| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Selected Social Media Posts on the #BlackLivesMatter Protest

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| ABSTRACT

The Black Lives Matter movement is a social movement focused on social justice for Blacks, undocumented immigrants, people with disabilities, and it seeks to change laws and policies in the criminal justice system and other areas that set these categories of people at a disadvantage. This paper investigated the multiple modes of communication such as text, colour and images manifested in the social media posts on the #BlackLivesMatter protest; which resulted from the murder of an African American, George Floyds, by American police officers on the 25th of May 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota and the protest which started on the 26th of May 2020, in the same city in the US. The study utilized a qualitative research design and sampled six posts made by participants in the protest. The posts were purposively sampled from online sources and were analysed with Kress and van Leeuwen's strand of the theory of multimodal discourse analysis. The research goal was to explore the socio-semiotic meaning exposed in participants' posts on the #BlackLivesMatter protest through social media #hashtag (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and online articles), using Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of Visual Grammar to unravel visual-verbal synchrony in selected posts used in the Black Lives Matter protest. The study identified evidence of multimodality, such as verbal-visual synchrony expressed through text, font, images, colours, and framing and found, among others, that these features of the posts enhanced the overall theme of the #BlackLivesMatter protest. Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that the eight themes – black identity, racism, oppression, brutality, social justice, global activism, the resilient spirit, and the pursuit of liberation that emerged from the analysis were systematically projected in the posts with the aid of multimodality.

| KEYWORDS

Black Lives Matter Movement, #BlackLivesMatter, protest, visual grammar, socio-semiotics, social media language

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

1. Introduction

With the fast developmental pace of information and communication technology (ICT) around the world and its usefulness as a tool for connecting people via social media, visual language has become very important in many aspects of communication to create an identity and facilitate recognition, especially in a social movement. The social movement term Black Lives Matter is a moniker that was formed out of despair and frustration from three black women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometti and Patrisse Cullors, who wanted to publicise the names of victims of police brutality (Birdsong, 2016). Trayvon Martin, 17, was fatally shot in Sanford, Florida, on February 26, 2012; The phrase and hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was born out of tragedy; specifically on July 13, 2013, after Alicia Garza made a post on Facebook describing her feelings. This prompted Patrisse Cullors to create the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on a social media platform (Cullors, 2019).

In the wake of the police killing of a Black man, George Floyd, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2020, demonstrators flooded the streets of American cities, sparking the #BlackLivesMatter campaign, which went viral worldwide. Demonstrators replicated the

protest in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Poland, Brazil, Canada, Germany, France and so on, with a similar message; Black Lives Matter, employing the use of visual language on social media to drive home their cry for justice, equality, fairness, express the black experience and to show their resilience in it.

Cases of police misconduct and brutal use of force by law enforcement officers and vigilantes in the United States, especially against African Americans, have led the civil rights movements and other activists to long protests, from the 1965 Watts riots in response to police brutality, involving Marquette Frye, a 21-year-old African American in Watts neighbourhood of Los Angeles; in 2015, the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore police custody; Breonna Taylor; Ahmaud Arbery; to George Floyd's murder on May 25th, 2020. African Americans are faced with existential problems from not only racial profiling and open police brutality but also state-instituted neglect, poverty, overcrowding, and unequal access to healthcare. The Black Lives Matter movement, therefore, focuses on a core mission of achieving equality in a racially stratified, misogynous and oppressive society, navigating dehumanizing stereotypes that devalue and disregard black lives. The movement seeks to achieve this by eradicating racism and countering violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.

The hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, became a general slogan with the help of social media, not just for true freedom and justice for the Blacks but also for empathetic solidarity against all shades of racial discrimination, police brutality, social-cultural inequality and socio-political abandonment; by condemning and countering acts of violence. George Floyd, a 46 year-old African American male, was arrested on suspicion of using a counterfeit $20 bill. When he resisted being put into the police squad car, the police officer, Derek Chauvin, pressed his left knee on Floyd's neck for eight (8) minutes and fifteen (15) seconds. As seen in spectators' Facebook live streams and video footage of Ms. Darnella Frazier, then 17 years old, who recorded the police killing George Floyd and posted the video to Facebook, the victim begs for his life, saying, "I can't breathe." When videos of the incident circulated widely on social media, the death touched off a series of protests in cities around the United States, with protesters demanding, among other things, police reforms. CNN polls indicate that as of mid-June 2020, as many as 21 million adults have attended a Black Lives Matter or anti-police brutality protest across America (Mclaughlin, 2020).

This study approached the analysis from the multimodal discourse analysis viewpoint, exploring the way socio-political and ideological stands are projected using verbal-visual language and how the individual modes of communication, such as text, colour, images, etc., contribute to the discourses. Each mode, as observed and seen in the social media posts, highlighted specific aspects of the overall message, "Black lives matter". By preference, the modes of communication in this discourse are paramount to the research, primarily playing crucial roles in mobilising the protesters, attracting global support for the fight against a range of injustices and spreading information and momentum of the #BlackLivesMatter protests at an unparalleled rate. This necessitates an analytical study that will account for semiotic and discursive dimensions of #BlackLivesMatter protest social media posts and how they portrayed the agitations of the Black community. As a result, this study executed a multimodal discourse analysis of selected social media posts and specific discursive strategies employed to achieve the communal call for reform of the justice system, reform of the police, an end to racially motivated violence against Black people, and change to policies for true justice, equality and fairness. The study focused on utilizing the Visual Grammar approach to multimodal discourse analysis in investigating the semiotics, discursive, socio-political, socio-cultural and ideological features underpinning the social media posts of some participants during the protest.

1.1 Rationale
This study focused on multimodal discourse analysis (on the text, colour and images) of selected online posts of the #BlackLivesMatter protest as it influences the discourse of protest. Its objectives include to:

   i.   Identify the features of multimodality employed by the protesters on their social media posts.
  ii.   Examine each feature (text, colour, and images) employed in the social media posts.
 iii.   Analyse the modes of communication to reveal the underlying thematic meaning projected in the social media posts.
 iv.   Determine the verbal-visual synchrony in relation to underlying themes of the socio-political movement.

1.2 Research Questions
The study is guided by the following four research questions:

   1. Which features of multimodality are utilized by the protesters on their social media posts?
   2. Do the features of the social media posts contribute to the overall theme of the #BlackLivesMatter protest?
   3. Do the modes of communication reveal the underlying thematic meaning projected in the social media posts?
   4. Do the selected posts exhibit verbal-visual synchrony in relation to themes of the #BlackLivesMatter?

1.3 Framework of Analysis: Visual Grammar

M. A. K. Halliday advocated for the inclusion of social semiotics in linguistic analysis in his book *Language as social semiotic* (1978) and described his theory as systemic functional linguistics (SFL), also known as systemic functional grammar (SFG). According to Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (henceforth SFG), language is a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning. Grammar transcends formal accuracy regulations and serves as a way to represent patterns of experience. Halliday further explains that grammar enables people to create a mental representation of reality to make sense of what is happening to them and around them (Halliday, 1985, cited in Kress & van Leeuwen (2006). In SFG, the semantic system, the lexico-grammatical system, and the phonological system are the three strata for analysis. The semantic system, which includes the ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and textual metafunction, is the central system among the three. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996-2006) later extended these three metafunctions to visual social semiotic resources and renamed them as representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions for a comprehensive description of meaning. Halliday (1978) maintained that a language's grammar is a resource for constructing meanings, not a code or a series of rules for producing accurate sentences and that grammatical resources are used to construct our understanding of the world outside and inside of us (ideational meaning), the interaction between the speaker and addressee(s) to carry out social roles, and the construction of text (textual meaning). (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1997). Culture has been defined as a set of semiotic systems and systems of meaning that are interrelated. (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Halliday had earlier posited that the meaning potentials of semiotic resources constitute the reality of culture (1978, p. 123). Halliday's theory is limited to the analysis of textual properties alone.

Beyond Halliday's foundation of textual analysis, numerous other authors (including Kress & Van Leeuwen, Bezemer & Jewitt, Bull and Anstey, O'Halloran, etc.) have further broadened the scope and applications of SFL. In Kress and Leeuwen's (1996) variation of SFL, the examination of visual and verbal text components was combined. The analysis of digital texts and writing styles that combine text and visuals in communication, such as online marketing and promotions such as the #BlackLivesMatter campaign, lends itself to this variant of the social semiotic theory. O'Halloran (2011) views Halliday's SFG as the framework theory ideal for multimodal social semiotics. O'Toole (1994; 2010) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) provided the basic foundation for multimodal discourse analysis by drawing from Halliday's idea of the grammar of semiotic modes. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggested that all images (such as pictures, typography, colours, etc.) and related semiotic systems function like language and can therefore be used to fulfil the three metafunctions. Both language and image perform communicative roles, but Kress (2003) has noted that in social semiotics, language acts a role different from the role of image in multimodal discourse. O'Toole's (2010) semiotic analysis of displayed artworks/paintings, sculpture, and architecture illustrates how language represents the narrative while image represents the displayed worlds.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) built on Halliday's SFG theoretical concept of "metafunction" and proposed three metafunctions for Visual Grammar (VG) and these are:

1. Compositional meaning
2. Interactive meaning
3. Representational meaning.

There are no direct connections between semiotic resources and meaning in the three metafunctions proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen. Power, interaction, detachment, and engagement are examples of concepts that are not implied by the images; rather, they mean potentials or potential meanings that may be activated by the creators and viewers of images. This study adopts their theoretical concept of metafunctions to analyze the representational, interactive, and compositional meaning of selected #BlackLivesMatter social media posts.

2. Literature Review

Visual images have become significant communication tools on social media embedded with meanings to draw attention and give individuals information perceived and interpreted differently, targeting a particular audience to induce action or support. Significantly, quite some scholarly works in the field of language and the social sciences have been done. Research as regards to protest, social movements, multimodality, social media posts, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, #BlackLivesMatter protest, Black Lives movement, etc., and the implication of #BlackLivesMatter protest on police reforms, justice system reform, Covid-19, etc. Also, other writers have tried to figure out how, for instance, the use of social media encouraged the movement. Cappelli (2020) conducted a study entitled Black lives matter: The emotional and racial dynamics of George Floyd Protest graffiti. Her research focused on the analysis of the George Floyds Protest Graffiti as a kind of rhetoric that is becoming more prominent and offers a democratic place for its underprivileged peoples to express their stories. Also, it historically records the melancholy feeling of the mass protest and bears witness to racial and political battles in America. She attempted to critically analyze graffiti as a kind of visual activism by utilizing Visual Frame Analysis and Visual Argumentation to show how emotions play a role in its creation as well

as how a rhetorical power transmits ideas and shapes public discourse. According to her analysis, the Floyd cultural graffiti creation serves as both a political call to action to end institutional racism in America and a system of socio-cultural bargaining.

Related to Cappelli's study reviewed above is another study carried out by Brehman (2018) entitled, 'An Analysis of the iconic images from the Black Lives Matter Movement'. The work explored a wave of imagery documenting the Black Lives Matter movement and the national conversation surrounding the injustices faced by the black community, as populated by the media. A sample of five iconic photographs from the movement was examined for their rhetorical impact using a qualitative two-part content analysis.

The images in this sample were determined to be iconic because they provided more than just documentation. Instead, they altered the collective memory of society in order to create a new story about American politics, society, and identity.

In his thesis entitled 'The Role of social media in social movements: The Case of Black Lives Matter', Hamilton (2016) examined collective identity as a crucial aspect of the discussion of social movements and their effectiveness. By examining the notions of collective identification, blacktivism, and racial injustice as they apply in the twenty-first century, he investigated the impact social media has played in social movements. A case study analysis of the Black Lives Matter movement makes use of every one of these components. Yet, his findings confirm the important role social media plays in society, as is demonstrated by the Black Lives Matter campaign.

Similar to Hamilton's work reviewed above, Prihantoro and Ramadhani (2021) studied the critical function of social media, namely the Twitter hashtag (#), in the Black Lives Matter movement in their paper entitled Social network analysis: #BlackLivesMatter distribution at actor level and system level. The study employed quantitative techniques, a positivistic worldview, and a Social Network Analysis (SNA) approach to ascertain the extent to which actors' usage of hashtags on Twitter has a significant impact on how users communicate and connect to form ideas regarding the Black Lives Matter Movement. For the timeframe of April 20– April 27, 2021, these researchers ran a study to ascertain the spread of #BlackLivesMatter at the actor level on Twitter. According to the study, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has a low diameter value, which allows it to grow swiftly without becoming too widespread and foster open discourse among a number of Twitter clusters to shape public opinion about the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet, the study was unable to bring together the disparate groups of viewpoints based on personal impressions of those who are marginalized and the victims of racism, police brutality, and extrajudicial death.

Awopetu and Aseniserare's (2021) published article "Visual communication for activism: The case of the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria presented social media as a feasible medium and instrument for activism and protest movements. The study was based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual grammar, and it examined how visual images could be deployed in activism and protest movements through its analysis of some images of the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. It demonstrates that the depiction of visual elements, such as objects, people, and events, in these images suggests a preponderant involvement of youth in the events as well as a depiction of law enforcement officials, the police, as opponents to the protesters' activities, which provides insights into the protests. The effectiveness of visuals, such as protest photos, for activism is also investigated in this study since they can serve as a narrative and record of the protest activities in addition to conveying the anger, demands, and concerns of the demonstrators.

Wetzstein (2017) also conducted a study on The visual discourse of protest movements on Twitter: The Case of Hong Kong 2014. The work examined visual thematic patterns, actors depicted, relationships between actors, and analyses of visual viewpoints in posts made in support of the protests. The study looked into the visual discourse of the Hong Kong protests on the Twitter hashtag #HongKongprotests, using the qualitative documentary image interpretation. According to the study, the purposes of visual pictures are to provide an understanding of the visual protest narrative, as well as the visuals and image-text relationships in Tweets on the #HongKongprotests. Although the method adopted turned out to be appropriate for the research assignment, the research design had certain drawbacks. It did so by using the sociology of knowledge as a foundation and doing so in accordance with the discourse in that field; multimodal discourse analysis methodologies are typically based on sociological rather than linguistic viewpoints (Kress & van Leeuwen,1996; 2001).

The studies reviewed above share a common interest (with this paper) in the visual grammar of social media posts utilized in protests. This paper adopted multimodal discourse analysis to examine some social media posts of the #BlackLivesMatter protest. The study utilized social semiotics as the tool to analyse the black identity, racism, oppression, brutality, social justice, global activism, the resilient spirit, pursuit of liberation, ideology, power and beliefs inherent. It focused on multimodal discourse patterns: the representational, interactive, and compositional meanings of the selected #BlackLivesMatter social media posts.

3. Methodology

This research was conducted using qualitative methods of analysis. The qualitative method of analysis calls for research to be analysed following the descriptive approach to analysis and interpretation of data. The focus of the analysis in this study was on investigating the multimodal features and discourse strategies utilized in selected social media posts on the #BlackLivesMatter protest that started in the United States of America but spread to many other parts of the world. The interpretation of the analysis was based on the way modes of communication are projected in the social media posts, also accounting for the analysis of inherent protest/political discursive practices available in the #BlackLivesMatter protest representations and the power relations underpinning the discourses.

Some #BlackLivesMatter social media posts, which were the data for this study, were purposively selected from four social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Blogs. All selected social media posts have the #BlackLivesMatter Hashtag and other trending expressions related to the movement, such as: 'I can't breathe', 'Hands Up', 'George Floyds', 'My Life Matters', 'No Justice, No Peace', 'Defunding the Police', '#SayHerName', and '#SayHisName'. In selecting the data, attention was given to posts of real-time images and vector images that have quality content that is eye-catching, full of relevant information, something captivating that draws interest before ever seeing a word of what is written, and that engages the social media platforms with the #BlackLivesMatter trends, #BlackLivesMatter posts from the international sympathetic community etc.

3.1 Data Presentation

The data utilized in this study comprise both texts and images from purposively selected social media posts of online participants in the #BlackLivesMatter protest in 2020. The data are presented and analysed below based on the three metafunctions of visual grammar (representational, interactive, and compositional meanings) proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996).

4. Data Analyses

4.1 Representational Meaning

The representational meaning in Visual Grammar corresponds to the ideational metafunction in Systemic Functional Grammar. The representational meaning visually conveys and depicts an idea, participants, environment or events in relation to their concrete or abstract meaning. The socio-semiotic system must be capable of representing items and their connections in the external world. In an effort to apply the notion of representational meaning to picture analysis, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) claim that the representational function involves two processes: a narrative process and a conceptual process. They suggested that the conceptual process is related to the classification or analysis of participants in terms of their stable and timeless essence, for example, using graphics, diagrams, etc., while the narrative process involves ongoing actions or events in which actors are represented by vectors, either real or imaginary. Three types of conceptual processes are distinguished: classificational, analytical, and symbolic processes.

Based on this definition, Figure 1 below utilizes both the narrative and conceptual processes. As a result, the discussion that follows will center on these two processes for the chosen post. The classificational process establishes the link or relationship between participants in order to understand the conceptual processes. One member may be the subordinate and the other the superordinate in the connection. As seen in various pictures, the participants' relationship can be covert or overt. The spectator may deduce from the image or the accompanying text that the "Superordinate" and "Subordinate" are related in some way (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

Figure 1. Black Lives Matter Exhibit: Silence Equals Violence by Zita Holbourne, Poet-Artist-Activist.

Source: www. Zitaholbourne.com/@zitabaracuk

Figure 1 shows a vector graphic and texts with the inscriptions "George Floyds, I can't breathe, and Black Lives Matter" for the narrative process. For the classificational process of Figure 1, there are two classifications of the participants; the taxonomy relation is between the African American community and the White supremacist: the police, the justice system, and the racist government policies in the United States. While the opposing factors are the 'superordinate', the African American is the 'subordinate'. These images are overt. In the overt classification process, the participants are realized in an unequal and disproportionate composition; that is, the participants are asymmetrical, as evidenced in the slogan, "Black Lives Matter", "I Can't Breathe", "George Floyds", and "Rest in Power George Floyds".

Figure 1 above by Zita Holbourne belongs to the overt taxonomy, an open show of aggression against the African American community in the United States of America. In this post, the focus of the vector image is the skin "colour", "the hair", "the attires", and the Africanness portrayed, which depicts a contrast against another factor, though not seen, but can be induced, creating a visual inequality. Therefore, different shades of black skin colour portrayed as the participants on the posts are together used to represent the whole appearance of the Black community. The absence of the other shades of skin colour, like white, creates an unequal distance and gives the viewer a sense of clarity to the disparity and segregation between the African American community and others in the free nation, the United States of America.
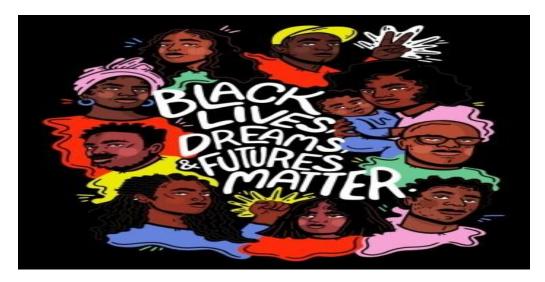
Figure 2. George Floyds Protest Art by Kelly Malka

Source: latimes.com, 2020/@bykellymalka

The analytical processes involve a part-to-whole structure in participation, and there are two kinds of participants: the carrier (the whole) and the possessive attributes (the part). In Figure 2 above, both the text and the colour are the carriers, and they form the focus of the viewer. The other components of Figure 2 are its possessive attributes. The text and the colour represent two major elements that describe the situational context, while the image represents the structure of the African American community. The colour of their clothes and their faces represent the different individual, their age categories, the uniqueness of their dreams, and their future goals that makes-up the community. The black background and the gloomy faces of people in the vector image create a whole structure that well embodies the hopeless, depressing, agonizing, hellish, insufferable atmosphere of the African American community.

Also, as seen in Fig.2, the gesture of holding up the index finger and the middle finger of one hand in the shape of a "V", which also mean "victory" (Cosgrove, 2014) on a white background represent the pursuit of peace and love between the African Americans and the White Community. The fisted hand gesture on the yellow-coloured background represents the resilience of the Blacks in achieving a better life, dreams and future for the African American community.

Figure 3. A protester wearing a Black Lives Matter T-shirt for a memorial event at Jefferson Square Park.

Source: Sipa USA/Alamy Stock Photo, 2021.

The symbolic process focuses on what participants intend or imply, and solidarity is the intention of the participant in Figure 3 above. There are typically two types of participants: one participant represents the meaning or identity, which is the "Symbolic Attribute," and the other participant acts as the "Carrier" and the meaning that has been associated with the interactions. An image from the worldwide photo media firm Sipa, USA, is shown in Figure 3. In this post, the text, the colour, the background of the image and the image are all combined with standing for a marginalized Black community that is oppressed, maimed, silenced, and killed. It sends the message that Black lives truly deserve equality with the rest of humanity and, therefore, Blacks should not continue to be treated as inferior humans.

The protester's shirt features images of various black people as a representation of the innocent Black persons who lost their lives as a result of racial violence and police brutality. The protester's nasal mask emphasizes the phrase "I can't breathe," which was the last recorded words of George Floyd before he was strangulated by racist police officers. The hands in the pocket symbolise the constraints against the Black community, and the thumb sticking out of the left side pocket symbolises the resilient nature of the Black community. The blurry background is created to keep the focus on the protester and what he has on, from the nose mask to the cloth, the faces on the cloth and the inscription on the cloth.

All three social media posts analysed above have similar elements of representational meaning embedded in both the images and the texts deployed in the messages. All the components in Figures 1-3 have symbolic value, and the combination of them well embodies the concept of oppression, cruelty, the indomitable spirit, and the pursuit of liberation, "No Justice, No Peace".

4.2 Interactive Meaning
The interpersonal metafunction of Systemic Functional Grammar is equivalent to the interactive meaning of Visual Grammar. How the interactive meaning is achieved depends on a number of factors, including social distance, contact, perspective, and modality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Images are interactive, and they convey meanings; they have behaviours that are manifested in the gaze expressions of the participants. The two distinct gaze expressions are taking and providing. The participants in the image make eye contact during visual contact, which establishes a fictitious link with the observer. Eye contact creates a fictitious interpersonal link with the audience. Since the eyes display their personality traits and emotional states, they perform a connecting role by attracting the viewers' attention and seeking their approval and empathy. This increases communication and connection between the post and the audience. Figures 4 and 5 below are analysed according to the precepts of this background of Visual Grammar.

Figure 4. A young Black girl sitting on the grass holding a sign, "MY LIFE MATTERS". Photo credit: Daniel Led-Olivia/AFP via Getty images.

Source: Anthony Heath & Richards Lindsay, 2020.

In this social media post, a young girl is photographed sitting on the grass and holding a rectangular cardboard with the inscription, "MY LIFE MATTERS", emphatically written in uppercase. She is alone, and her sitting posture is awkward and visibly uncomfortable. Her nose mask enhances the portrait of helplessness and constraint. Without the text in Figure 4, the young girl's image is a classic silent appeal for an assistant. The image maintains eye-contact with the audience, and the young girl's innocent demeanour enhances empathic communication between her and the audience. The imaginary visual contact establishes a link between the participant and the audience. In Figure 4 above, the combination of the young girl's image and the text she displayed underscores a subdued, silenced African American community appealing for an end to racism and the equal treatment of all races. With just three words and an apt image of a young girl, Figure 4 is capable of stimulating empathy for the social movement seeking justice for the Black community.

Figure 5. Black Lives Matter solidarity March by students. Photo credit: Amanda DenHarthog/The Ithacan.

Source: De Lima, 2015/www. theithacan.org

The image in Figure 5 above presents a small group of eight young black students holding placards that support the #BlackLivesMatters protest. This online article post takes a close image framing of different categories of Blacks with different expressions on their placards. The closeness of the participants depicts solidarity and unity against a common enemy, which they are all confronting, and it reflects the overall situational environment in which they live.

Participants in the image display solidarity in a unified social distance. The picture is an up-close shot of eight people holding signs with various themes. The messages aim to develop a deep contact by revealing complicated emotions, bringing the audience closer to the action, and decreasing their perceived distance from the participants. The audience may more easily relate to the hardships of the Black community because of how closely they consider the participants to be related to one another. The social distance between individuals is influenced by their social relationships, while the social distance in an image is influenced by the spacing between the image's frame distances. The relationship between the participants and the viewer is inversely correlated with the distance between the images; the closer the distance, the closer the relationship is, and the further the distance, the further the relationship. Perspective determines the dimension of the image, and with a close shot frontal angle, the image transmits solidarity, dejection, frustration, resilience and readiness to go all the way in pursuit of justice and equality.

Figure 5 has high modality in its contextualization and representation. Both the text and the image of the participants contain multimodal properties within the discourse of the BlackLivesMatter protest, and these include the participants' skin colour, the colour of their clothes (which is black), the framing of the picture to reduce viewers' focus on the three white skinned persons in the background, absence of background and absence of depth to shift the focus mainly on the placards held and also to minimise distraction from the main purpose of the post. For colour, the image has fully de-saturated colours, and the posts appear greyish, dulled down, pale and gloomy.

4.3 Compositional Meaning
The textual function in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar corresponds to the compositional meaning in Visual Grammar, and according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), it is a semiotic system with the ability to create texts, which are sign complexes that are cohesive both internally and with the context in which they are formed. They believed that "the manner in which the representational and interactive parts are created to relate to one another and the manner in which they are combined into a

meaningful whole" is what composition refers to. They also examine informative value, framing, and salience as the three compositional meaning resources.

The arrangement of the image's components results in the realization of information value. Kress and van Leeuwen claim that the center-margin composition contains little or unimportant information, whereas the top-bottom arrangement represents ideal-real information. The left-right arrangement is a given-new information structure.

Figure 6. BLM-Fist Resilience word cloud on a black background stock image featuring some of the 13 guiding principles of Black Live Matter.

Source: Galanis, 2020/intersectionalhistories.com

In Figure 6 above, there are several lexical items presented in the dimensions of the left-right arrangements and the Top-Bottom structure. The centre-margin composition is left blank. The word "RESILLIENCE" is presented in red colour and obviously in a font size higher than all other items in the word cloud. All other words in the image are written in white against a black background but in varying font sizes, all of which are lower than the font size of resilience. The special colour and font size created a sharp visual contrast and foregrounded "resilience" as the driving force of the BlackLivesMatter movement. It also underscores the determination of members of the movement to achieve equality and social justice for the Black community. From its position in the top left-right arrangement in Figure 5, "resilience" is presented as Given-New information, and it is important, while the other words presented in white are Ideal-Real information, which is less important. Also, the word 'fight' is strategically placed around all the other lexical items on the posts as the background of the image, occupying the top-bottom and left-right of the image.

The words written in white and which form the clenched fist are as follows: 'liberation', 'oppression', 'history', 'allies', 'black life', 'feminism', 'social media', 'globalism', 'affirmation', 'empathy', 'black Americans', 'humanity', 'slavery', 'civil right movement', 'engagement', 'build connection', 'activist', 'contributions to society', 'de-humanization', 'intervention', 'violence', 'restorative justice', 'poverty', 'black people', 'rallying cry', 'call to action', 'end racism', 'ideological intervention', 'diversity', 'minority group', 'black liberation movement', 'Black Lives Matter', 'targeted', 'political intervention', black women', 'LGBT' and 'Fight'.

Using forms and other elements to "frame" and highlight specific areas of painting is a composition method known as framing. The concept behind framing as a composition method is similar to the idea behind physically framing paintings and photographs because, in both instances, framing helps to focus attention on the images. The presence or absence of frames that connect or disconnect elements points out whether they go together or not in the making of meanings. Framing aims to focus our attention on the post and the primary message it conveys. In Figure 6 above, the black background reflected a perfectly framed fisted hand made of wording. The essence is to draw attention to the fist and the lexical items of which it was made.

Salience in compositional meaning is determined by the various dimensions and elements of attractiveness presented to the audience, and despite its placement, salience is capable of creating a level of importance for each element (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The foreground or backdrop, the contrast of hue value, relative size, sharpness, and brightness level of the image can all contribute to salience. The #BlackLivesMatter movement is portrayed rather strongly by the black backdrop, the white font colour, the font sizes, the fist that symbolizes the fight, the placement of the language on the hand, and the solitary red word.

In Figure 6, the text and image together fulfil the purpose of information communication. The font size, the thickness of the fonts, the arrangements of the lexical items and the colour clarity are superior, thereby giving more information to the audience. The

post in Figure 6 combined verbal text and image to convey a meaning that reflects the depiction of the Black community's struggle for liberation.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The cluster of six social media posts analysed in this study focused on the #BlackLivesMatter protest, and this study submits that evidence of solidarity with the protest abound in each post. The posts under study are unequivocally targeted at criticism and outright resistance to racial-based violence against African Americans. The features of multimodality identified in the study include a combination of verbal and visual texts, varying font sizes of verbal text, capitalization, the colouring of both verbal and visual texts, the use of posturing and distance, and framing. This identification provides positive answers to Research Question 1: Which features of multimodality are utilized by the protesters on their social media posts? The study also examined each feature (verbal text, colouring, font, framing, and images) employed in the social media posts and found that they were carefully deployed to enhance the message of resilience and a quest for freedom from racial-based violence against African Americans. In doing this, the study provided positive answers to Research Question 2: Do the features of the social media posts contribute to the overall theme of the #BlackLivesMatter protest? Also, the analysis of the modes of communication revealed the following eight themes: black identity, racism, oppression, brutality, social justice, global activism, the resilient spirit, and the pursuit of liberation. These underlying themes are projected in the posts, and their identification answers Research Question 3: Do the modes of communication reveal the underlying thematic meaning projected in the social media posts? Finally, the analysis found verbal-visual synchrony in relation to the underlying themes of the movement. The study clearly established the verbal-visual harmony that underscored the activism portrayed in the posts. Although there are certain connections between language and image, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), the image is independent of linguistic explanations because it has its own structure and order. The image itself may have compositional, interactive, and representational meanings. The interpretation of the image is somewhat arbitrary, and it could mean different things in various situations. The verbal texts in the posts clarify the meaning of the concrete images while also making the message to be more detailed. At the same time, the image brings the meaning of the verbal text to life. As a result, the social semiotic properties of verbal and visual texts combined conveyed meaning more effectively and thoroughly. As a result, social semiotics resources were utilized to create meaning that works well together to capture the significance of these online and social media posts.

5. Conclusion

This study revealed overwhelming evidence of a protest against racial discrimination, police brutality, social-cultural inequality and socio-political abandonment projected through a combination of verbal and visual elements in social media posts. Much of these claims are depicted and explored in the analysis of the elements of the multiple modes of communication, such as text, colour, and images manifested in the social media posts on the #BlackLivesMatter protest. Categorically, eight (8) themes were summarily found to emerge from the findings. They are black identity, racism, oppression, brutality, social justice, global activism, the resilient spirit, and the pursuit of liberation. This study agrees that these are consistent themes in the #BlackLivesMatter protest. The study, therefore, offers a multimodal analytical study that takes into consideration the views and stands projected in these posts, not minding their racial background but focusing on how their use of text, colours and images reveal ideologies, agitations, solidarity, and socio-political leaning in the discourse participant's social media posts.

It is doubtful whether thematic realization in the posts would have been apt without a combined analysis of both visual and verbal elements. Some of the verbal texts are lone lexical items, phrases, and sentence fragments that do not convey complete meaning independently. The same applies to visual texts that may symbolize a different range of meanings when presented without the accompanying text in the post. In Figure 6, for instance, the fist alone without the accompanying text could symbolize power, anger, resistance, determination, or group resistance. But when analysed against a backdrop of accompanying texts such as "black life", "black lives matter", "end racism", "resilience", etc., its thematic solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement is clearly established. It is this visual-verbal synergy that makes Visual Grammar a preferred framework in the analysis of multimodal texts.

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