

## Analyzing the Psychological Dimensions of Normalization in BBC's News Channel through Semiotic Analysis

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### Abstract:

This academic study aims to explore the psychological aspects of normalization within the context of the BBC's news channel. Specifically, it employs semiotic analysis to examine the ways in which psychological factors contribute to the process of normalizing certain narratives, discourses, and ideologies within the news content presented by the BBC. Readers are in need to get acquainted with a number of ways for making sense of reading visual imagery. To build meaning, a wide range of semiotic resources have been employed, so visual meaning systems provide a variety of tools and opportunities for meaning creation. The present study deals with the concept of normalization in a semiotic track. It involves selected political news reports from BBC's website channel. It also documents the visual analysis of the presented images within the reports that focus on normalization between Israel and Arabs. So, this study aims at investigating the following concerning normalization in BBC selected news channels' images: the type of gaze that is mostly prevailed in BBC's presented participants images, the widely used social distance between the presented participants and the viewers in BBC's reports that deal with normalization, the main indication of the mostly used angle in BBC's reports images, the dominant colours utilized in BBC's reports regarding normalization and the way the presented participants are placed according to new-given structures. By conducting a semiotic analysis of the BBC's news channel, this study seeks to uncover the psychological factors at play in the process of normalization within their news programming. It aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how the selection, framing, and presentation of news stories contribute to shaping public perception and the acceptance of certain ideas or values. Ultimately, this research provides insights into the complex interplay between media, psychology, and the construction of societal norms.

**Keywords:** Normalization ,Semiotics, BBC, Visual

### INTRODUCTION

The Arab-Israeli normalization refers to Arab-Israeli peace attempts and accords. Since the 1970s, there has been a parallel attempt to identify terms for peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many channels write their reports and support them with images concerning the normalization treaty between Israel and some Arab states. The "grammar of visual design" theory presented by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is one of the theories accessible for analyzing media discourse. They give a framework for analyzing and comprehending visual images, as well as the interaction of visual elements with the viewer in media discourses. According to Halliday, the visual design, like all semiotic modes, accomplishes three main functions: an ideational function, which represents the world around and within us; a "interpersonal" function, which implements social interactions as social relationships; and a textual function, which introduces a coherent world of the text, a world in which all the elements of the text come together internally and harmonize with its relevance (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.16).

## 1. NORMALIZATION: DEFINITION

The process of imposing, restoring, or maintaining normalcy is referred to as normalization. A wide range of techniques, tools, and mechanisms are also used. The two ways that normalization intervenes are to construct the abnormal using preconceived notions of what should be normal and to impose new definitions and practices of normalcy by dictating what should be normal.

The terms "peace," "stability," "safety," and "order," as well as "recovery and reconstruction of relations and affairs between and within states affected by war, disaster, and other events deemed unusual and unacceptable," have typically been used interchangeably with normalization (Visoka & Lemay-Hébert, 2022, p.2).

As a noun, "normalization" refers to any process that brings something closer to being normal or regular, which usually entails conforming to some regularity or rule or leaving an abnormal state. It also indicates standardization, act of imposing standards or norms or rules or regulations. In relational database design, a process that breaks down data into record groups for efficient processing, by eliminating redundancy or it is a process of establishing normal diplomatic relations between two countries (web source1).

### 1.2 NORMALIZATION FROM A LINGUISTIC DIMENSION

Several articles also build on important discourse-analytical work that has a specific focus on normalization in/as a discourse and that has produced related concepts that are helpful in describing the discursive construction of normalization as well as its very specific linguistic representations and displays. The first of these viewpoints is Fairclough's (1992, 1995) original idea of "naturalization," which he (2010, p.30) defines as "the capacity to 'naturalize' ideologies, i.e. to win acceptance for them as non-ideological common sense".

Naturalization is used by Fairclough as a sign of a broader process of discourse hierarchy, or more specifically, as a means of deliberately establishing the difference between "dominant" and "dominated" discourses. He argues that naturalization's overall aim is the generation of common sense around ideas which, as such, do not originate from within wider public- and are most definitely not intended to create or preserve the common good. Instead, he claims that naturalization can be directly attributed to ideologies that are vying for public mind dominance.

In another crucial approach to normalization in discourse intersection, Gavriely-Nuri (2013) examines discourses that normalize war in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict using empirical research. She argues that in that context, normalization's primary goal is, as previously stated, to normalize the abnormality and thereby lessen its "cultural-cognitive dissonance", which is inherently a part of a process where something as utterly unacceptable as war is being presented as acceptable.

Gavriely-Nuri (2013, p.129) emphasizes that not only wars but also other "controversial social issues" - such as "poverty, diseases, corruption, earthquakes, global warming, ethnic minorities, and disabled people" may be subjected to a very similar trajectory of processes of normalization. She claims that the power of discourses normalizing war resides in their oppositional character vis-à-vis those arguing against military interventions and conflicts.

## 2. Kress and Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar Model (2006)

The analysis of images are analyzed using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model. Interactive meaning represents the imaginary relationships that could exist between viewers and participants in an image. Three ideas are mentioned by Kress and Van Leeuwen that reflect these relationships:

**2.1 Gaze:** Eye contact between the participants and viewers, where a direct gaze from the part of the participants may reflect a "demand" relationship. An *indirect* gaze, or gaze absence, may only represent a participant "offering" information to the audience (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 118). In this kind of images, the producers just want to provide information to the viewers.

**2.2The Distance:** Kress and Van Leeuwen distinguish between close-up, medium, and long shots when describing frame size or the distance. They demonstrate how different social relationships between viewers and participants may be represented by shot distance. They contend that a close-up image of a public figure may suggest a close friendship or neighborhood between the participant and the viewer. On the other hand, a long distance shot might show a different (opposite) relation of detachment between them. The distance between participants and viewers determines how intimate it will be; the smaller the distance, the more intimate it will be. Images can allow viewers to feel closer to participants as if they were friends or relatives when the distance is being not far from them. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.178).

**2.3The angle (Perspective)** is served to show the position in which the viewers are made to see the images. Perspective deals with the choice of angles. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) cover two perspectives concerning the angle:

**2.3.1 Horizontal angle:** The relationship between the frontal planes of the participants who are being represented and the image-producer determines the horizontal angle. A *frontal angle* indicates *involvement*, whereas an *oblique angle* indicates *detachment*, and can therefore be used to express whether the image-producer and viewer are connected to the participants being represented or not. (Frontal angle: refers to the participation or interaction of participants and viewer, where the oblique angle reflects the detachment, so that viewers are not part of the image, they only view the way an image is represented) (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 134).

**2.3.2 Vertical angle:** When an image is presented from a high, low, or eye-level angle, it may allude to the power dynamics between viewers and participants. Thus, *participants depicted from a high angle are under the power of the viewers. Participants depicted from a low angle are of higher social status than the viewers*, whereas *equality social relation is reflected when an image is depicted within eye level*. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 140-179) also note that the degree of the angle affects the degree of involvement, detachment, and power.

## 2.4 Information Value

Within the visual discourse, it includes the distribution of elements in various zones. In a multimodal discourse, the information value varies depending on whether elements are distributed *vertically or horizontally*. The information value of the right side of an image, for instance, differs from the left side when elements are distributed horizontally. *The left side frequently has elements that are well-known or expected (given)*. The terms "given elements" refer to what the audience has agreed to and accepted. On the other hand, *"new" elements are positioned to the right*. "New" refers to parts of a composition that are novel or unusual and require the viewer to focus more on them. The distribution of elements from left to right may therefore denote progression and movement.

## 2.5 Colour

Mas Dian, in his book "The Effect of Color in Feng Shui", argues that colors have a specific trait that can have an impact on a person's emotional state and can provide various sources of inspiration. He also explains that the language of color can have different meanings, (Dian, 2002: 1-2) such as:

Pink representing femininity, softness, beauty, and romance. Red representing energy, power, dynamic activity, and heat. Creamy symbolizing gentleness, classic exclusivity, neutrality, warmth, and sweetness. Orange representing carefree enjoyment, popularity, loudness, brightness, heat, and passion. Pale yellow representing nature, cheerfulness, warmth, softness, prettiness, and sweetness. Light green representing freshness, happiness, cheerfulness, growth. Green representing classicality, coolness, worldliness, exclusivity, and quietness. Light blue representing calmness, cleanliness, coolness, peacefulness, gentleness, and relaxation. Blue representing classicality, strength, confidence, calmness, and professionalism. White representing nature, quietness, purity, cleanliness, chastity, classicality, sheen, and grief. Black representing classicality, elegance, mysticism, power, toughness, sexiness, and drama. Silver representing exclusivity or expense, elegance, classic, and coolness. Gold representing energy, power, dynamic activity, and heat.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS

#### Report 1

**Headline: Israel says partnership with Arab League allies will deter Iran**



#### A. Situational Context

In this picture, Israel's Foreign Minister Yair Lapid (on the left) welcomes Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani by shaking hands upon his arrival for the Negev summit at Sde Boker in the southern Negev desert on March 27, 2022

#### B. Visual Analysis

From an interactive perspective, the represented participants do not look directly to the viewer, yet they look to something out of the image's frame. It is called an 'offer' picture, since both may show some information about the type of relation between Israel and Bahrain that they represent. As the Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs is pointing to something while he is talking and the Israeli Foreign Minister is smiling, this indicates a strong relation between the two.

The distance between the presented participants and the viewers is far personal as the area from the head to the waist is visible that shows a personal relation with the viewer. The angle in this picture is horizontal, frontal and at the eye level, so the viewers can see them from a close angle and this creates the feelings of involvement making the viewer as part of the image.

The information which is presented on the left side includes the Israeli Foreign Minister as he is the host and the known partner in this image while on the right side, the Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs appears as a new partner and guest. Both are presented at the center of the image, which gives them an equal attention and prominence. The most salient colours are the light blue of the Israeli flag, which indicates calmness and coolness with the white colour that gives purity, cleanliness and nature.

The silver of the Bahraini Minister's dress represents coolness and exclusivity. Moreover, the red colour in US flag is also clear in the image to indicate power and energy.

#### Report 2

**Headline: Israel and UAE strike historic deal to normalise relations**



### **A. Situational Context**

This image views on the left Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi in two separated pictures that are taken in different setting as it is clear from the slight line between the two frames.

### **B. Visual Analysis**

From an interactive perspective, the gaze in these two shouts represent "offer", so both images offer information to the viewer by showing that Netanyahu and Al Nahyan are engaged in diplomatic relations and aiming at normalizing the relation between the two countries.

The distance is intimate as only the head and the face are visible that indicates an intimate relationship between the presented participants and the viewers. The angle in these pictures is horizontal, frontal and at the eye level so it creates a sense of involvement making the viewer as part of their world.

According to the information value, what is presented on the left side includes the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu while on the right side, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi appears as a new partner in normalizing relation with Israel. Both are presented at the center of the page with equal size which gives them an equal attention. The prevailed colors in this image are the white shirt and blue ties of Netanyahu's associates with Israeli flag. His black jacket indicates power, toughness and seriousness. Al Nahyan's traditional white clothes indicate a sense of purity in this image.

## **Report 3**

### **Headline: Pompeo urges more Arab states to make peace with Israel**



### **A. Situational Context**

In this image, it is seen that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (in the left) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (on the right) bump elbows, ahead of making a joint statement to the press after meeting in Jerusalem, August 24, 2020.

### **B. Visual Analysis**

In term of the presented gaze in this image, it tends to be an "offer" one as both Pompeo and Netanyahu do not look directly to the viewer instead Pompeo is looking directly towards Netanyahu whom in turn is looking to something out of the images frame. As they show how strong, relation they are engaged in and how intimate they are to each other that represents the diplomatic strong ties between US and Israel.

The distance between the presented participants and the viewer is far personal as the area from the head to the waist is visible which indicate a personal relation with the viewer.

Pompeo and Netanyahu are depicted from a horizontal angle, frontal and at the eye level, which indicates an involvement sense between the presented participants and the viewer.

What is presented at the left side is US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo while Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is at the right side of the image and both are placed at the center of the image, which gives them both an equal

attention and focus. The salient item is the prevailed blue colour of the background which is associated with the Israeli flag, also this colour is found in Pompeo and Netanyahu's neck- ties. The black and white colors of their formal suit represent elegance, power and classicality.

#### **Report 4**

##### **Headline: Israel-Gaza: Conflict stalls Arab-Israeli Rapprochement**



#### **A. Situational Context**

In this image from the left, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Donald Trump, Bahrain Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa and UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan pose for a photo on the Blue Room Balcony at the White House in Washington after signing the Abraham Accords on September 15, 2020 .

#### **B. Visual Analysis**

From an interactive perspective, as Trump, Al-Nahyan and Al Khalifa look directly to the viewers whereas Netanyahu looks at unknown things so this picture will be a mix between "demand" and "offer" picture. The participants (Trump, Al-Nahyan and Al Khalifa) who demand ask the viewer to support what they are doing and to agree with what type of relation they get with Israel. Furthermore, the look of Netanyahu provides the viewers with more information about what they do and present that new normalized relation between Israel and Arab nations by US brokering as a new step in the Arab region. The distance between the represented participants and the viewers is far social as the whole figures and the space around them is visible which indicates a formal and impersonal relationship with the viewer and he is not part of the image's world.

The angle in this picture is horizontal, frontal and at the eye level without power difference. It creates a sense of involvement with the viewer to be with their decision concerning the normalization agreement.

The information which is presented on the left side is known as getting strong diplomatic relations between them which is represented by Netanyahu and Trump but what is new and current is the Arab Nations that joined the process of normalizing the relation with Israel so both Al-Khalifa and Al-Nahyan are presented the left side of the image to attract the viewer's attention as they are newly making normalization with Israel.

The salient colours are the white background which indicates the place where they are standing i.e the white house. The dark blue of the participants' formal suits implies power and classicality. The red colour of Trump, Al-Nahyan and Al Khalifa's neck-ties indicates power while Netanyahu's blue one is associated with the Israeli flag. What is written at the title-plate is so obvious that refers to the white house, where they are standing and signing the normalization treaty.

#### **4. THE RESULT OF THE VISUAL ANALYSIS**

The BBC reports on the normalization process between Israel and its neighboring countries, as well as the United States, featuring images of high-ranking officials meeting and greeting each other. The first image shows the



Foreign Ministers of Israel and Bahrain shaking hands in a non-transactional manner, with a far personal distance and calming colors. The second image features Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in separate pictures, but with a similar theme of diplomatic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, with an intimate distance and powerful colors. The third image shows US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Netanyahu bumping elbows in a formal setting, with far personal distance and powerful colors. The fourth report highlights the dynamic narrative process of the normalization agreement signed between Israel, UAE, and Bahrain, brokered by the former US President Donald Trump, with a mix of demand and offer, formal and impersonal relationship, and a sense of involvement and decision-making concerning the normalization agreement. All the details are clarified in table (1) below:

**Figure (1) the Visual Analysis of BBC Channel**

VISUAL DIMENSIONS		REPORT 1	REPORT 2	REPORT 3	REPORT 4
Representational	Narrative	Non-transactional	Non-transactional	Transactional	Non-Transactional
Interactive	Gaze	Offer	Offer	Offer	Demand-Offer
	Distance	Far personal	Intimate	Far personal	Far social
	Angle	Frontal-Horizontal	Frontal-Horizontal	Frontal-Horizontal	Frontal-Horizontal
Compositional	Information Value	Israeli Foreign Minister at the left Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs at the right	Israeli Prime Minister at the left, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi at the right	US Secretary of State at the left, UAE & Israeli Prime Minister at the right	Israeli & USA leaders at the left, UAE & Bahraini leaders at the right,
	Salience	Israeli \ USA flags	Both participants presented with focus	The Israeli flag at the background	Friendly meeting of the four leaders
	Colour	Silver\ Red	Blue\ White\Black	Blue\ White\Black	White\ Red\Dark blue

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

1. The gaze in BBC reports' images is presented to offer information indirectly to the viewer about normalization. Each image gives an explanation about the participants' statues, instead of demanding the viewer to do certain acts.
2. Regarding the social distance and the angle, it is found that BBC chooses images, about normalization, that makes the viewer feels as if he is part of what he sees to indicate the sense of involvement between the participants and the viewer.

3. Colours make a great effect in the selected images as they influence the mood of the viewer. It is found that the prevailed colours are blue and white which are associated with the Israeli flag. Added to the black and white to reflect classical, nature and sheen and the red one which indicates the sense of power.

4. Concerning the presence of the participants, BBC reflects that normalization is a new track for Arabs while it is common to US. That is presented by placing the Arab leaders on the right side (new) while American and Israeli officials are on the left (given).

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