adapting to their circumstances, showcasing the ability to find normalcy amidst

chaos. The camp itself signifies displacement and the realities faced by refugees who have had to leave their homes due to conflict or other crises. In Peirce's semiotic terms, the image serves as an icon of the refugee experience, directly representing the children's situation. It is an index, as the conditions of the camp point to the larger issues of displacement and humanitarian crises. Symbolically, the children's actions and the setting represent the ongoing struggles and adaptability of those living as refugees. The viewer's interpretation of these signs may be influenced by their own experiences or awareness of such situations, leading to a personal understanding of the depicted reality.

Image No. 5



This image portrays a situation characterized by intense discomfort and a sense of urgency. A mother is holding a distressed little child, while another child in the foreground is looking directly at the camera and wailing. The scene depicts a bustling street with onlookers and an atmosphere of disorder. It is a remarkable combination of sentiments and behaviors. The primary individuals female and two offspring, whose countenances convey distress and apprehension. These signifiers

are the main indicators that imply a story of distress. The background, characterized by a multitude of people and scattered wreckage, enhances the perception of immediacy and chaos, suggesting a recent disruption or confrontation. Regarding the signified, the fundamental essence conveyed by the signifiers indicates a state of emergency, possibly resulting from a violent incident or a catastrophe. The woman's countenance and her manner of cradling the infant indicate a frantic endeavor to shield and console in the middle of chaos. The toddler in the front, visibly shedding tears, conveys an instantaneous reaction to feelings of dread and bewilderment. Peirce's semiotic framework categorizes the image into three types: icons, indices, and symbols. The icon accurately portrays the subjects and their feelings in a genuine manner. The presence of the index in the details implies the occurrence of a more significant event, as evidenced by the scattered debris and the congregation of individuals. The image symbolizes the difficult situation faced by civilians, particularly children, in areas affected by conflict. It effectively portrays the common themes of dread, protection, and the natural connection between a caregiver and a child.

5. Conclusion

The present research investigates the semiotics of icons utilized in Facebook posts regarding events in Gaza. It specifically examines the complex connection between visual representations and their semantic interpretations. Our investigation, based on Peirce's semiotic theory, revealed the significant impact of images in not just representing reality but also in building and conveying complex meanings in a digital, socially-connected environment.

Research has revealed that the photographs used in Facebook posts are not only simple visual aids, but rather they play a significant role in conveying emotions, providing information, and expressing ideological positions. Upon analyzing each photograph, it becomes evident that they contain significant

symbols, meanings, and objects. These images reveal a complex array of interpretations, frequently going beyond their local environment to encompass bigger themes such as human resilience, struggle, and the socio-political narratives related to Gaza. The interaction between icons, indices, and symbols in these images, as described in Peirce's framework, allowed for a wide variety of interpretations, demonstrating the complex nature of human perception and comprehension.

Moreover, this study emphasized the importance of semiotics in the era of digital technology, namely in the way visual symbols are employed to communicate intricate messages across diverse cultural and linguistic boundaries. The image's capacity to function as an icon, index, and symbol, enhancing its potential for interpretation, reflects the dynamic nature of communication in our interconnected world.

This research adds to the wider discussion on digital communication, emphasizing the necessity for a more profound comprehension of visual semiotics in social media. It provides opportunities for additional research on the effects of semiotic features in different types of digital media and their impact on public perception and communication. To summarize, the semiotic study of Facebook posts regarding Gaza events provides a convincing argument for the complex relationship between visual representation and the creation of meaning. This showcases the capacity of images to not just mirror reality but also influence it, providing understanding into the functioning of visual semiotics in the domain of digital communication and social networking.

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