A Semiotic and Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Editorial Caricatures on Drug Addiction

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Abstract

This study analyses selected editorial caricatures focusing on drug abuse. Depending on the theoretical frameworks of Roland Barthes' semiotics (1957) and Norman Fairclough's CDA, the researcher applies a descriptive qualitative approach. The study concentrates on the linguistic messages, denoted non-linguistic elements, and connoted connections between textual and denoted elements. Furthermore, the analysis investigates how visual and linguistic elements converge to support or challenge social ideologies surrounding drug abuse and addiction. It gives a deeper understanding of how the visual media participates in the ideological construction of drug-related narratives and their broader social implications.

The results indicate that these caricatures efficiently express intricate messages through visual symbols and simple language and that the role of editorial caricatures is not only humorous or artistic expression, but they are influential discursive instruments that sustain or contest prevailing ideologies of drug addiction.

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الملخص

تحلل هذه الدراسة رسوما كاريكاتورية تحريرية مختارة تركز على تعاطي المخدرات. اعتمادا على الأطر النظرية السيميائية لرولان بارت (1957) و التحليل الدلالي لنورمان فيركلوف ، يطبق الباحث نهجا وصفيا نوعيا. تركز الدراسة على الرسائل اللغوية ، والعناصر غير اللغوية ، والروابط الدلالية بين العناصر النصية والعناصر المشار إليها. علاوة على ذلك ، يبحث التحليل في كيفية دمج العناصر المرئية واللغوية لدعم أو تحدي الأيديولوجيات الاجتماعية المحيطة بتعاطي المخدرات والإدمان. إنه يعطي فهما أعمق لكيفية مشاركة وسائل الإعلام المرئية في البناء الأيديولوجي للروايات المتعلقة بالمخدرات وآثارها الاجتماعية الأوسع. تشير النتائج إلى أن هذه الرسوم الكاريكاتورية تعبر بكفاءة عن الرسائل المعقدة من خلال الرموز المرئية واللغة البسيطة وأن دور الرسوم الكاريكاتورية التحريرية ليس فقط تعبيرا فكاهيا أو فنيا ، بل هي أدوات خطابية مؤثرة تدعم أو تتحدى الأيديولوجيات السائدة لإدمان المخدرات.

1. Introduction

Caricatures are visual satires that have been playing a grounded role for over centuries in both forming the public opinion and reflecting societal attitudes. Those inflated depictions frequently become vessels for criticism, joking, and the outright expression of ideological causes. By applying a sophisticated analytic framework, we can begin to understand what caricatures mean and the consequences they yield. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) does so by focusing on how discourse both constructs and is established through social power structures and ideologies (Gee, 2014: 45–47).

The theoretical basis of CDA offers a superior way to understand that caricature materializes cultural hegemony; through visual exaggeration and symbolic representation, caricatures reveal the ways power relations, stereotypes and societal norms are disseminated (Van Dijk 1993: 22–24). This emphasis on the relationship between language and image becomes important in the analysis of caricatures that frequently use visual distortion to either challenge or reinforce prevalent social attitudes (Wodak & Meyer 2016: 78-81).

This type of visual artifacts can be analyzed through CDA, broken-down and favorably return to its deeper ideological and cultural messages. The importance of CDA to the research on caricatures is proved by its ability to explore how visual texts as such are involved in larger discursive activities. For example, caricatures have been shown to dismantle but also reinforce stereotypes and power relations, showing that it is a discourse product as well as a discursive producer (Fairclough, 2001: 56-58). In contemporary contexts, caricatures continue to play a crucial role in political and social commentary, making it vital to understand their discursive functions (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006: 112-115).

This paper seeks to explore the intersection of CDA and caricature analysis, aiming to shed light on how these visual representations negotiate meaning and reflect societal power dynamics. By examining caricatures through CDA, we can gain insights into how they contribute to, and reflect, ongoing social and political discourses.

2. Literature Review

Ahmed & Ali's (2022) paper investigated designated cartoons regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, highlighting their assembly to convey messages related to social and political practices. The dissected caricatures pertained to vaccine shortages and probed public reactions towards authorities. Utilizing CDA and Semiotic models, the analysis focused on linguistic messages (verbal descriptions and lexical choices), literal denoted messages (non-

linguistic features), and symbolic connoted messages (interconnections between textual and denoted elements). The analysis revealed two primary insights:

1-The apparent failure of government officials to manage the escalating pandemic effectively.

2-The perceived untrustworthiness of authorities due to their inability to timely develop a vaccine to mitigate critical casualties.

Hassan et al. (2022) investigated the ideological propositions some caricatures in relation to their verbal expressions. The data comprised five cartoons sourced from four platforms regarding the 2015 and 2020 Paris attacks. The analysis employed Kress and van Leeuwen's Grammar of Visual Design and Machin and Mayr's Multimodal CDA frame. The examination of both verbal and visual components of the cartoons elucidated the ideologies present. Furthermore, the media has a significant role in influencing public perceptions of drug addiction. Habib et al. (2023) analysed the concept of dehumanization which means the perception or treatment of people as a subhuman. The study found that dehumanizing drug users in different media forms causes stigma and discrimination and often depicting them as poor or uneducated showing harmful stereotypes and biased policies. Editorial caricatures show embellish features and symbols to communicate messages efficiently and rapidly and thus they are powerful tools strengthening the societal ideologies. Kordić (2017) analysed media representations in the Croatian daily press found that drug addicts were pictured through sensationalist lenses showing societal biases. The use of caricatures in media is similar to the concept of figured worlds. These worlds form and support social narratives and identities. The public's comprehension of addiction is affected by these visual representations since the latter change complex issues to easily comprehended and biased narratives (Banack et al., 2023)

Nemati & Khataei's (2023) research investigated the representation of ideology in political caricatures spanning from the Persian Constitutional Revolution to the present, utilizing a sociological lens alongside linguistic analysis to elucidate the interplay of verbal and visual components. Findings indicated that caricatures effectively communicated intricate messages and fostered audience awareness, thereby underscoring their significance within the sociocultural landscape of Iran.

3. Defining Discourse Analysis

Scholars specify various meanings of the two technical terms discourse and discourse analysis in different fields. Tannen et al. (2015, 11) mention that linguists generally define discourse as anything beyond the sentence. Others like Fasold (1990: 65) state that discourse studies language use. These definitions concentrate on certain instances of language. However, critical theorists use the term "discourses" such as discourses of power and racism to refer to an expansive collection of linguistic and non-linguistic social methods and ideological conventions. The latter accumulation creates power or racism.

Rodríguez-Vergara (2018:297) explains that Zellig Harris was the first to present the term discourse analysis in 1952 and define it as the analysis of interlinked written and spoken language. Critical discourse analysis emphasizes social concerns and power dynamics, whereas non-critical analysis prioritizes linguistic structure, often neglecting societal implications (Zotzmann & O'Regan ,2023:57).

4. Critical Discourse Analysis

Wodak and Meyer (2009) claim that CDA is interested in demonstrating ideologies and power through scrutinizing semiotic spoken and written data (Salih, 2023:360). Crystal (2008:123) regards CDA as a perspective that examines the relations between discourse

events and the socio-political and cultural factors with an emphasis on describing how discourse affects and is affected by power relations in society. Similarly, Van Dijk (2015: 366) defines CDA as kind of discourse analytical research that focuses on the reconstructing and enacting of power abuse and inequality by text and talk in socio-political contexts. Wodak (2001:9) states that CDA considers discourse which includes the spoken and written use of language as a social practice.

For Kazemian & Hashemi (2014), CDA is an interdisciplinary framework examining the interplay between power and discourse, focusing on the construction and challenge of authority and social inequality in textual and verbal communication. Fairclough (1995) rather offers a long clarification of this term:

> By critical discourse analysis I mean analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a)discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power, and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (p.132-33).

5. CDA Approaches

A variety of methodologies is employed in CDA. Within this realm, the contributions of three distinguished scholars will be explicated, namely Fairclough, Van Dijk, and Wodak.

5.1 Fairclough's Socio-Cultural Approach

According to Amoussou and Allagbe (2018:14), Fairclough's framework encompasses three elements: (i) a text (whether spoken or written, inclusive of visual representations), (ii) a discourse practice involving the production, consumption, and dissemination of the text, and (iii) a socio-cultural practice. Consequently, Fairclough outlines a triadic outline for the examination of text and discourse: (a) characterizing the formal attributes of the text linguistically; (b) interpreting the interplay between discursive processes/interaction and the text; and ultimately, (c) the elucidation of the connection between discourse and the social and cultural reality.

The dialectical-relational approach to CDA as articulated by Fairclough (1995) constitutes a fundamentally Marxist framework, deeply entrenched in his scholarly inquiries into the interrelations among language, politics, and mechanisms of control, wherein one can observe a lexicon characterized by profound significance, encompassing concepts such as domination, resistance, hybridization of discursive procedures, technologization, and conversationalization of popular discourse. Fairclough, as elucidated by Wodak and Meyer (2009,1-33), emphasizes the role of semiotic mediation within the context of social conflict, which subsequently manifests as his engagement with social transformations (i.e., practices, events, and social structures). In addition, Ideology for Fairclough is found in the social practise dimension which investigates how discourse is formed by and forms societal structures (Fairclough, 1995). Van Dijk (1998:8) defines ideology as the foundation of social representations that members of a group share and Hall (1996:26) asserts that ideology refers to a collection of discourses which aids the interests of a certain group by forming knowledge.

5.2 Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach

The role of language in shaping social identities and power structures is stressed by Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach which synthesizes cognitive processes and social dynamics for discourse analysis. It is especially effective in examining political discourse and

ideological frameworks. Van Dijk (2009:62-86) asserts that CDA imposes a contextual framework parallel to Moscovici's (2000) social representation theory, where individual perception is shaped by dynamic social perceptions—ideas, beliefs, norms, and images shared within a community and manifested in discourse.

This frame is essential but it has specific demerits such as considering ideological implications, yet neglecting the intricate parts of social identities and power relations. Thus, providing a simple understanding of discourse without signifying the complications of real interactions. For example, when studying leftist narratives, it supports binary oppositions (e.g., left vs. right) only without recognising the existed beliefs (Ahmadi et al., 2023).

5.3 Discourse-Historical approach

Ruth Wodak formulated the discourse-historical approach (DHA). Wodak (2015, 1–2) postulates that her framework integrates historical context with CDA. It synthesizes linguistic scrutiny with historical, sociological, theoretical, and methodological perspectives. In the analysis of anti-Semitic imagery in the 1986 Austrian presidential campaign discourse, Wodak first applied this approach (Riyanti,2023:389). The latter aspires to discern, among other objectives, the contexts wherein those in positions of authority employ language and various semiotic practices to sustain their dominance (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009, 87).

The meaning paradigm in DHA encompasses four interpretative levels: (a) linguistic co-text,
(b) inter-textual and inter-discursive level,
 (c) extra-linguistic level, and
 (d) sociopolitical and historical level (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

The relationship among different forms of writing and conversation assists in removing context and redefining it, thus permitting the integration of context-relevant components into current systems. DHA has developed numerous theoretical and informative tools, grounded in linguistic models and argumentation principles. Specifically, DHA identifies six ideological positioning techniques (selection, estimation, argumentation, viewpoint, exacerbation, and mitigation) within a comprehensive framework addressing discourse content, linguistic modalities, and context-dependent stereotypes. The integration of observation, theory, and methodology, alongside the distinction between practical execution and theoretical constructs, represents DHA's strengths. Its sociological, political, and historical analyses significantly contribute to its methodology, particularly regarding genre structures, although there is a notable limitation which is the lack of a systematic protocol in this domain (Ahmed & Ali, 2022: 6-7).

6. Defining Semiotics

Semiotics studies signs and their interpretations, chiefly in texts such as poetry (Ghozali et al. 2022,206-207). The term semiotics is derived from the Greek word (semiotiké) for sign, encompassing its historical context in medicine and evolving to signify the observation of symptoms, while also addressing the relationship between signifiers and signifieds across communicative forms (Da Silva Neto & Rodrigues, 2023). Furthermore, de Saussure (1916: 15) defines semiotics as A science that studies the life of signs within society and Barthes and Smith (1967: 9) mentions that Semiology is a science of signs. Semiotics involves the inspection of various sign types transmitted through different channels, the analysis of socially and evolutionarily constructed sign systems, and the investigation of the conditions under which meaning is derived from signs (Prior, 2014:1). According to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, the signifier denotes the visual aspect of a sign, whereas the signified represents the mental association or meaning (Fauzan et al., 2023:116).

7. Caricatures: An Overview

The caricature functions as a visual medium that delivers messages through exaggerated illustrations. It efficiently communicates criticism or awareness to the audience. Its primary objective is to highlight societal deficiencies and injustices. Any topic relevant to humanity can be depicted through caricature. Consequently, a caricature functions as historical documentation and social commentary reflective of its era. By mirroring contemporary society, it serves as a reference point for future evaluation. These characteristics render cartoons invaluable to historians, and they have contributed to the establishment of cartoon journalism as a distinct academic field (Das,2019:7). Caricatures work as instruments for cultivating visual arts cognition, analytical thought, and novel viewpoints. They delineate emblematic figures via aesthetic, physiological, and morphological examinations within educational contexts (Pineda,2019:44).

8. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach involving CDA and semiotics. The data consist of four caricatures selected purposively for their thematic relevance and symbolic richness. The researcher uses Barthes' (1957) model to analyse the connotative and denotative meanings of visual signs and only the social dimension of Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework. Each caricature is analysed semiotically by recognizing the visual elements and their meanings. The use of Barthes' model highlights the way these signs reconstruct societal myths on drug addiction. This blended approach enables a significant interpretation of the way the visual and textual elements reflect, support, or challenge dominant discourses on drug addiction. Fairclough's analysis of ideology aligns proficiently with Barthes' semiotic theory, embracing a grassroots viewpoint. Data analysis progresses from broad to specific perspectives. Initially, micro-level discursive and semiotic analyses, followed by cultural and social contexts elucidation. The researcher employs Fairclough's and Barthes' frameworks for comprehensive data analysis. The caricatures will be examined for linguistic messages, literal denoted messages, and symbolic connoted messages.
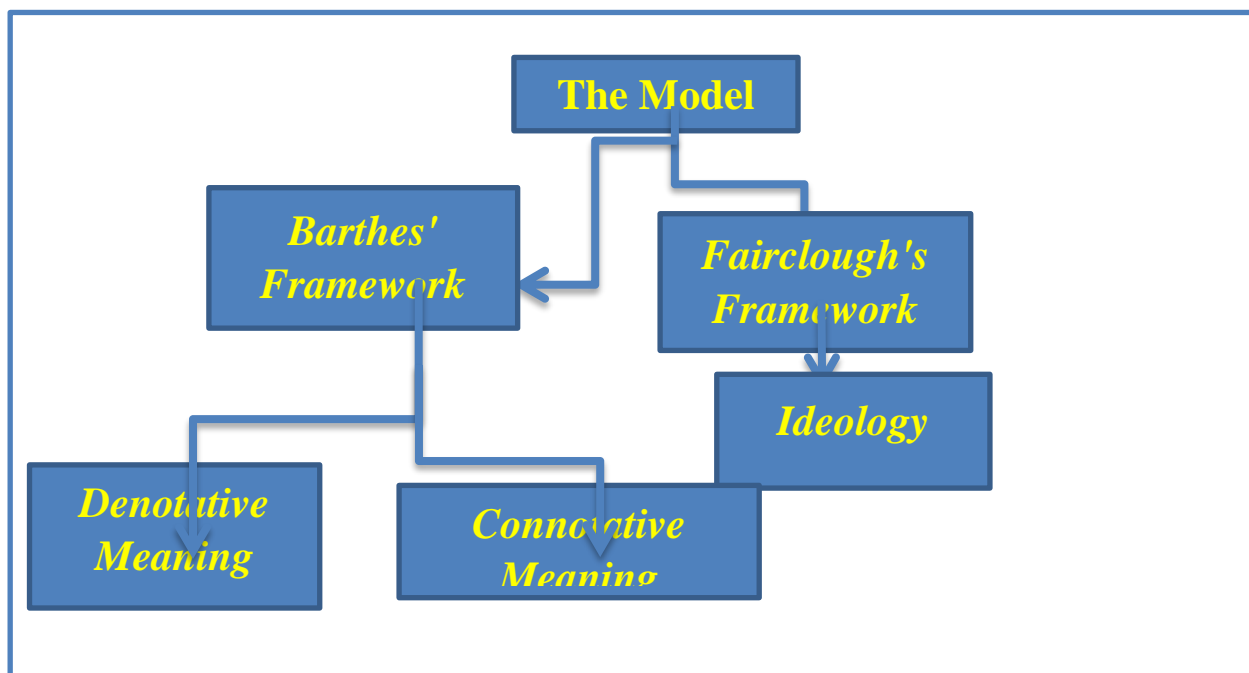
9. Data Analysis
Caricature (1)

Figure (2) https://www.cartoonstock.com

In this caricature, the encoded and uncoded messages can be scrutinized through semiotic and linguistic analyses as follows:

Semiotic Analysis

1. Signs and symbols:

The hollow designated "Drugs" functions as a metaphor for a trap or a deadly trail. The existence of the skull within the pit appears as a universal emblem of mortality and thus reinforcing the terrifying consequences of drug use. The banded individual reflects a representation of ignorance or lack of knowledge or awareness and displays doubt regarding his directional route. The school uniform shows that the individual is a student which means that he represents the youth. Directional indicators (Education and Drugs) are signs that exhibit a distinct juxtaposition between two contrasting life alternatives. The "Education" sign shows one pathway, while the "Drugs" sign points towards a pit or an imminent fall, therefore signalling hazard. The sign "education" reflects a socially approved path unlike the pit refers to danger.

2. Encoded Message (Connotations)

The blindfold signifies insufficient leadership or the potential for being deluded, with the path towards drugs represented as a substantial blunder in judgment, ending in danger (as shown by the pit and skull). The individual is a schoolboy as manifested by the uniform. The cartoon implies that he is cautious to choose the appropriate course of action to pursue in life, exemplifying the confusion or inconclusiveness encountered by numerous adolescents. The contrast between "Education" and "Drugs" embodies the severe divergence between a constructive, rewarding trajectory and one that closes in destruction and potentially fatal consequences.

3. Uncoded Message (Denotations)

The walking boy approaching the branded pit is wistfully querying whether he is going in the right direction.

Linguistic Analysis

The language used is very facile which makes the intended message logical and relevant drawing the attention of many people including adolescents. There is only one textual component which is the question the boy asked that shows his hesitation. The boy is involved in a self-reflection process about his choices. The two expressions "Education" and "Drugs" combination establishes a moral opposition between two options.

Ideological Analysis

The question the boy asks shows the lack of awareness among the young. Individuals should be aware of their responsibilities regarding addiction and this neoliberalism is rooted in this caricature. The latter implies people are free to choose, yet incorrect choices have significant effects. The central ideology reflected is that drug addiction prevents people from attaining their ambitions and education is crucial to succeed. However, the conflict between the social expectations and individual agency is criticized and this is indicated by the boy who stands for people's efforts to decide accurately. To sum up, the main ideology is that education is right option unlike drug abuse which is the erroneous one. It is clear that the figure relies on twofold symbols like (education vs. drugs, success vs. destruction) to tell a moral message. Drug abuse is ideologically positioned as a deviation from socially approved paths of success and wisdom.

Figure (3) https://www.pottsmerc.com

Caricature (2)

Semiotic Analysis

1. Denotative/Uncoded (Literal) Analysis

-Visual Elements

The "Heroin Epidemic" is exemplified by a portentous figure with dark clouds and aggressive qualities. Two men use a big cannon with an inscription to face this entity. A shadow is shaped over a local residence which means that disaster pervades average people and families. One of men says , "Let's add this to the fight!", which is captured in the speech bubble.

-Textual Elements

The utterances "Heroin Epidemic" and "Drug Education and Abuse Prevention Initiative" include clear and important constituents for people to pay attention to. This assertive sentence "Let's add this to the fight!" shows two vital methods to be used against addiction. These include educating people about the harmful effects of drugs and using prevention programs.

2. Connotative/Encoded (Symbolic) Analysis

- The Monstrous Entity (Heroin Epidemic)

The entity's shape which is hazy and immense means that the majority of the society will suffer from the consequences of the epidemic. The figure represents this catastrophe as a dangerous and inescapable occurrence and has a pervasive nature. The giant teeth and claws refer to danger, aggression, and destruction. The dark smoke reflects fear and confusion which typical of a menace.

-The Cannon (Drug Education and Abuse Prevention Initiative)

The cannon used by one of the men symbolizes the tactics used to tackle this problem. It is implied that the weapons employed to confront include drug education and prevention programs.

Linguistic Analysis

The language used is serious since it reflects that drug education and prevention are two new policies used in this endless war which is shown in the sentence "Let's add this to the fight!". There is a visual metaphor of the crisis which is represented as a huge monster to match social perspective of drug abuse as a malevolent and aggressive power.

Ideological Analysis

The comparison of the heroin epidemic to a huge monster shows how dense social complications are brutalized. Thus, the metaphor concentrates on the panic instead of the causes of addiction. The employment of education as a weapon refers to reducing the destructive effects of drugs like the public change to use drug prevention as well as support programs to deal with this issue. The giant weapon reflects the collective societal effort to oppose this danger. The text "let's add this to the fight" with the visual elements show a governmental or institutional ideological attitude that is drug abuse is a significant social peril which requires educational and defensive reactions.

Figure (3) https://www.newtimes.co.rw

Caricature (3)

Semiotic Analysis

-Drug Abuse as the Grim Reaper

The use of the dark cloak shows a strong link with the harmful effects of addiction and death. The drug abuse is presented as a grim reaper and the latter is used traditionally to symbolize transience which means drugs lead to destruction and death. The head of the reaper is a snake because it is usually associated with danger and poisonousness as well as

manipulation. This indicates that drug abuse has a twofold description since it is dangerous and alluring at the same time.

-The Person on a Leash

The man is wearing a formal suit with a tie which suggests that he used to be educated and employed. However, his addiction has ruined his life. He is powerless handing over power to his addiction and this is shown by the way he is tied by a leash to the reaper. He is physically weak since he is slavering and trying hard to keep his balance and apparently the reaper is pulling him to his end. His floppy tongue reflects exhaustion and sickness.

-The Gravestone

The man is hauled against his will to an open grave which represents the fatal end of addiction and that is death. The grave is a very powerful cue of the significance of drugs consequences.

-Signposts

Addiction distracts individuals from promising life chances and this is captured by the arrows directions leading the man away from constructive trajectories. The guiding signposts on the right of the caricature show providential endings like education, career, good health, and employment, but he cannot achieve them due to his addiction.

-Contrasts and Colors

The white and red colours of the signposts differ from the black reaper to signify the plain difference between the damages of drug abuse and the progressive life attained without addiction. The signposts red color which stands for exigency advocate the significance of following these promising pathways in life.

Linguistic Analysis

1. Text on the Grim Reaper: "Drug Abuse "

This text is very clear as it shows uncomplicatedly that the figure refers to drug abuse.

Therefore, no other possible interpretations can be deduced since the idea is explicit.

2. The Signposts (Education, Employment, Career, Good Health)

Every term is selected wisely to refer to a different phase of life. These are goals that people do their best to reach, yet the man seems to be unable to accomplish them. The words used are optimistic and ambitious suggesting self-growth and development. Nevertheless, they are diverse from the picture of the straining man approaching death.

Ideological Analysis

The visual metaphor of the reaper figure refers to how drug abuse dominates the victim's agency preventing him from paths of career and education. The snake represents how deceitful and fatal drugs can be.   This reflects the ideological message that drug abuse is harmful and leads people away from positive paths in life. There is a hegemonic ideology which shows the terms used in the caricature such as education, career and employment are vital signs of a good life, yet addiction is a barrier to them. Social worriers of the detrimental nature of drug abuse is expressed by the grave and the figure with a snake as a head and thus reflecting a warning description. To sum up, the ideology exposed is that drug abuse is a devastating power that makes individuals distracted from their socially essential objectives. Symbolic images —death, snake, leash, and the grave—reflect the social and moral consequences of drug abuse.

Figure (5) https://www.newtimes.co.rw

Caricature (4)

Semiotic Analysis

1.Skeleton

Symbolism: The skeletal figure denotes not merely corporeal demise but also an acute state of exhaustion. Within this framework, it may epitomize the detrimental impact that addiction or the excessive intake of alcoholic beverages (notably vodka) imposes on an individual, culminating in devastation, mortality, or significant injury.

Metaphor for Desperation: The skeleton may serve as a representation of an individual who has physically deteriorated as a result of the repercussions of rampant alcohol consumption, suggesting that addiction exhausts an individual on physical, psychological, and emotional levels.

2. Desert

Desert as Isolation and Despair: a desert exemplifies a realm of profound desolation, scarcity of resources, and seclusion. In this illustrative depiction, the desert may be interpreted as a metaphor for the barren and solitary condition that addiction can engender. It is an empty place and there is sign of any escapism which highlights the sensation of being imprisoned in a deadly cycle.

Fatigue and high temperature: the sun is glowing luminously since it is a tiring setting that represents sorrowful outcomes of addiction.

3. The "HELP!" Sign

The call for Assistance: the word Help that the skeleton grips communicates despair and refers to a request for liberation and support. Linguistically, this word is a very strong demand to emphasize this harsh condition.

From a linguistic perspective, the term itself constitutes a potent, direct entreaty that accentuates the gravity of the predicament.

Irony: An ironic dimension exists within this symbol. The skeleton, which appears beyond the reach of assistance (given its deceased state), nonetheless clutches a sign imploring help, insinuating that the individual may have sought aid previously, but such requests were either disregarded or arrived too late.

Linguistic Analysis

HELP!: The term "HELP!" is inscribed in uppercase letters, thereby amplifying its urgency. The exclamation mark adds an emotional immensity, denoting a sense of panic or rigor. The

difficult situation of the skeleton differs from the simple idea of the caricature which implies that assistance should have been given long before declining.

Ideological Analysis

This caricature criticizes the way addicted individuals are abandoned socially. The image of the skeleton in an empty desert signifies how they are isolated in society. The ask for help stresses the need for support systems. There is a potent assessment of the social viewpoints toward drug abuse. It communicates the ideology that addiction is a personal disappointment.

10. Conclusion

By examining the selected caricatures, the researcher found that very complicated ideas are expressed successfully using simple language and graphic elements. There are opposites in colors and symbols to contradiction between positive and negative selections. Metaphors are utilized regularly like the grim reaper metaphor to stand for death and textual constituents explicate the intended message. These caricatures illustrate both overt and covert messages. The study concludes that the caricatures are not only artistic representations, but they are very strong discursive tools since they represent, support, or defy the existed ideologies of drug abuse. Semiotic analysis shows that caricatures frequently utilize cultural signs embedded such as symbolic imagery to express different meanings such as morality and victimhood in relation to drug abuse.

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