



Original article

Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Political Caricatures on Telegram Reflecting the US-Israel-Iran Conflict (March 2026)



Khalida H. Addai AlGhezzezy¹,



Taqwa Rashid Juma'a²

Wasit University, College of Education for Human Sciences, Open Educational College/Center of Najaf²

***Correspondence author:**

khhashoosh@uowasit.edu.iq
taqwa.rashid@ec.due.iq

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of political caricatures in digital communications in the US-Israel-Iran conflict of March 2026 using the framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The study aims to analyze how the combination of visual and textual elements in these caricatures conveys ideological positions. Nine caricatures gathered from the Telegram platform "Iran in Arabic," are analyzed due to Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) as a Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The findings indicate that the caricatures, through their humorous and exaggerated details, engage the audience with critical political messages of military strategies, foreign intervention, and media influence. The inclusion of both Arabic and English texts enables the caricatures to target various audiences, with a sense of context and a relevance of the critique to local as well as international audiences.

Keywords: Multimodality, Political Caricatures, Digital Practices.

تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط للرسوم الكاريكاتورية السياسية في الاتصالات الرقمية خلال الصراع الأمريكي-الإسرائيلي-الإيراني مارس (2026)

إ.د. خالدة ح. عدي الغزي¹، أ.م. تقوى رشيد جمعة السوداني²
جامعة واسط/ كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية/ قسم اللغة الإنكليزية¹، الكلية التربوية المفتوحة / مركز النجف²

المُستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة دور الكاريكاتيرات السياسية في الاتصالات الرقمية في صراع الولايات المتحدة وإسرائيل وإيران في مارس 2026 باستخدام إطار تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية نقل مزيج العناصر البصرية والنصية في هذه الكاريكاتيرات للمواقف الأيديولوجية. تُحلل تسع كاريكاتيرات تم جمعها من منصة تيليجرام "إيران بالعربية" وفقًا لتحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط لكريس وفان ليوين (1996). تشير النتائج إلى أن الكاريكاتيرات، من خلال تفاصيلها الفكاهية والمبالغ فيها، تشارك الجمهور برسائل سياسية نقدية تتعلق بالاستراتيجيات العسكرية والتدخل الأجنبي وتأثير وسائل الإعلام. يشمل تضمين النصوص العربية والإنجليزية في الكاريكاتيرات استهداف جمهور متنوع، مع إحساس بالسياق وأهمية النقد للجمهور المحلي والدولي على حد سواء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعددية النمطية، الكاريكاتيرات السياسية، الممارسات الرقمية

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital platforms has profoundly changed the nature of political communication, and political caricatures have become potent tools of social critique and political expression. During periods of geopolitical conflicts, these visual texts, which are often disseminated through the digital sphere (for instance, they are shared worldwide in the format of Telegram), are powerful tools for communicating complex political messages. Political caricatures, in the given context of the US-Israel-Iran conflict (March 2026), are instrumental in the expression of political ideologies, ridiculing the relations of power and involving the audience with the assistance of the combination of visual and textual media. The purpose of this study is based on the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and is intended to investigate the political caricatures that were shared in digital communications during the conflict, according to the particular interest towards studying the multimodal nature of the texts as a means of expressing ideology.

The theoretical constructs of this research lie in the works of Multimodal Discourse Analysis by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), which presents a construct on how meaning is developed by interacting between various semiotic modes, including language, images and symbols. The model of analysis MDA is more concerned with the social and cultural contexts of these modes of operation, and believes that meaning is never fixed, but provided by the interaction of the various resources available to communication (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Besides, the research is founded on the ideas of Social Semiotics and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) suggested by Halliday (1985) that considers *representational*, *interactional* and *compositional* dimensions of communication. These theoretical approaches provide a framework through which the paper will address the issue of visual satire, or in this case, political caricatures, to communicate ideological

standpoints during the digital era.

Although there is an ever-expanding amount of research on the study of multimodal discourse and political caricatures, the gap in knowledge about the role of these caricatures, namely those that spread over the digital communication platforms, in framing existing geopolitical struggles remains. The study aims to fill this gap by answering the following questions:

1. How do the visual and textual elements of the political caricatures combine to express ideological positions regarding the US–Israel–Iran conflict?
2. In what ways do these multimodal texts contribute to shaping public opinion and framing political discourse within the digital space?
3. How do the caricatures reflect the socio-political tensions of the time, and what ideological critiques do they offer regarding the powers involved in the conflict?

By addressing these questions, the study will make a contribution to a better understanding of the role of digital political caricatures in the formation of modern political communication, especially in the context of ongoing international conflicts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The investigation of multimodality is not limited to one specific discipline but can be found in areas such as medical discourse and literacy studies. Multimodality was originally developed and more widely adopted by M.A.K. Halliday (1996) in the context of the Sydney School of Semiotics who used semiotic tools to investigate ancient words and images. Images therefore, play a vital role in disseminating ideologies, as Eco notes that semiotics is culturally oriented and carries diverse interpretations (Khudair, 2026). Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is a collection of methodological methods that study the process by which meaning is produced across various means of communication, which are language, graphics, sounds, and other tools of semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Kress and Van Leeuwen are regarded as the pioneers of creating Multimodal Discourse Analysis. They indicate that multimodality offers a framework for analyzing how different modes, such as language and image, collaborate to create meaning. It enables the study of various semiotic resources, including images, gestures, and text-based messages, to understand how they work together in communication (Adams et al. 2014). In other words, MDA focuses on exploring the various ways communicators convey meaning through different semiotic modes, which go beyond just language. Besides verbal communication, MDA studies the non-verbal features, i.e. images, gestures, and sounds. The most important aspect of multimodality is knowing how the meaning is produced by combining all these various means of communication, which emphasizes the idea that communication cannot be found in language only (George, 2012).

The growing interest in semiotic modes arises from social changes like the impact of electronic communication, globalization of trade, and the blending of political and cultural influences in various countries. These changes have expanded the ways in which ideas can be expressed, moving beyond traditional written language to include other modes such as images. Moreover, multimodal areas are four essential areas. The former is the recognition of non-verbal semiotic modes. The second field is exploring how the semiotic modes interact during communication. The third one is

the analysis of how the semiotic modes are influenced by the social changes. The final field of Multimodal Discourse Analysis concerns the analysis of how the semiotic modes affect interaction (Iedema, 2003). According to Kress (2003), Multimodal Analysis has four theoretical assumptions, and all correspond to the main spheres of the field. To begin with, language has been perceived as a single aspect of multimodality, with other forms of semiotics playing a role in communication. Second, luxurious modes possess their own communicative role and functions, and such functions and roles are influenced by the social, cultural, and historical contexts. Third, meaning is generated through the selection and interplay of various modes, and not just a single mode. Lastly, meaning is understood in the social context in which it is applied, in which the significance of the environment and circumstances surrounding communication should be emphasized.

The work of Kress and van Leeuwen is based on the theory of Systems Functional Linguistics (SFL) created by Halliday. Halliday, in turn, provides three metafunctions of SFL that explain how a visual text is communicated: the "*Ideational*" metafunction that provides information about people, things, places, and events; the "*Interpersonal*" metafunction that tells something about the participants, the author and the audience; and the "*compositional*" metafunction, which is used to bring order to the text through the use of cohesive devices to achieve coherence and flow (Kress & Leeuwen). Halliday views language as a mode that serves to recognize the three metafunctions. However, traditional multimodality focuses primarily on language combined with writing, excluding other semiotic resources. In contrast, Kress and van Leeuwen define multimodality more broadly, encompassing various modes, such as visual, oral, and written forms of communication (Pan, 2015). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) present their own three metafunctions: representational, interactional, and textual, extending Halliday's metafunctions to include all semiotic resources in a text. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the meaning-making process across different modes. They argue that each text contains various modes that are interconnected and collectively convey the intended meaning. Their extended metafunctions can be applied to visual modes, helping researchers break down and analyze images in specific contexts to understand the meaning suggested by the visuals (Rizvi, Waqas Khan & Farooq, 2020).

2.2. Political Caricature and Visual Satire

Political cartoons are a powerful means of media speech, which provides the visual satire reflecting the socio-political vibrations of an area (Saikrishna, 2025). Multimodal discourse analysis has served well in the study of political caricatures as it enables one to clearly see the contribution made to the creation of political meaning by both visual and textual means. Political cartoons, being a certain form of multimodal communication, can be described as the combination of images, symbols and text, used to support ideologies and criticize power structures (Machin, 2013). The concepts of Political Caricature and Visual Satire are also part and parcel of the perception of how visual communication is used to express complicated political concepts and social critique. Political caricatures make use of exaggeration and distortion of body parts, behaviors, and traits of social actors or phenomena to criticize or bring out the faults. It is a visual characteristic of visual satire, turning serious political questions into funny, easy-to-understand

and quite scandalous pictures. A prime example of visual satire is a political cartoon, which is an efficient tool in transmitting political messages through simplifying complicated issues, using visual metaphors, and highlighting contradictions. Being a social critique, these visual forms make it possible to communicate potently and entertain as well as provoke those who have various audiences (Swain, 2012).

Political caricature is a political device that has the strength of a combination of jokes and criticism. Through exaggeration and caricature, such images convey ideological standpoints which can be used to contest power systems and also expose tensions in society. It is possible to interpret visual satire as a visual rhetoric, in which visual tools are used to find the appeal to metaphors, symbolism and humor as persuasive means to change the opinion of the masses and form the discourse of politics. Political cartoons may also act as arenas of ideological dispute in conflict or highly polarized situations. The humor and irony used in the political caricatures tend to provide a critical space in which the audience is able to interact with the political power in a manner that goes beyond the conventional means of political discourse. These stereotypes help in creating the narratives of the masses by revealing hypocrisy, mocking the authorities or bringing out the social inequities (George, 2012).

Furthermore, visual satire has also gained more and more effectiveness in the digital era, which is actively disseminated and transformed using social media. The digital cartoons have a wider influence due to their reach, which has helped them to spark a wider public discussion on current events. The social media sites enable political caricatures to spread far and wide, and in some cases, they are modified or changed to fit the tastes or political inclinations of different people. This process of remixing and sharing adds layers of meaning and accelerates the potential for political satire to influence public opinion. Cartoons and visual satirical content thus represent a dynamic and evolving form of communication that reflects not only the political climate but also the shifting modes of digital engagement (Makaruk et al., 2025; Swain, 2012).

2.3. Digital Communication

Digital communication is defined as the sharing of information using electronic gadgets and networks, which encode information using digital formats (i.e. binary code, i.e. the use of zeros and ones) to transmit and decode the message. The process involves a wide scope of interactions, both at individual or personal levels, organizational and global communications, which involve the use of platforms such as email, social media and video conferencing, among other internet-enabled services (El-Astal & El-Youssef, 2025). Digital communication differs from traditional face-to-face interactions by lacking nonverbal cues and enabling time-asynchronous exchanges, which complicate the application of traditional communication theories. Strauss et al. (2024) conducted a literature review of 84 studies, highlighting the need for specialized research methods and frameworks for analyzing digital communication. They also identified a gap in standardized methodologies and proposed guidelines for data collection, analysis, and interpretation to improve both academic research and organizational practices in this growing field (Strauss, 2024).

Digital Communication has transformed the way individuals communicate and conduct relationships, as well as carrying out social activities. The communication has now gone beyond the customary methods of interaction due to the introduction of digital technologies and has

brought new prospects and challenges. Jones, Chik, and Hafner (2015) conclude that digital technologies have altered the way we conduct activities such as work, play, and politics, in addition to altering discourse analysis. The technologies permit the generation of multimodal texts, which consist of a combination of text, images, and sounds, and the traditional analysis is based on the analysis of spoken (or written) language only. Social media, blogs, and online communities are especially the ones that present new types of interaction that are unlike those that face-to-face communication offers. The digital media affordances support the production of multimodal texts, such as those that combine text, image, and sound, which disrupt the traditional analysis based on the spoken or written language. Social media, blogs, and online communities come into being and bring up new ways of interaction, which are not similar to face-to-face interaction, and bring up the issue of authorship, since practices such as remixing and curating obscure the boundaries between content ownership and content. With the changing nature of digital communication, discourse analysts need to modify the current approaches and create new paradigms that can be used to study such a complicated terrain (Jones, *et. al.*, 2015).

2.4. Previous Studies

Concerning the previous investigations, there is a recent work that applies the multimodal critical discourse analysis to political cartoons on the topic of sanctions against Russia. It raises the issue of cartoons as the intersection of visual and verbal to express the political dynamics and provides an insight into the analytical approach to multimodal political imagery (Makaruk, *et. al.*, 2025). Another study examines political cartoons through multimodal discourse and studies the visual rhetoric and satire features used to pass thematic messages about political problems in the cartoons (Ali, 2025). Although this paper is not a study on caricatures, one can apply critical discourse analysis to the analysis of Al Jazeera English and BBC accounts on the Israel-Gaza war of 2023, one of the most recent topics in the news in relation to multimodal analysis (e.g., the use of cartoons as a media text) (El Damanhoury, *et. al.*, 2025).

Additionally, an article examines political caricatures in the Pakistani English newspaper *The Nation* between 2016 and 2018, focusing on significant political events such as the Panama Papers leak, the News-gate scandal, and political sit-ins. The study shows how political caricatures in the print media critique political parties whose policies are deemed detrimental to public interests (Umer, *et. al.*, 2024). One more study examines the semiotic analysis of political cartoons published in digital media following the high-profile meeting between President Donald Trump and President Volodymyr Zelensky on February 28, 2025, in the Oval Office. The research aims to explore the complex meanings conveyed during this tense encounter. Using *Cartoon Movement*, a global platform for editorial cartoons and journalism websites, the study focuses on seven selected cartoons created between February 28th and March 3rd, 2025 (Faqe, 2025). Finally, a qualitative study examines the understudied domain of Sri Lankan political cartoons, aiming to decode the complex messages they convey. By conducting a discursive content analysis through multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), the research focused on 52 political cartoons published in the *Sunday Observer* between January and December 2021. The analysis revealed how these cartoons employ various modes to communicate socio-political and economic messages (Gunaratne, 2023).

3. Methodology

The proposed research is qualitative and based on a multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) to investigate the political caricatures that were exchanged in the course of the March 2026 war between the United States, Israel and Iran. The study focuses on how these caricatures that were gathered on a Telegram platform can be discussed as political texts, which participate in the current geopolitical crisis. The study seeks to reveal the functionality of multimodal resources, such as visual and textual elements of the caricatures, to convey ideological standpoints, influence public opinion, and involve audiences in a digital conflict discourse.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The current investigation is based on Kress and Leeuwen's (1996) Multimodal Analysis as its theoretical framework, which is grounded in Halliday's social semiotic theory. Their visual grammar theory, part of the social semiotic approach, examines how semiotic systems reflect the social relationship between the receiver and the speaker. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) expand on the idea behind multimodality by adding different modes of communication, which include visual, audio, written, oral and spatial. They expand Halliday's three metafunctions (*ideational*, *interpersonal*, and *textual*) to all semiotic resources by proposing their own set of three metafunctions, namely *representational*, *interactional*, and *compositional*, to analyze the process of meaning-making by contrast in different modes. There are three meta functions proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), including:

- a. Representational meaning** shows the relationship between the world such as thing, person, place etc.
- b. Interactional meaning** is concerned with the relationship between the participants, such as authors and addressees.
- c. Compositional meaning** deals with cohesive, thematic devices and lexis look upon structure and different truth values.

These metafunctions will inform inquiry into the ways in which the visual and textual elements of the caricatures work together, in order to construct meaning, communicate messages and reflect the socio-political context surrounding the conflict. The caricatures will be categorized according to the textual content, so that a comparison can be made between the various types of political messaging integrated into the visual satire.

3.2. Data Collection

For this study, a total of 9 political caricatures were collected from a formal news channel on Telegram called "Iran in Arabic," which provides real-time coverage of the ongoing war in March 2026. These caricatures were shared as part of the media landscape surrounding the conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran.

The collected caricatures are categorized into three distinct groups based on the presence of textual content:

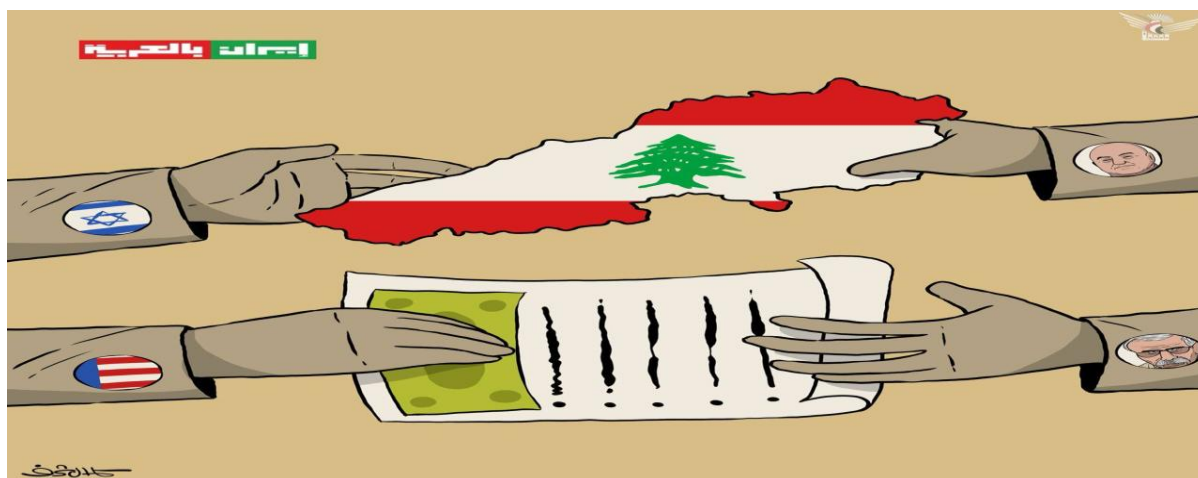
1. **Caricatures Without Written Text (3):** These images are entirely based on the use of visual satire to pass their messages, through exaggerated images and symbolic representations to depict different political players and scenarios in the conflict.
2. **Caricatures With English Text (3):** These caricatures contain texts in the English language, to create another layer of meaning, probably to an international audience and context for the visual satire.
3. **Caricatures With Arabic Text (3):** These images include Arabic text, which is directed towards a local or regional audience, integrating linguistic and visual elements to deliver their message.

The caricatures are not singular as an expression of the war situation at hand but also a means of expression through multimodal means in terms of ideological standings and emotional involvement through the integration of both visual and textual representations. The focus of the data collection is the understanding of the ways of distribution, alteration and interpretation of these caricatures in online platforms, particularly that of Telegram that was a major source of information at the time of war. The study will seek to interpret how visual satire plays out as a political text in the digital era and how it contributes to the framing of narrative and expression of political ideologies by analyzing these 9 caricatures.

Additionally, the study focuses on the US–Israel–Iran conflict, but some of the caricatures do not include all parties involved. The nine selected caricatures were chosen because of their capacity to mirror the broader political and ideological dynamics of the conflict, such as foreign intervention, military strategies, media influence and power relations. Each caricature gives an idea of how digital satire conveys critique, exaggeration and ideological viewpoints relevant to the main parties. This allows caricatures that lack one or more of the three actors to still contribute meaningfully to the analysis of political messaging, framing and public interpretation in the digital space.

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study is based on the principles of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), in which the multimodal elements, including visual and textual, interact to construct the political meaning in the caricatures that were collected from the Telegram platform "Iran in Arabic." Each caricature was classified by the text inside it: caricatures with no text, those with English text, and those with Arabic text. The analysis is informed by the framework of ideational, interpersonal and compositional metafunctions introduced by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) to investigate the ways in which these modes interact with each other to represent, interact and structure the political messages. Through this process, the study seeks to discover how these visual texts work with their audiences, contribute to the political discourse, and reflect the socio-political tensions of the US-Israel-Iran conflict.



Caricature (4.1): Lebanese Army Withdraws from Border Positions, Allowing Ground Infiltrations in Several Areas

4.1. Visual Analysis

In the caricature (4.1), the main visual feature that stands out is the representation of four hands exchanging different things. The hands of two people hold a map of Lebanon, the Lebanese flag displayed prominently on it. The central focus, though, is the action of the hands distributing a sheet of paper, which is symbolic of a document. One hand with the Israeli flag hands the paper over to another hand with the American flag. The document is known with a series of black vertical lines, which symbolizes the signing or acknowledgement of a deal. Above the scene, there are two other hands with portraits, one of which has a leader, presumably an influential political figure in Lebanon, the other has a similar visual element to represent power or political influence. The bright red and green color of the background in the picture reinforces the visual representation of the Lebanese flag, which connects the caricature with the political situation in Lebanon.

a. Representational meaning

The representational meaning in this visual presents both narrative imagery and conceptual imagery. The narrative aspect is noted by the action of the document being handed over between the figures, the transaction or agreement between the U.S. and Israel. The map of Lebanon with the Lebanese flag emphasizes Lebanon as an object in the visual discourse. The vertical black lines on the paper are suggestive of some formal agreement or decision, which may suggest imposing terms on Lebanon by foreign powers. The positioning of the figures holding the document and their roles (as indicated by their national flags) is a reflection of the international power mechanisms that influence Lebanon. The symbolic process here is demonstrated through the use of the Israeli and American flags, which have inherent connotations of power, control, and intervention.

b. Interactional meaning

The interactional meaning is shown by the close contact between the hands and the visual elements that they hold. The exchange of the document is the center of the interaction, and draws the viewer's attention to the foreign control implied by the exchange. The social distance between the participants in the image is maintained as an intimate one; the proximity of the hands sharing the paper implies a sort of collusion or cooperation between the U.S. and Israel and Lebanon in the

background, in its passive or objectified state. The attitude of the caricature, suggested by the exaggerated proportions of the figures and the use of color, accentuates the irony of the situation and critiques the interference in Lebanon's political affairs.

c. Compositional meaning

The compositional meaning in this caricature can be interpreted through the use of information value, framing and salience. The most important visual factor, the exchange of the document, is positioned in the center of the image making the political transaction between Israel and the U.S. the focus of the viewer's gaze. The Lebanese map, although important, is located as a passive background, which emphasizes the marginal role of Lebanon in this transaction. The position of the Israeli and American flags on the hands make them prominent, looking very much involved in the action. The portraits of the political figures bring an extra level of meaning as they indicate that these leaders are involved in the orchestration of the agreement. The salience of the visual is strengthened with the boldness of the national symbols (the Israeli and American flags) and the honed-in depiction of the document. The use of bold, bright colors, especially the red and green colors of the Lebanese flag, underlines the political context and the role of contrast between the interference represented by the flags and the document. The composition visually tells the story of the undermining of Lebanon's sovereignty, drawing a bold line between the powers of the foreign and the passive role of Lebanon in the situation.



Caricature (4.2): UN Security Council Supports U.S. Military Actions, Ignores Atrocities Against Civilians in Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq

4.2. Visual Analysis

In this caricature, the primary visual feature is a large, circular table, which can be likened to a round of negotiation or some sort of diplomatic meeting. At the center of the table is the emblem of the United Nations, as a symbol of the context of international diplomacy. The image is focused on two hands, which seem to be playing the cards, one hand wearing a striped hat with the Israeli flag and the other hand that emerges from under the table, with a more neutral tone. The hand with the Israeli flag hat is prominently placed on the table, demonstrating a physical presence that is much stronger than the rest of the chairs around him, and the other hand seems to be supporting or guiding the situation, and in an extremely subtle way, influencing the proceedings. The

exaggerated scale of the figures helps reinforce the idea of overwhelming power, and the lack of seating implies the lack of participation by others.

a. Representational meaning

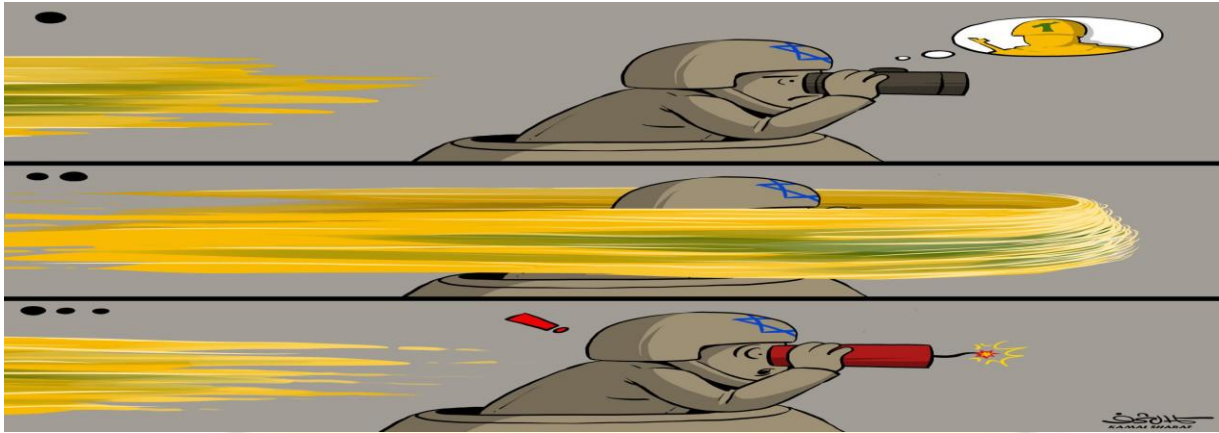
The representational meaning in this caricature depicts a situation of political power. The round table, linked to diplomatic conversation, is broken by the unequal power of the Israeli figure, represented by the hand with the Israeli flag hat. This visual narrative alludes to the imbalance of power in international negotiations, where Israel, in this context, symbolized by the huge hand, has the power to control the discussion. The presence of the United Nations emblem is indicative of the political context and the message that this is a diplomatic discussion and that their discussions are supposed to be neutral and inclusive, but the power dynamics here argue otherwise. The hand on the table and the seated chairs around it represent the negotiation process being strongly influenced or steered by Israel; it could leave other stakeholders marginalized.

b. Interactional meaning

The interactional meaning is emphasized by the exaggerated drawing of the figure of the Israeli, whose presence is far greater than any other part of the image. The contact with the viewer is established by the emphasis on the hands, which are in action directly with the table and are the symbol of intervention. The gesture of the hand on the table gives a sense of imposing force, dominance or control. The physical space between the centre figure and the empty chairs reinforces further this sense of isolation and the absence of real negotiation or collaboration in this process. The attitude expressed by the imagery is that of criticism and irony, as it suggests that Israel's involvement in international diplomacy is too great compared to the involvement of others.

c. Compositional meaning

Compositional meaning in this image is dependent upon the center position of the table as well as the emblem of the United Nations. The round table is traditionally a symbol of equality and mutual discussion, but the actual location of the hands changes this, giving the impression of one-sidedness. The hand with the Israeli flag hat is located prominently at the table, and the other hand stands somewhat passive, which implies Israel is in a dominant position in the discussion. The emptiness of the surrounding chairs adds visual impact to the composition, contributing to the idea of exclusion. The salience is given to the hand and the flag, which are bold and central in the composition, immediately drawing attention to the power dynamics at play. The absence of participants around the table further makes the point that the visual critique of the situation implies that others are excluded or powerless in this political setting.



Caricature (4.3): Flying of Hezbollah Drones Over Nahariya

4.3. Visual Analysis

The above caricature shows a three-panel format to describe the response of an Israeli soldier on seeing Hezbollah drones flying over Nahariya. The soldier is depicted with binoculars observing the distant action, with a definite progression in his actions from passivity to action. In the first of these panels, the soldier is focused on looking through binoculars, with a thought bubble above his head indicating a Hezbollah soldier, in order to indicate a primary target or objective. The second panel brings movement into this scene as the soldier's eyes are taken over by the yellow streak representing the movement of the threat (drone) coming toward him. In the final panel, the soldier, now alarmed, switches quickly to a missile launcher firing a red missile with an explosion, suggesting the escalation of his reaction.

a. Representational meaning

The representational meaning is concerned with the change of the Israeli soldier from being a passive observer to being an active aggressor. The first panel depicts the soldier, who is standing in a tank, using binoculars to observe a target, which is represented by the figure in the thought bubble (probably representing Hezbollah or a particular drone threat). The yellow streak in the second panel is representative of the movement of the drone, which gives a sense of urgency and shows the speed at which the threat is approaching. The last panel depicts the escalation of military activity, with the soldier not only switching from binoculars to missiles, but also indicating an immediate response to the perceived threat. The shift from passive observer to active participant in the military is indicative of the intensity and character of the conflict.

b. Interactional meaning

The interactional meaning is communicated by the soldier's increasing involvement with the threat. Initially, the interaction between the soldier and the target is a distant and observational one. The thought bubble with the Hezbollah soldier indicates that the target is far away and is not yet a direct threat. As the drone, symbolised by the yellow streak, moves closer in, in the second panel, the soldier's reaction changes from contemplation to alarm. The soldier's swift shift to the missile launcher in the last panel illustrates an escalating interaction, in which the soldier goes from an observer to a violent disputant. This change accentuates interaction between the soldier and the drone, depicting the immediate response of the soldier to the perceived threat.

c. Compositional meaning

The compositional meaning of this caricature is organized in three panels. The first panel depicts the soldier watching the target with binoculars, which is connected to the Hezbollah soldier using a thought bubble. In the second one, the yellow streak is the movement of the drone, which makes the urgency more pronounced. The last panel zooms in on the missile launcher, accentuating the soldier's reaction to the danger with a red missile, an expression of escalation. The yellow streak is a link between the panels, linking the observation and action.



Caricature (4.4): American Soldiers: Victims of Israel's Power

4.4. Visual Analysis

This caricature makes use of a startling visual metaphor to comment on the political and military relationship between the United States and Israel. The central point of the image is a large red cap, with the slogans "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" front and center, and "MAKE ISRAEL GREAT AGAIN" in the back. The large cap appears to devour the surrounding space and implies the overpowering presence these political ideologies have. The oversized cap appears to consume the space around it, which seems to suggest the overwhelming influence these political ideologies have. Inside the cap, a line of soldiers in U.S. military uniforms and carrying American flags is seen walking towards two coffins draped in American flags. The coffins are being pulled out from under the brim of the cap, symbolizing the consequences of the political relationship between the U.S. and Israel, specifically the price in American lives in the process.

a. Representational meaning

The representational meaning is conveyed by the visual metaphor of the oversized "Make America Great Again" cap, which dominates the scene. The cap, which is a nod to the slogan used by former American President Donald Trump, is a symbol of US political influence and power. The juxtaposition of the slogan and the phrase "Make Israel Great Again" is meant to highlight the close political and military alliance between the two countries, and to imply that American support for Israel is central to the conflict. The soldiers entering the cap represent American military involvement, and the coffins, wrapped in American flags, represent the cost, in human lives, of the military involvement. The action of the coffins being dragged from under the cap is a visual reminder of the sacrifices made by the American soldiers and links the political ideologies of both nations to the physical consequences of war.

b. Interactional meaning

The relationship between the soldiers and the coffins and the cap creates the interactional meaning. The soldiers appear to be being sucked into the greater political and military machine, as indicated by their actions of walking into the cap, which implies that there is some sense of duty or inevitability in it. The coffins are in the center of the story and this establishes a very potent contrast between the political ideologies (symbolized by the cap) and the human price of the political ideologies. The dialogue between the coffins and the soldiers conveys the effects of the policies, where the U.S soldiers act as the victims of the political relationship with Israel. The oppression between the soldiers and the movement of the coffins are used to contrast the stark reality of the war and the loss.

c. Compositional meaning

The composition in this caricature makes use of the large red cap as the central visual element of the composition, drawing immediate attention. The size and placement of the cap dominate the space and represent the overpowering influence of the political ideologies represented by the slogans. The soldiers walking towards the chapel give a sense of movement as their path leads directly to the coffins, which are the focal point in the foreground. The value of the American flags on the coffins also adds to the visual impact, heightening the cost of US military involvement in foreign conflicts. The salience of the image is the juxtaposition of the political slogans and the coffins, making a visual statement about the political priorities which lead to military conflict and the loss of lives.



Caricature (4.5): Trump's Greed for Iran's Oil and the Strait of Hormuz

4.5. Visual Analysis

This caricature is a satirical statement on US President Donald Trump's relationship with Iranian oil. The central image depicts a massive purple oil barrel with "IRAN OIL" stamped on it, hovering above Trump, whose figure is shown struggling to escape from its shadow. The barrel casts a long, dark shadow that extends towards Trump, visually connecting him to the oil barrel, suggesting that he is being pulled into its influence. Trump is depicted with a caricature facial expression which accentuates his sense of frustration and desperation as he struggles to escape the grasp of the shadow.

a. Representational meaning

The representational meaning of this caricature is turned around the metaphor of oil as a strong

and inescapable force. The large purple oil barrel with the words "IRAN OIL" on it is placed above Trump, symbolizing the major role Iranian oil plays in U.S. politics, especially in terms of sanctions and geopolitical tensions. The weapon of oil resources of the Iranian state is casting the shadow of the barrel upon Trump, as they are often the subject of economic and political conflicts. The tense posture of Trump and his fists depict his unwillingness and the weight to handle the Iranian oil that is symbolically illustrated as a heavy load which cannot be taken off.

b. Interactional meaning

The interactional meaning is communicated by the physical relationship between Trump and the oil barrel. The shadow from the barrel seems to be pulling him into its grasp, which suggests that it is an overwhelming force that is hard to escape. Trump's severe struggle, as indicated by his strained expression and body language, shows his frustration and inability to break out of the situation. The interaction here symbolizes the political and economic pressures put on by Iranian oil, in which Trump is caught between his reception to resist and his reality of being pulled into the ongoing conflict regarding oil resources.

c. Compositional meaning

The composition makes the center of the visual space the oil barrel with Trump placed below it, struggling against the shadow cast by the barrel. This configuration is used to highlight the imbalance in power between the U.S. and Iran, where Trump appears to be dwarfed by the power of Iranian oil. The dark shadow of the barrel contrasts with the lightness of the background and serves to enhance the metaphor of being trapped or overshadowed by the issue of oil. It is the over exaggeration of the parts of the body of Trump and, in particular, his arms reaching out that gives a strong sense of desperation and helplessness to get free. The symbolic strength of oil in the political arena is also strengthened by the use of bold colors and key dark purple, in particular, of the barrel and the dark shadow.



Caricature (4.6): The Relationship between the USA and Israel

4.6. Visual Analysis

This caricature uses grotesque imagery to show the relationship between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump. Netanyahu is depicted standing self-assuredly while wearing a military helmet with the Israeli flag and holding a leash attached to Trump, who's crawling around on the ground wearing a "Make America Great Again" cap. The

setting contains a chaotic warzone with a massive sign in the background that says "ATTACK IRAN!" with Iranian and Israeli flags very much on show. Netanyahu is seen telling Trump, with a smile on his face, to "Attack!" while Trump is responding with a tired response saying, "Yes, sir."

a. Representational meaning

The representational meaning of this caricature is clear: the influence of Israel over the U.S. foreign policy, especially with regard to military intervention in the Middle East. Netanyahu, with the leash in hand, is shown as controlling Trump, and shows the dynamics of power between the two leaders. The image implies that Trump is being led into military action against Iran as a submissive figure crawling under the command of Netanyahu. The "Make America Great Again" cap represents Trump's loyalty to nationalist rhetoric, but the leash and submissive stance run counter to this symbol, making it seem that his actions are being directed by another power - Israel, in this case. The background, with war planes and the "Attack Iran" sign, helps highlight the emphasis on military aggression and adds to the criticism of US involvement in wars driven by foreign pressures.

b. Interactional meaning

The interactional meaning marked in this caricature is characterized by the relationship existing between Netanyahu and Trump, one of command and submission. Netanyahu's self-assured posture and the positioning of the leash are symbols of power, whereas Trump's stooped posture and reluctant expression reflect submission, involving a distribution of power. The visual dynamic gives the impression that Trump is less than fully autonomous in his decision-making, especially in foreign policy, which implies that Israel has a lot of power over the U.S. The phrase "Go on, boy! Attack!" emphasizes Netanyahu's supremacy with Trump's reply and "Yes, sir" reinforcing his subjugated role. This interaction serves as a critique of the notion that the US foreign policy is influenced by outside factors, in this case, Israel.

c. Compositional meaning

The composition is focused on Netanyahu and Trump, with Netanyahu standing out front, clutching the leash, and Trump standing down on the ground, showing the hierarchy of the relationship between Netanyahu and Trump. The background of the warzone, with its explosions and the military presence in the background emphasizes the context of the war, which is in line with the call to action - "Attack Iran." The salience of the image is enhanced by the large bold sign "ATTACK IRAN!" which is put into the background and reinforces the theme of military intervention. The exaggerated proportions of Netanyahu's figure and Trump's submissive pose exaggerate the critique of power dynamics in international politics, the imagery of the leash providing a clear visual metaphor for control.



Caricature (4.7): Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, An Iraqi Leader of Al-Nujaba Movement, to Journalists: Roll Up Your Sleeves, the Battle is Media-Based

4.7. Visual Analysis

This caricature employs powerful visual metaphors in critiquing the role of the media in shaping the public's perception and political realities, with a special focus on the influence of media during political battles. The image is one in which the big, shadowy figure of a man with a TV set as his head represents the controlling power of the media. The man is holding a leash attached to a group of smaller figures, which represent the public or audiences who are being manipulated by the media. The figure with the TV head is wearing a suit, and his hand is reaching outwards, directing the masses, which further underlines the influence of media. In the background, a quote from الشيخ أكرم الكعبي (Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi), the أمين عام المقاومة الإسلامية في العراق (Secretary-General of the Islamic Resistance Movement in Iraq), reads: "أهيب بالأخوة جنود الإعلام والأشواوس أصحاب الكلمة الصادقة ، وأن يشمروا سواعدهم في هذه المعركة، فإن الإعلام نصف المعركة، وأن يبتلوا خداع هذا الكذاب الأشر (عدو السلام) ، وأن يروجوا لانتصارات جبهة الحق التي يخفيها الإعلام العربي والغربي". His quote urges journalists and media to continue their struggle against misinformation emphasizing that the media is half the battle, and it has an important role to play in exposing the deceit propagated by the 'enemy of peace' and the role of the Western and Arab media in covering up the victories of the just cause.

a. Representational meaning

The representational meaning of the caricature underlies the emphasis on the role of media as a manipulative force in the control of public narratives. The TV head has been a representation of media control, noting its role in developing perceptions and determining political realities. The puppet-like figures below are representatives of the public being manipulated by the narratives of the media. Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi's role plays a part in this critique as he advocates for resistance against the control of the media, as he calls on the "soldiers of media" to reveal the truth of the political manipulation. The TV figure's leash over the people symbolizes the power media wields over the narrative, its power to manipulate reality being a major part of the ongoing political struggle.

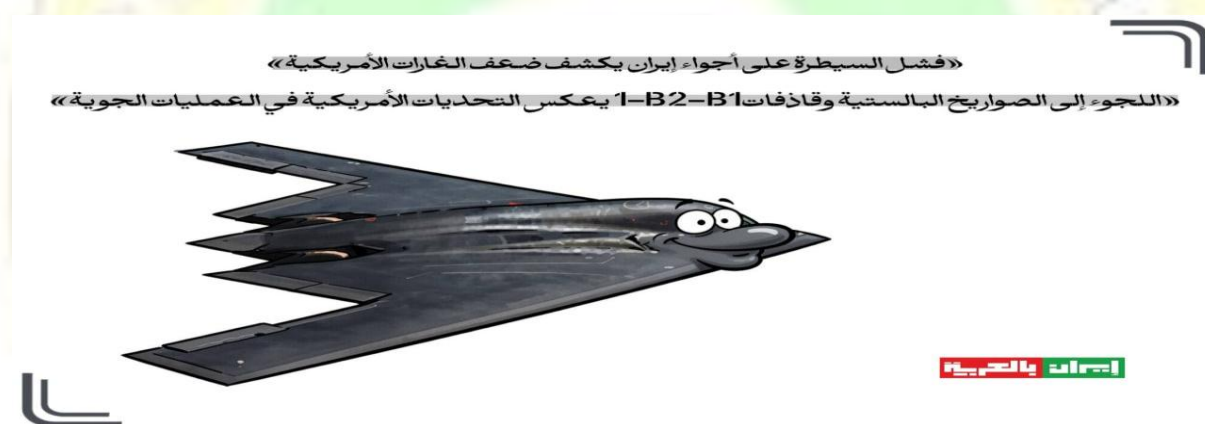
b. Interactional meaning

The interactional meaning is shown in this caricature in the dynamic between the TV-headed figure

and the puppet-like masses. The central TV-headed figure is dominant and represents the overwhelming power of the media in shaping public opinion. The smaller figures attached to the strings represent the passivity of the public who are at the mercy of the power of the media. The quote from الشيخ أكرم الكعبي that tells media personnel to continue to reveal the truth emphasizes the need for active resistance against such media manipulation. The media is shown as a tool for deception, and the interaction in this picture enhances the power of the media to perpetuate or expose lies based on how it is used.

c. Compositional meaning

The composition of this caricature makes the TV-headed figure the subject of attention, with the puppet-like figures on the bottom emphasizing their subjugated role. The strings which link the TV-headed figure with the masses serve a metaphoric function by reinforcing the concept of media manipulation. The swath of black background sets apart the central subject, drawing attention to the imbalance between control of the media and the passivity of the public. The Arabic quote adds to the caricature's message, and Sheikh akrem ka'bi's words stress the importance of questioning the lies the media propagates and empower the people to see through these manipulations. The saliency of the quote stresses the ideological divide between the 'enemy of peace' and the forces of truth that the media is either upholding or obscuring.



Caricature (4.8): Failure in Controlling Iran's Airspace

4.8. Visual Analysis

This caricature employs a fun visual metaphor to comment on the failure of U.S. forces to control the Iranian airspace. The image is a cartoon drawing of a US stealth bomber in the form of a happy-looking character. The bomber is depicted with a funny face, complete with big eyes and a smile, making the situation even more ironic. The bomber is shown flying through the air with an air of carefree movement, which works to reinforce the concept of an underestimated or mismanaged operation. In the background, the Arabic text states: "فشل السيطرة على أجواء إيران يكشف ضعف الغارات الأمريكية", which translates to "The failure to control Iran's airspace exposes the weakness of U.S. airstrikes." Below, another Arabic phrase reads: "B1-B2 اللجوء إلى الصواريخ الباليستية وقاذفات", meaning "The return to ballistic missiles and B1-B2 bombers reflects American challenges in air operations."

a. Representational meaning

The meaning of representational is to communicate by use of imagery; the U.S. bomber is

portrayed with a fun and unthreatening manner. The cartoonish characteristics of the bomber, such as its large eyes and smiling face, contrast with the seriousness of the military operations and emphasize the failure of the U.S. to adequately control Iran's airspace. The image of the stealth bomber as a character is also one of the technical sophistication of U.S. military assets, but it is also suggested through its comical character that it is incompetent or failing in the achievement of military objectives. The accompanying Arabic text is critical of the failure, with the first phrase directly pointing out how such a failure shows the weakness of US airstrikes against Iran, while the second phrase underlines the reliance on outdated military strategies, such as using B1-B2 bombers and ballistic missiles, which further suggests that these military strategies are not working for the current air operations.

b. Interactional meaning

The interactional meaning is highlighted by the contrast between the serious military situation and the jocular representation of the U.S. bomber. The bomber's expression of joy in spite of its serious military purpose creates a state of irony and mockery. This humour is used to point to the failure of the operation and also addresses the approach taken by the U.S. forces in dealing with Iran's airspace. The Arabic phrases serve to reinforce this irony because they imply that the inability to gain control of airspace not only prevents these U.S. operations from being effective but also leaves these military assets vulnerable. The fun image of the bomber plays off with the seriousness of the text, and there is a tension between the two text elements, furthering the idea of the inefficiency of U.S. air operations.

c. Compositional meaning

The composition centers the bomber, with its huge face and dynamic movement, emphasizing this underwhelming performance of the U.S. airstrikes. The bomber's jocular expression contrasts with the serious background of the Arabic phrases, which comment on the failure of U.S. operations and the overuse of old-fashioned tactics. This contrast between the humorous image and the critical text helps to emphasize the satire by pointing to the disconnect between the sophisticated image of the U.S. military and how it is failing to control Iranian airspace.



Caricature (4.9): CBS from Trump: "Iranians Fired at All Targets"

4.8. Visual Analysis

This caricature depicts US President Donald Trump with a badly bruised face, representing the face of a conflict or attack, and is likely a reference to the tensions between the US and Iran. The bruising and wounds on Trump's face are overstated, as there are traces of red and blue on his cheek and eye, which symbolize damage and suffering. The background is dark, adding to the serious tone of the image, while the text above Trump's head indicates: "الإيرانيون أطلقوا النار على كل الأهداف" ("The Iranians fired at all targets"). This text refers to a scenario where Iran might have targeted US assets with the caricature suggesting that Trump's statement, "Iranians fired at all targets," is a consequence of this attack. The darkened visual of Trump's bruised face is part of the critique of his leadership during the crisis; the visual of his bruised face accentuates the vulnerability of Trump's leadership and the effects of the military conflict.

a. Representational meaning

The representational meaning of such caricature focuses on the harm that has been inflicted on the physical self of Trump, which is the result of the military confrontation with Iran. The visual sign of how the conflict was costly is his bruised face, the aspect that shows that his leadership or endeavors might have led to the dreadful circumstances. The extreme injuries emphasize the severity of the consequences, while the dark colors of the picture add to the intensity of the moment. The Arabic phrase "الإيرانيون أطلقوا النار على كل الأهداف" provides context, with Trump's face reflecting the repercussions of the attack. This image implies that Trump is bearing the fallout of an escalating conflict, with the bruises symbolizing the personal and political cost of the tensions with Iran.

b. Interactional meaning

The interactional meaning is communicated by the visual relationship between Trump and the text. The picture of Trump's bruised face with its exaggerated features plays with the text message in a way that critiques his physical positioning as well as his political position. The juxtaposition of his sombre and injured expression and the words "Iranians fired at all targets" implies a disconnect between Trump's response and the reality of the situation. The use of Trump's image with his bruised face highlights the failure or consequence of his leadership, with the injury representing his vulnerability and mistakes made in dealing with the situation. The phrase, in this case, becomes more of an ironic commentary on Trump's position throughout the conflict.

c. Compositional meaning

The composition of this caricature positions Trump's bruised face as the main visual element, with his face occupying most of the space. This has the effect of drawing the viewer's attention directly to his expression and emphasizes the damage caused by the conflict. The dark and moody background adds to the gravity of the situation, isolating Trump and drawing all attention to him and his bruised features. The placement of the Arabic text "الإيرانيون أطلقوا النار على كل الأهداف" above Trump's head adds context, framing his injury as a result of the attack. The salience of his bruised face and the text enhances the irony and criticism of Trump's leadership, communicating visually the impression that his actions or decisions have had substantial consequences, politically and personally.

5. Discussion

In the previous sections, the political caricatures studied from the viewpoint of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) have shown how the different modes of communication, including visual satire, language, and symbolism combine to express powerful ideological messages in the context of the US-Israel-Iran conflict (March 2026). These caricatures are thus critical looks into the geopolitical tensions and reveal both direct and indirect commentaries on power relations, military strategies and public perceptions.

The political caricatures analyzed in this study use a powerful combination of visual and textual elements to express ideological positions regarding the US–Israel–Iran conflict, directly answering the question: *"How do the visual and textual elements of the political caricatures combine to express ideological positions regarding the US–Israel–Iran conflict?"* The caricatures emphasize the power relations and tensions between the U.S, Israel and Iran through exaggerated visuals, i.e., oversized figures, flags and symbolic imagery. The application of visual satire and text allows these caricatures to convey the critical attitude towards foreign interventions, in particular, that which is concentrated in the control and manipulation of the U.S. and Israel over Iran. Visual simplicity of the complex political scenarios by the caricatures allows the ideological messages to be accessed by a broad audience, and these visuals are supplemented by the text that provides a context to the situation and strengthens the attack on these forms of power structure.

These multimodal texts also contribute significantly to shaping public opinion and framing political discourse within the digital space, as addressed in the question: *"In what ways do these multimodal texts contribute to shaping public opinion and framing political discourse within the digital space?"* By using digital platforms such as Telegram, these caricatures spread political messages widely, fast, and efficiently. The mix of humour, visual exaggeration and serious political critique engages viewing audiences at both the emotional and intellectual level and shapes the way they view the conflict. Additionally, the use of both English and Arabic texts impacts how different audiences interpret the caricatures, answering the question: *"How do the caricatures reflect the socio-political tensions of the time, and what ideological critiques do they offer regarding the powers involved in the conflict?"* The English language texts are attractive to the global viewers, and the Arabic language texts are more attractive to the local viewers, emphasizing the local political situation. This two-fold language element allows the caricatures to reach and appeal to the international and local views, and as a consequence, comment on the greater socio-political issues and offer criticisms of the foreign powers that were implicated in the conflict. The caricatures, through these visual and written devices, provide a satirical analysis of the political aspects of the era, which indicates the inconsistency and power concentration of the conflict between the US, Israel and Iran.

In addition to analyzing ideological and representational content, it is important to highlight the role of satire in shaping audience understanding. The selected caricatures employ humor, irony, exaggeration, and visual metaphors to underscore contradictions, critique political figures, and reveal the human or ethical consequences of actions. For example, depictions of Trump struggling with the "Iran Oil" barrel or the U.S. bomber portrayed as cheerful create irony by contrasting perceived power with operational failure, while the TV-headed figure manipulating the public

illustrates media influence in a visually ironic manner. By emphasizing these satirical devices, the analysis demonstrates that the caricatures not only convey ideological messages but also actively engage viewers, provoke reflection, and encourage critical evaluation of political events, ensuring that the humor and exaggeration are recognized as integral to their communicative and persuasive effects.

In conclusion, the caricatures in this analysis employ an abundance of visuals, text, and symbols to comment and critique the US-Israel-Iran conflict. By making use of humor, visual exaggeration and ideological symbolism, these multimodal texts are powerful means of political critique, questioning the power structures in place and reflecting the socio-political climate of the time. The use of digital platforms in spreading these caricatures enhances the reach and impact of the caricatures, making visual satire even more of a key component of how politics are communicated in the modern day.

6. Conclusion

The research shows that the political caricatures shared through the Telegram channel “Iran in Arabic” comprise powerful multimodal texts which actively construct the digital conflict discourse. These caricatures do not simply offer a humorous interpretation of events; instead, they use visual exaggeration, symbolism, and textual cues in Arabic and English to communicate ideological stances on power, intervention, and resistance in the US–Israel–Iran conflict. They emotionally engage audiences and guide interpretation, translating complex geopolitical realities into accessible narratives that foreground asymmetries of power and responsibility.

The findings have implications for theory by reaffirming that meaning is produced by the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, rather than from image or language alone. Using Kress and van Leeuwen’s representational, interactional and compositional metafunctions, it is demonstrated that caricatures function as visual arguments, framing political actors, dramatising conflicts and reinforcing ideological stances. In practice, this highlights the importance of media literacy, as digital satire has the potential to influence public perception, political participation and the dissemination of ideological messages among local and international audiences.

Methodologically, the study illustrates the value of a multimodal approach for analyzing digital political communication. By integrating visual and textual analysis, researchers can capture how images, captions, color, spatial arrangement, and symbols jointly construct meaning. Although limited by its small corpus and single platform focus, the research highlights the potential for further studies to examine larger datasets across multiple platforms, audience interpretations, and the long-term influence of multimodal satire on political attitudes and digital activism.

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