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REPRESENTATION OF TIKTOK IN U.S. NEWS AFTER *THE NO TIKTOK ON GOVERNMENT DEVICES ACT*

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Abstract: TikTok, the most downloaded application in the world for three consecutive years since 2020, has been the target of various bans from governments and organisations. Despite widespread media coverage of such events, the representation of TikTok therein remains underexplored by linguists. This study therefore attempts to examine how TikTok is linguistically represented in U.S. television news after President Joe Biden signed *the No TikTok on Government Devices Act* into law. The Systemic Functional Linguistics, elaborated in Halliday and Matthiesen (2014), was employed as the analytical framework. The findings revealed that news coverage predominantly uses Material processes, followed by Relational processes. Mental and Verbal processes rank third and fourth, while Existential and Behavioural processes have rather low frequency. Regarding their subtypes, Identifying Relational and Cognitive Mental processes are more prevalent in negative representations, while Attributive Relational and Emotive Mental processes occur more often in positive representations. These transitivity patterns contribute to five main portrayals of TikTok, including “TikTok is a scrutiny and ban target”, “TikTok is a cybersecurity threat”, “TikTok is the Trojan horse of the Chinese Communist Party”, “TikTok is a must-have for many”, and “TikTok is a sales driving force”.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), transitivity system, news, representation, TikTok

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SỰ THỂ HIỆN CỦA TIKTOK TRÊN TIN TỨC HOA KỲ SAU ĐẠO LUẬT *KHÔNG TIKTOK TRÊN CÁC THIẾT BỊ CỦA CHÍNH PHỦ*

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Tóm tắt: TikTok, ứng dụng được tải xuống nhiều nhất trên thế giới trong ba năm liên tiếp kể từ năm 2020, đã trở thành mục tiêu của nhiều lệnh cấm từ các chính phủ và tổ chức. Mặc dù những sự kiện này được các phương tiện truyền thông đưa tin rộng rãi, sự thể hiện của TikTok ở đó vẫn chưa được nhiều nhà ngôn ngữ học nghiên cứu. Do đó, nghiên cứu này cố gắng tìm hiểu cách TikTok được thể hiện về mặt ngôn ngữ trong tin tức truyền hình Hoa Kỳ sau khi Tổng thống Joe Biden ký Đạo luật *Không TikTok trên thiết bị Chính phủ* thành luật. Khung phân tích được sử dụng là Ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống, được mô tả trong Halliday và Matthiesen (2014). Nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng tin tức chủ yếu sử dụng các quá trình Vật chất, sau đó là các quá trình Quan hệ. Các quá trình Tinh thần và Phát ngôn xếp thứ ba và thứ tư, trong khi các quá trình Hiện hữu và Hành vi có tần suất khá thấp. Về các phân nhóm của chúng, quá trình Quan hệ Xác định và quá trình Tinh thần Nhận thức phổ biến hơn trong các mô tả mang tính tiêu cực, trong khi các quá trình Quan hệ Thuộc tính và Tinh thần Cảm xúc được sử dụng thường xuyên hơn trong các mô tả mang tính tích cực. Những đặc điểm của hệ thống chuyển tác này góp phần tạo nên 5 cách thể hiện về TikTok, bao gồm: “TikTok là mục tiêu bị giám sát và cấm”, “TikTok là mối đe dọa an ninh mạng”, “TikTok là con ngựa thành Troy của Đảng Cộng sản Trung Quốc”, “TikTok là thứ không thể thiếu đối với nhiều người” và “TikTok là động lực thúc đẩy doanh số bán hàng”.

Từ khóa: ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống, hệ thống chuyển tác, tin tức, sự thể hiện, TikTok

1. Introduction

TikTok is a video-sharing social media application developed by the Beijing-based ByteDance Ltd. This platform has constantly gained prominence and remained the most downloaded application for three consecutive years since 2020, according to Forbes' reports (Koetsier, 2021a; Koetsier, 2021b; Koetsier, 2022). In the United States only, TikTok amasses a significant number of over 94 million monthly active users (Aleksandric, 2023). Despite such popularity, TikTok has been the target of multiple bans from governments and organisations. In addition to a complete prohibition in India, the Chinese viral video app has been disallowed on official devices in the UK, Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, and New Zealand's Parliament. Furthermore, TikTok has faced various restrictions from states and colleges in its current most significant market, the United States. Among the most dramatic moves against the social media platform was the nationwide “No TikTok on Government Devices Act”, signed by President Joe Biden on 29 December 2022. This marked one of the first national-level bans on TikTok in the U.S., barring approximately 4 million federal employees from accessing TikTok (Ingram, 2022). Given its scale and implications, this event

has attracted widespread news coverage.

However, the representation of TikTok in such coverage has been understudied by linguists. While previous studies have delved into various aspects of TikTok, including user behaviour and experiences (e.g. Heyang & Martin, 2022; McLean et al., 2023; Schellewald, 2023) and the analysis of video content and user responses on the platform (e.g. Avdeeff, 2021; Eriksson Krutrök & Åkerlund, 2023; Lewis & Melendez-Torres, 2024; Zeng & Abidin, 2021), there remains a gap in the representation of TikTok in U.S. news during recent events. While critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA) studies have made some attempts to address the topic, these have primarily focused on Indian media, such as those of Kumar (2023) and Kumar and Thussu (2023), or were conducted more than two years ago, including those of Miao et al. (2021) and Zhu (2020). Furthermore, a recent CDA study by Lin (2023) incorporated transitivity analysis and corpus-assisted methods but limited its investigation to just CNN news. Therefore, there is a clear research gap in our understanding of how TikTok is represented through specific linguistic patterns across different news sources in the United States.

To bridge this gap, the present study aims at exploring the linguistic representation of TikTok after the No TikTok on Government Devices Act in U.S. news, using the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework (hereafter SFL). It seeks to answer the research question: “How is TikTok linguistically represented through the transitivity system in U.S. news, following the signing of the No TikTok on Government Devices Act?”

2. Literature Review

2.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), first introduced in M.A.K Halliday’s article ‘Categories of the theory of grammar’, is a linguistic approach that views language as “social semiotic”. This theory centres on the relationship between linguistic selection and the functions it has to serve in specific social and cultural contexts. Language functions in SFL are often referred to as “metafunctions”.

SFL identifies three primary metafunctions of language: textual, interpersonal, and ideational. The textual metafunction refers to “clause as a message” and concerns how text coheres and relates to its context. The interpersonal metafunction refers to “clause as an exchange” and deals with interactions between speakers and listeners, such as expressing attitudes and building relationships (Statham, 2022, p. 37). The ideational metafunction, particularly relevant to this study, refers to “clause as a representation” and involves construing human experience of both external events and internal consciousness. This metafunction is realised through the transitivity system (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The transitivity system in SFL is considered the “foundation of representation” (Fowler, 2013, p. 71) or in other words, a fundamental instrument for analysing representation in discourse. It is worth noting that Halliday’s concept of transitivity extends beyond the traditional grammatical distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs to encompass “the entire system of representational resources” (Haig, 2012). This allows for the systematic investigation of speakers’ language and the ideologies underlying their discourse (Statham, 2022, p. 38).

The transitivity system includes processes, participants, and circumstances within a clause. The process is the key component, and the type of process decides the participants involved (see Table 1). These two elements together constitute the experiential centre of the

clause, whereas circumstantial elements are optional in general (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 221).

Table 1

Process Types and Their Participants. Adapted From Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 311)

Process type	Participants, directly involved	Participants, obliquely involved	Example
Material (doing and happening)	Actor, Goal	Recipient, Client; Scope; Initiator; Attribute	ByteDance and TikTok [Actor] may be obtaining U.S. user data [Goal].
Behavioural (behaving)	Behaver	Behaviour	My 16-year-old daughter [Behaver] will be in total uproar .
Mental (sensing)	Senser, Phenomenon	Inducer	We [Senser] can't trust TikTok [Phenomenon].
Verbal (saying)	Sayer, Target	Receiver, Verbiage	TikTok [Sayer] has not commented on Congress' latest actions [Target].
Relational (being)	Carrier, Attribute Identified, Identified; Token, Value	Attributor; Beneficiary; Assigner	ByteDance [Identified] is the parent company of TikTok [Identifier].
Existential (existing)	Existent		There are three concerns about TikTok [Existent].

Process refers to the type of state or event being described in a clause and is typically expressed by the verbal group of the clause. In English, process can be categorised into six types according to whether they construe actions, feelings, speech, states of mind or states of being. The six types are Material (creative and transformative), Mental (perceptive, cognitive, desiderative, and emotive), Behavioural, Verbal, Relational (intensive, possessive, and circumstantial), and Existential, respectively (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Furthermore, the Relational sub-types come in two different modes: attributive and identifying.

Participant is the individuals or things involved in the process and is realised in the nominal groups of the clause. As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 221) have it, participants are “close to the centre” of the configuration and inherent in the process. In other words, every experiential type of clause has at least one participant, with the exception of some meteorological processes like “It’s raining”.

The last but optional component that makes up a clause is circumstances, which add information, such as casual, spatial, and temporal information, to the process. Circumstances is generally expressed through adverbial groups or prepositional phrases. Depending on the kind of information that they provide, they can be classified into 9 types: Extent, Location, Manner, Cause, Contingency, Accompaniment, Role, Matter, and Angle (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 313-314).

2.2. News as a Genre

News, according to van Dijk (2013, p. 4), is “a news item or report” in various mediums

such as print, online, television, or radio, through which new information about recent political, social, and cultural events is provided. With this definition, news can involve several subgenres, namely bulletin, editorial comment, report, and interview. Editorial comments and interviews are usually analytical, evaluative, persuasive and hence could include personal opinions of the anchor(s) or the interviewee(s). By contrast, bulletins and reports are expected to be informative and objective, with the use of neutral language (Lavid et al., 2012; Piskorski et al., 2023). However, it should be noted that there is not a clear-cut separation between these subgenres, as a news report, for example, could also include one or more interviews.

News serves two primary functions of keeping the public informed about political events and issues, and fostering effective democratic citizenship (Overholser & Jamieson, 2005, p. 49; Porto, 2007). However, news does not merely reflect reality; it often presents specific ideological agendas through content and linguistic choices (Fowler, 2013; Statham, 2022). In this respect, news can highlight issues, campaign, criticise, celebrate, promote forthcoming events, or divert attention from other events (Durant & Lambrou, 2009). Exposure to only some ideologies may hinder the public from accessing a diversity of worldviews, which conflicts with the core functions of news (Fowler, 2013, p. 66; Porto, 2007).

Concerning the linguistic patterns, Durant and Lambrou (2009, p. 218) suggest that news discourse tends to represent events in a more material and less mental way than in reality, in order to dramatise events to engage the target audience. News discourse is also found to perpetuate some common ideologies, such as nationalism, racism, and sexism, often presenting a polarised 'Us vs. Them' narrative to maintain societal power structures (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009).

2.3. Representation of Social Media Platforms in News

Recent studies have delved into the depiction of social media platforms in news, through an analysis of the transitivity system or recurring themes.

Lin's (2023) transitivity analysis of news about TikTok-related events revealed the overall distribution of processes. Notably, Material processes dominated, which was implied to potentially influencing audience perceptions by emphasising the consequences of events over objective descriptions.

Pertaining to recurring themes, earlier research highlighted a tendency to problematise social media in news discourse. Shiryayeva et al. (2018) identified 12 anti-values in news discourse about social media, including harmful content, data misuse, censorship, and addiction, etc. Data misuse emerged as the most recognised theme, appearing in multiple studies (Kumar & Thussu, 2023; Lin, 2023; Miao et al., 2020; Sako, 2021; Scatton, 2023; Aqsa et al., 2022). Concerns about national security threats linked to TikTok's Chinese parent company were also prevalent, despite lacking concrete evidence, in the studies of Kumar and Thussu (2023), Lin (2023), and Scatton (2023). Meanwhile, Hine (2020) highlighted how news narratives on Twitter perpetuate inequalities, portraying it primarily as a platform for celebrities rather than for the public to express their opinions. These negative representations of social media platforms, particularly in the case of TikTok, were concluded by Kumar (2023) as a way to justify governmental restrictions or bans, rather than to inform.

However, there were exceptions where social media platforms were neutrally or even positively portrayed. Miao et al. (2023) found a de-politicised depiction of TikTok as a business success in news prior to 2020, with positive attitudes toward its market strategy, entry motivation, products, and services. Sako (2021) also noted instances where the solution to data

privacy issues were framed as up to individual choices, without mention of political policies. The narratives analysed in this research also depicted Facebook as a victim of Cambridge Analytica in the scandal, shifting the criticism away from the media platform.

The review of extant literature implies that while a number of studies have examined the portrayal of social media platforms in news discourse, the lexico-grammar choices through the transitivity system have not received enough attention. Thus, the present study is being conducted to bridge that gap to some extent.

3. Research Methodology

The data for this study consisted of television news items about TikTok in the U.S. between 29 December 2022 (the signing date of the No TikTok on Government Devices Act) and 28 January 2023. The selection of news sources followed Howe's (2023) findings on the most-watched news networks, including Fox News, ABC News, CNN, CBS, PBS, NBC, and MSNBC. Given their extensive viewership, they were likely to represent mainstream media's perspectives on TikTok. A total of 10 videos were gathered from these channels, except for ABC News and PBS, where no relevant videos could be obtained. They were labelled V1 to V10 (see Appendix). Seven of them were in the form of news reports while the remaining three were interviews by Fox News and MSNBC. They revolved around various bans on TikTok, politicians' viewpoints, and the app's impacts.

The procedure of data collection involved three steps. First, a search was conducted on Google and YouTube using the search terms "TikTok or Tik Tok" and "Fox News or CNN or CBS or PBS or NBC or MSNBC", within the specified time frame (29 December 2022 to 28 January 2023). The retrieved search results were then filtered based on the following inclusion criteria:

- (1) The videos must be posted on the news networks' official websites or official YouTube channels;
- (2) They must feature the word "TikTok" in both the title and the headline;
- (3) They must centre on TikTok and its implications, measures, or regulations in the U.S., thereby excluding cases where TikTok is merely a platform for a story and not the main focus (e.g. news about an actor coming out in a TikTok video);
- (4) They must have a duration of at least 1 minute to provide more insights and perspectives.

To ensure a manageable dataset, two videos from each source were shortlisted. If there were more than two videos, those published earlier were prioritised. Finally, a transcription was made for each of the chosen videos for the analysis process, which meant that other elements such as sounds and images would not be considered.

A qualitative approach and a quantitative step were adopted in this study. The qualitative approach involved using Halliday's SFL framework, elaborated in Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and discussed in 2.1, to analyse the process types, participants, and circumstances. This method provided an in-depth understanding of "goings-on" in the world (TikTok in this case) and offered critical interpretations (Statham 2022). The quantitative aspect involved calculating the distribution of processes, participants, and circumstances to identify overall trends in the data. As Loewen and Godfroid (2019) note, although there has been a considerable increase in the use of qualitative data analysis in applied linguistics research, it cannot be overlooked that quantitative methods offer researchers the means to describe their data systematically.

There were 7 main stages in the data analysis procedure. First, the obtained videos were transcribed into texts. Second, all clauses and clause complexes in the text were identified. The third stage required the separation of clause complexes into clause simplexes, in which minor clauses and clauses for greeting and for transition between parts of the news were removed as they did not contribute to the core analysis of representation. The remaining clauses were labelled according to their source video and their order within that video for easy reference and organisation. For example, a clause from the video “V9”, in the twenty-fifth position, was coded as “V9.25”. These clauses were then analysed with regard to processes, participants, and circumstances. Following this, the distribution of each type of these elements was calculated. The final stage involved using the findings from the two previous stages to generate the themes expressed from the contents of the news and discuss the representation of TikTok, drawing on earlier research for further explanations. This stage would provide answers to the research question.

4. Findings

Data analysis revealed five relevant themes related to the representation of TikTok, namely “TikTok is the target of scrutiny and prohibition” (135 clauses), “TikTok is a cybersecurity risk” (224 clauses), “TikTok is the Trojan horse of the Chinese Communist Party” (109 clauses), “TikTok is a must-have for many” (61 clauses), and “TikTok is a driving force for sales” (43 clauses).

4.1. Transitivity Analysis of the Theme “Tiktok is the target of scrutiny and prohibition”

The frequency of process types within the theme “TikTok is the target of scrutiny and prohibition” is summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2

The Distribution of Process Types in Each News Source in the Theme “Tiktok is the target of scrutiny and prohibition”

	NBC	Fox News	CNN	MSNBC	CBS	Total	
Material	25	10	8	1	25	69	51.1%
- creative	1	1	2	-	3		
- transformative	24	9	6	1	22		
Mental	1	3	-	1	7	12	8.9%
- perceptive	1	1	-	-	-		
- cognitive	-	2	-	-	3		
- desiderative	-	-	-	1	3		
- emotive	-	-	-	-	1		
Relational	12	5	4	1	9	31	23.0%
- attributive	5	2	1	1	4		

- identifying	7	3	3	-	5		
Behavioural	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Verbal	4	-	1	2	7	14	10.4%
Existential	4	2	-	1	2	9	6.7%
Total	46	20	13	6	50	135	

Material processes were the most frequently used, constituting over 50% of all identified processes. U.S. authorities emerged here as the most common Actor. Their attempts primarily targeted at the video app, whether by scrutinising and barring it or bringing forward legislations on it, like in this example:

(V9.25) [...] *Governor Abbott banned TikTok on all Government-issued devices back in December.*

Governor Abbott	banned	TikTok	on all government-issued devices	back in December.
Actor	Process: material, transformative	Goal	Circumstance: location, place	Circumstance: location, time

On various occasions, such restrictions were expressed through passive voice where the Actor was hidden:

(V3.1) *TikTok now banned from all house-managed devices [...]*

TikTok	now	(is) banned	from all house-managed devices
Goal	Circumstance: location, time	Process: material, transformative	Circumstance: location, place

As shown in the extracts above, TikTok, the most prevalent Goal, was usually subjected to the U.S. authorities' actions, regardless of whether they made an official appearance in the clauses.

Relational processes ranked second in terms of frequency with 23%. A fairly even distribution of 17 Identifying clauses and 14 Attributive clauses was witnessed. In Identifying clauses, the legislation on TikTok was often defined based on the contextual background (like in V9.9) and the scope of influence. Meanwhile, in Attributive ones, it was associated with certain characteristics, such as “doesn't seem hard to reinforce” (V1.27) or even quite evaluative “ridiculous” (V2.33) in a TikTok user's opinion.

(V9.9) *The move (= the ban) is in response to Governor Greg Abbott's Recent Directive about the popular video-sharing app.*

The move	is in response to	Governor Greg Abbott's recent directive	about the popular video-sharing app.
Identified	Process: relational, circumstantial, identifying	Identifier	Circumstance: matter

The depiction of TikTok as a scrutiny and ban target was further supported by Verbal processes (10.4% of all the clauses). These processes predominantly represented the authoritative voice since the participant role of Sayer was performed by U.S. authorities eight times, compared to only twice by TikTok. These authoritative statements focused on declaring bans, proposing laws, and responding to media queries. Nevertheless, in a CNN video, they were referred to as “vow” rather than simply “announce” or “say”, implying a greater sense of determination:

(V6.42) [... *State Leaders*] who have vowed to rid their systems of the app.

who	have vowed	to rid their systems of the app.
Sayer	Process: verbal	Verbiage

Without explicitly stating that TikTok is a risk, the verb of saying here denoted state leaders’ assertiveness in blocking the app, which might trigger a negative feeling about the app, albeit in a tacit manner.

4.2. Transitivity Analysis of the Theme “TikTok is a cybersecurity risk”

Table 3

The Distribution of Process Types in Each News Source in the Theme “TikTok is a cybersecurity risk”

	NBC	Fox News	CNN	MSNBC	CBS	Total	
Material	15	22	7	26	14	84	37.5%
- creative	1	-	-	4	1		
- transformative	14	22	7	22	13		
Mental	3	8	2	10	2	25	11.2%
- perceptive	-	-	-	-	-		
- cognitive	-	5	1	6	1		
- desiderative	1	-	-	2	1		
- emotive	2	3	1	2	-		
Relational	7	16	8	21	10	62	27.7%
- attributive	2	7	3	10	5		
- identifying	5	9	5	11	5		
Behavioural	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.4%
Verbal	6	10	1	5	7	29	12.9%
Existential	7	4	2	10	-	23	10.3%

Total	38	60	20	72	34	224
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As can be seen in Table 3, the distribution of process type in this part displayed a similar trajectory compared to the previous theme in the sense that Material processes still took the leading position with 38% of all the clauses. However, unlike in the preceding theme, the leading Actor here was TikTok, making the focus very much on their actions. TikTok was typically associated with action verbs such as “access”, “obtain”, “store”, “share”, “collect”, “track”, and even inherently negative verbs in this context such as “poses” and “harvest”, all of which were deliberate rather than involuntary.

(V1.10) TikTok, [...], has credibly accessed American journalists' data.

TikTok, [...]	has credibly accessed	American journalists' data.
Actor	Process: material, transformative	Goal

(V9.20) the app “harvests vast amounts of data from its users' devices [...]”

the app	“harvests	vast amounts of data	from its users' devices
Actor	Process: material, transformative	Goal	Circumstance: angle, source

Interestingly, the most recurring Goal in this topic was neither TikTok nor U.S. authorities but “data” (e.g. journalists' data, U.S. user data, information, American data) as exemplified above. They were all used in transformative clauses, which usually construed a fundamental change to the participant (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014, p. 233). Furthermore, the fact that only 3 clauses with these Goals were passivised indicated an emphasis on the Actors that performed the activity, which were TikTok in most cases. Putting it all together, this depiction might give the audience an impression of TikTok as an active entity that collected and shared user data, with that data serving as the primary and ultimate target.

Besides Material, Relational processes (around 28%) played a key role in constructing TikTok's identity. The app was consistently labelled “a concern for national security”, “a high risk to users”, “an enormous threat”, “a global issue” and “a clear and present danger”. Consequently, continuing to allow the use of this app on state devices was deemed “a criminal offence” (V6.49). A video of Fox News even went further by identifying the optimal solution, which was nothing but a total ban:

(V4.13) So the only thing that's in my mind, the solution to this problem is banning TikTok from operating in the United States outright.

So	the only thing that's in my mind, the solution to this problem	is	banning TikTok from operating in the United States outright.
	Identified	Process: relational, intensive, identifying	Identifier

Mental processes, at over 11%, added perspectives to this narrative of TikTok. Cognitive mental, the most common subtype, was often used to talk about how the speakers “understood”, whether they “trusted” and “believed” TikTok. Following this was emotive mental (8 clauses), which was linked to the feeling of “concern” in most cases. This was

resonated by Existential processes, which highlighted the existence of TikTok-related “concerns”, “issues”, “problems”, and “a potential threat”.

4.3. Transitivity Analysis of the Theme “TikTok is the Trojan horse of the Chinese Communist Party”

Table 4

The Distribution of Process Types in Each News Source in the Theme “TikTok Is the Trojan Horse of the Chinese Communist Party”

	NBC	Fox News	CNN	MSNBC	CBS	Total	
Material	-	9	10	21	9	48	44.0%
- creative	-	-	1	2	-		
- transformative	-	9	8	19	9		
Mental	-	5	1	7	3	16	14.7%
- perceptive	-	1	-	4	-		
- cognitive	-	2	-	3	1		
- desiderative	-	-	1	-	2		
- emotive	-	2	-	-	-		
Relational	-	11	5	10	5	31	28.4%
- attributive	-	4	2	2	2		
- identifying	-	7	3	8	3		
Behavioural	-	-	-	-	1	1	0.9%
Verbal	-	2	4	-	4	10	9.2%
Existential	-	-	-	2	1	3	2.8%
Total	-	27	19	40	23	109	

This way of portraying TikTok was mostly supported by Material processes (44%). Their most recurring participant was none other than the Chinese government (also referred to as the Chinese Communist Party). As the main Actor, they typically carried out intentional processes such as “control”, “influence”, “manipulate”, “track”, “run”, and “collect”. They also engaged in seeming military actions like “protect”, “targeting”, “weaponise”, and “espionage”. This suggested the framing of the Chinese government as an “aggressive” and cunning party in a war, using TikTok as its weapon for espionage. Furthermore, this militaristic government was believed to have the power to “require” TikTok and any other companies there to “hand over the data” at its disposal.

On the other hand, Goal was predominantly played by TikTok and its components such

as user data, content, and algorithm. Accordingly, these were implied to be prone to the Chinese Communist Party's influence. This institution also served as the primary Recipient. Specifically, it was portrayed as the one who enormously benefited from the valuable data of U.S. TikTok users:

(V9.23) The app “[...] offers this trove of potentially sensitive information to the Chinese government.”

The app	“[...] offers	this trove of potentially sensitive information	to the Chinese government.”
Actor	Process: material, transformative	Goal	Recipient

TikTok, in this depiction, was more or less a loyalist who devoted its treasure “trove” to the Chinese authorities.

The Relational type further amplified this by devoting over two-thirds of its processes to the Identifying mode. According to Halliday and Matthiesen (2014, p. 284), the dominance of Identifying mode is typical in highly valued registers such as scientific, commercial, political, and bureaucratic discourse, where meanings are essentially symbolic. However, TikTok and its operations were arguably more tangible, which might point at a tendency to convey meanings through symbolising and labelling. Specifically, the apprehension “concern” was continually defined. This apprehension was however not scientifically defined but instead, was established with identities rooted in TikTok's suspicious ties to the Chinese government. These included the potential impacts these ties could have on U.S. elections, the gathering of personal information (see excerpt V8.30), the misinformation and algorithmic control, and the influences of such control on public perception. In this way, TikTok was implied to be a tool for the Chinese government's surveillance and perception shaping, thus garnering “increasingly bipartisan concern”.

(V8.30) The second piece [of concern] is the collection of personally identifiable information.

The second piece [of concern]	is	the collection of personally identifiable information.
Identified	Process: relational, intensive, identifying	Identifier

Another common Identified was TikTok, whose identity was consistently associated with its Chinese origin. This was repeatedly emphasised in statements such as “TikTok is a Chinese company” (V8.13) or “because it's a Chinese-based company” (V10.20).

In the Attributive mode, the Chinese Communist Party and TikTok were the prevalent Carrier. The former was exclusively deployed in possessive clauses with the verb “has”. This indicated its ownership of control over Chinese-based companies, including TikTok, as well as their personal data of Americans. Meanwhile, the latter and its relationships with the former were characterised by descriptors such as “really disturbing”, “deeply disturbing”, and “genuinely troubling”, which made the negative bias towards them harder to ignore.

The next popular process type was Mental, making up nearly 15% of the clauses. Cognitive Mental clauses allowed the speakers to verbalise what they “thought” about China's

influence on the app and possible remedies. Meanwhile, Perceptive Mental concentrated on one's awareness of China's control over the company but it was generally just what they "saw" or "all heard" about, with no evidence. Desiderative and Emotive, having fewer occurrences, highlighted the speakers' "hope" for future actions and their concerns about connections between the company and the Chinese Communist Party, respectively.

4.4. Transitivity Analysis of the Theme "TikTok is a must-have for many"

Table 5

The Distribution of Process Types in Each News Source in the Theme "TikTok is a must-have for many"

	NBC	Fox News	CNN	MSNBC	CBS	Total	
Material	11	-	1	5	5	22	36.7%
- creative	1	-	-	-	-		
- transformative	10	-	1	5	5		
Mental	5	-	-	2	1	8	13.3%
- perceptive	2	-	-	-	-		
- cognitive	1	-	-	1	-		
- desiderative	-	-	-	-	-		
- emotive	2	-	-	1	1		
Relational	8	-	1	8	2	19	31.7%
- attributive	5	-	1	8	2		
- identifying	3	-	-	-	-		
Behavioural	-	-	-	1	-	1	1.7%
Verbal	4	-	-	1	3	8	13.3%
Existential	1	-	-	1	-	2	3.3%
Total	29	-	2	18	11	60	

Table 5 illustrates that Material remained the most commonly used type with about 37% of the clauses. TikTok users were the most active Actors within this narrative. They often engaged in activities like "using", "access", "scrolling on", and "switch", which reflected their interactions with the app and its elements without posing a single risk to other entities. In addition, TikTokers were also frequently described in an attempt to "find" all available methods to continue using the app despite bans, which hinted at their strong liking for it. By contrast, as another common Actor, the U.S. authorities' actions were "prevent", "not help", "affect", "enforcing", "get rid", "stop", and "bans", which were much more influential. These actions directly impacted the Goal of TikTok itself and its users:

(V2.34) *For a lot of us, this (= the bill) is going to affect our business and even some really cool friendships [...]*

For a lot of us,	this	is going to affect	our business and even some really cool friendships
Circumstance: angle, viewpoint	Actor	Process: material, transformative	Goal

Relational processes, whose proportion was only 5% lower than that of Material, served to attribute characteristics (16 processes) more than to identify (3 processes). As a common Carrier, TikTok was characterised as an “addictive”, “incredibly popular”, or “extremely popular” social media platform that “boasted more than a billion users”. Therefore, “the love for TikTok” was acknowledged with the attribute “real”:

(V1.51) *The love for TikTok is real for students and so many.*

The love for TikTok	is	real	for students and so many.
Carrier	Process: relational, intensive, attributive	Attribute	Circumstance: angle, viewpoint

However, the Angle circumstance “for students and so many” could be indicative of the speaker’s distancing from the proposition. This distancing strategy was more obvious in another video by MSNBC. In this discourse, there were at least four occasions the speakers employed possessive clauses to deny the state of having TikTok on their phone. Take V7.6 as an example:

(V7.6) *disclaimer, I currently do not have TikTok.*

disclaimer	I	currently	do not have	TikTok
	Carrier	Circumstance: location, time	Process: relational, possessive, attributive	Attribute

Although this theme was a very affection-related one, the proportion of Mental processes (13.3%) largely fell behind those of Material and Relational. However, it is unsurprising that the Emotive subtype was deployed the most in 4 instances to highlight the strong sentiments towards the app. To illustrate, aside from the repeatedly mentioned “love”, some would also feel “upset at any possible ban” on it.

Comprising a similar percentage of the clauses were Verbal processes. Sayer appeared in all of them and was typically played by young individuals. Their statements, in general, featured a Verbiage to convey their dissenting opinions over TikTok bans, such as V1.37 “... [who said] this will not prevent them from accessing TikTok”. However, in all cases, these were not direct quotations, which may somehow alter the strength of speakers’ assertions or leave out their elaborations.

4.5. Transitivity Analysis of the Theme “TikTok is a driving force for sales”

Table 6

The Distribution of Process Types in Each News Source in the Theme “TikTok is a driving force for sales”

	NBC	Fox News	CNN	MSNBC	CBS	Total	
Material	-	-	28	-	-	28	65.1%
- creative	-	-	2	-	-		
- transformative	-	-	26	-	-		
Mental	-	-	3	-	-	3	7.0%
- perceptive	-	-	1	-	-		
- cognitive	-	-	-	-	-		
- desiderative	-	-	-	-	-		
- emotive	-	-	2	-	-		
Relational	-	-	10	-	-	10	23.3%
- attributive	-	-	7	-	-		
- identifying	-	-	3	-	-		
Behavioural	-	-	1	-	-	1	2.3%
Verbal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Existential	-	-	1	-	-	1	2.3%
Total	-	-	43	-	-	43	

In this narrative, material processes dominated other types with around two-thirds of the total number. It was also clear that CNN favoured transformative doings (26 clauses) over the creative ones (2 clauses). Despite its low frequency, creative actions such as “creating” and “building” did play a role in depicting the innovative contributions of the app to the business field:

(V5.3) *The BookTok hashtag is not just creating new social media influence ...*

The BookTok hashtag	is not just creating	new social media influence
Actor	Process: material, creative	Goal

Notably, those who interacted with TikTok as a social media platform, including individual users, book reviewers, and book publishers, were the most prominent Actor. Their activities revolved around “journal”, “look for (what to read)”, “discover”, “reading”,

“following”, “reviewing”, “finding”, “growing”, “building”, “reach (a much wider audience)” on BookTok, a sub-community within TikTok. This helped to construct the video app as a conducive platform for people to actively engage in a book community and for publishers to get to know new potential authors. TikTok, when performing as the Actor, was portrayed to bring about positive outcomes, like sales increases, “attention”, “recognition”, and “grow”. These were beneficial for various stakeholders.

Relational processes were another commonly used type, accounting for nearly a quarter of the total processes. The Attributive modes outnumbered its counterpart subtypes (What are they? Be specific.). It associated TikTok and the hashtag BookTok with positive assessments such as “nice”, “phenomenal”, “very high”, and “boasts”. This added to the praising narrative of TikTok in terms of sales driving, as opposed to the negative portrayal in some other sections.

A much less prevalent process type, comprising just 7% of the total, was Mental. The majority of these centred on the positive emotions of Sensors (i.e. book publishers and TikTok users) regarding BookTok and books recommended there. For example:

(V5.49) *I think a lot of publishers have been surprised by the trajectory of what BookTok has done the last two years.*

I think	a lot of publishers	have been surprised	by the trajectory of what BookTok has done	the last two years.
	Sensor	Process: mental, emotive	Phenomenon	Circumstance: location, time

The feeling of being “surprised” could be interpreted as either positive or negative, depending on the context. In this discussion, it was considered positive because the speaker was praising the incredible growth in book sales, which was “entirely driven” by people on BookTok.

5. Discussion

The findings revealed the transitivity patterns of news representing TikTok. Overall, Material, the process that construes “a quantum of change in the flow of events” (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014, p. 244), was by far the most favoured among all the themes. This could be attributed to the first function of news: informing the public about recent events (Overholser & Jamieson, 2005, p. 49; Porto, 2007). It also supports the finding of Durant and Lambrou (2009, p. 218) about the dominance of Material processes in news. Coming next in terms of frequency was Relational processes. Interestingly, the primary aim of this process type was to identify in the two negative themes (“TikTok is a cybersecurity risk” and “TikTok is the Trojan horse of the Chinese Communist Party”) but to attribute characteristics in the two more positive themes (“TikTok is a must-have for many” and “TikTok is a driving force for sales”). The remaining one, which appeared to be somewhat more impartial, displayed a balance between both aims. These two main process types were aided by the use of Mental and Verbal processes to construe concerns, liking, announcements and perspectives of various subjects. Further analysis showed that adverse portrayals of TikTok were more likely to be pinpointed through the process of thinking, while the two favourable approaches tended to be linked to feelings. Existential and Behavioural processes, however, were the least preferred and hence had a less crucial role in the representation of TikTok.

These results differ from those reported by Lin (2023) in a number of important aspects. Although the prevalence of Material processes and the infrequency of Existential processes are still consistent, the share of Relational processes (14.29%) is significantly lower than that in the present study. Furthermore, Lin's research uncovered a huge discrepancy between the distribution of Verbal and Mental processes, with the former being twice as high as the latter, contrasting with their equivalence in this data set. The final major distinction is the complete absence of Behavioural processes there, as compared to its 6 appearances in my study.

These transitivity patterns unveiled a multifaceted portrayal of TikTok. First, it was regarded as a target of restrictions and probes by lawmakers. Specifically, the social media platform was highly susceptible to actions and decisions of the U.S. government, having little capacity for resistance. The seriousness on the American part was slightly reduced with the use of passive voice from time to time. However, in general, this representation still offered useful information about the current restrictions on TikTok as well as further moves in the future. This might help with keeping the citizens informed of political and social events - a primary function of news (Overholser & Jamieson, 2005, p. 49; Porto, 2007).

To set the grounds for these restrictions, the labelling of TikTok as a cybersecurity threat on both national and global scales was employed. This was also the most prevalent representation found across the corpus. In this representation, TikTok had evolved from the conventional role of an application into a treacherous entity that intentionally misappropriated American data. As a result, widespread concerns, distrust, and problems surrounding its use arose according to the news coverage. Despite certain commitments to address them, the company was emphasised as acting against their own promises. This finding resonates with previous observations of Miao et al. (2023), which suggested that the measures taken by TikTok were generally regarded as failing to eradicate doubts and worries about its data security. Furthermore, this representation bore a similarity to the enemification strategy, or "the portrayal of certain things or people as enemies on the basis of the danger and threat that they pose", possibly to evoke a strong sense of nationalism (Yu, 2022). With this strategy, TikTok was put in opposition to the U.S. national interests.

The U.S. news coverage heavily linked these data security issues to TikTok's Chinese origin. The video app was depicted to be the Trojan horse of the Chinese Communist Party for espionage. In other words, TikTok was indicated as nothing but a weapon used by the party to gather data and shape public opinions. By the same token, the media tended to criticise the Chinese party as an authoritative commander that exercised "disturbing" power and forced companies to hand over data, including those of American users, for its own interests. This meant that China was an enemy to the United States and Americans at large. The narrative of concern thereby unsurprisingly prevailed, with "concerns" about TikTok being consistently defined in relation to its intricate ties to the Chinese Communist Party. These concerns were amplified by accusations from bipartisan politicians. What set the representation by U.S. media apart from those in previous studies by Kumar (2023) and Kumar and Thussu (2023) was the absence of an alliance narrative with other countries. Unlike Indian media, American media appeared to stand independent in their opposition to TikTok and China.

However, this way of representing TikTok had more to do with framing than just informing and thus reflected ideological agendas. These ideologies invariably correspond with governmental interests according to Kumar (2023). In this case, such interests might lie in the decision to ban TikTok nationwide. For these reasons, this portrayal fell short of fulfilling core news functions. Instead of providing a balanced view, it tended to present rather one-sided

assumptions that could potentially manipulate public perception of TikTok's and the Chinese government's operations. This result aligns with the work of other studies in the field (e.g. Fowler, 2013; Statham, 2022) linking news with ideologies rather than just neutral facts.

By contrast, TikTok was also acknowledged as a must-have for many here and there, mostly in NBC videos. In this respect, TikTok represented a highly sought-after platform that was worth every effort to access, even in the face of bans. The fondness for the app was profound and the utilisation of it in this context was implied to be devoid of any inherent risks to others. However, the impediment to this process from the U.S. authorities remained continual and was believed to do more harm than good to the users. A similar favourable representation of TikTok was recognised in Miao et al. (2023), with evidence surrounding the app's innovations and users' enthusiasm towards it. However, the study pointed out that this discussion was virtually ignored since the relationships between China and the United States began to deteriorate in 2020. This did not appear to be the case in this study, whose data was collected between late 2022 and early 2023. In spite of having lower frequency than three above-mentioned ones, this narrative still accounted for about 10% of the total number of clauses.

Finally, TikTok was appreciated as a driving force for sales by CNN. Not only was it an innovative platform for sharing about books and discovering new authors, but it was also a driving force behind the recent exponential uptick in book sales. This was positively evaluated as "phenomenal" and surprising. TikTok, in this discourse, was portrayed to bring about amazing transformations and benefits for a wide range of stakeholders. Such a depiction offered a unique perspective on TikTok's impacts. While it helped us understand the overall picture of the app, including both its pros and cons, the other four news outlets seemed indifferent to it. This disregarding trend could explain why the depiction of TikTok in this positive manner has yet to be reported in earlier studies.

A comparison between television news items of the five channels reveal significant divisions in the way they represented TikTok. NBC and CBS dedicated the largest proportion of their videos to inform the audience of the scrutiny and prohibition of TikTok. Fox News and MSNBC, however, placed a higher priority on the relationships between TikTok and the Chinese government. This one-sided portrayal might be because these were the only outlets to use interviews, which is characterised by personal analysis and opinions. In contrast, CNN showed the greatest interest in TikTok's beneficial impacts on sales growth. On the whole, these differences could be attributed to the institutions' political stances. For example, Fox News is known to be a right-wing media outlet concerned with conservative political values. On the other side of the spectrum, CNN is more of a liberal left-wing media source, possibly with more open-minded opinions towards foreign countries and companies, like China and TikTok.

All in all, regarding the purposes of news, news reports appear to be more impartial and informative than interviews, since they involve a wider range of angles towards TikTok. Nevertheless, the majority of these angles are still negative, with only one advantage of the application to sales increase being recognised. This tendency could hinder a holistic understanding of the audience about the matter. It therefore might prevent U.S. news from serving the two core functions of providing useful information and thus strengthening democracy and citizenship.

6. Conclusion

The present study investigates the representation of TikTok in U.S. news coverage after the No TikTok on Government Devices Act was signed. It has been revealed that news items predominantly employ Material processes in their depictions of TikTok. Another preferred type is Relational processes, whose purposes are to identify in negative narratives but to characterise in praising discourses. Following that, Mental and Verbal processes occur with comparable frequency. What is surprising is that criticism of the application is mostly tied to thinking, while acclaim is more about feeling. Lastly, Existential is less popular, and Behavioural is scarcely encountered throughout the data corpus.

These transitivity patterns offer insights into how TikTok is portrayed in American news outlets, revealing five main narratives: (1) TikTok is a target of scrutiny and prohibition by the lawmakers, having little capacity for resistance; (2) TikTok is an active entity that misuses America data and thus a dangerous national and global security threat; (3) TikTok is a clandestine weapon of the Chinese Communist Party to attack the United States and attain its goal as the number one superpower; (4) TikTok is a must-have for a great number of people and worth every attempt to access, regardless of U.S. authorities' efforts to restrict it; (5) TikTok is a driver of sales with innovative contributions. Some of these representations, particularly those devoted to symbolic labelling and enemification, have the potential to distort public opinions about the app and relevant subjects. This may contradict the fundamental goals of news discourse, which aim to keep the public well-informed about current events and consequently empower them to exercise their democratic rights, as noted by Overholser & Jamieson (2005, p. 49) and Porto (2007).

These findings contribute to our understanding of how the transitivity system can be utilised to diversely portray TikTok, particularly during critical events such as a nationwide ban. This study could serve as a reference source for future researchers who attempt to study SFL in general or explore the media coverage of various social media platforms within the lexicogrammar stratum of language. Further, it is hoped that the potential ideological agendas found here can encourage audiences and readers to take more caution in consuming news about social platforms and news producers to attain a more objective portrayal of news content.

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APPENDIX: Data corpus





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RAPE CULTURE AND RAPE MYTHS ON FACEBOOK FANPAGE OF BILLBOARD: THE CASE OF KESHA AND DR. LUKE

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Abstract: This study explores the dynamics of rape culture and myths surrounding sexual assault through discussions on Billboard's Facebook fanpage, focusing on the case involving Kesha and Dr. Luke. Analysis of 1000 comments across four posts revealed that over half of the comments expressed support and empathy towards Kesha, while approximately a third blamed her. Supportive comments debunked rape myths, shared personal narratives, highlighted the complexities of sexual assault, and criticized Dr. Luke. These comments advocate victims and challenge harmful attitudes, suggesting the need to broaden societal and legal definitions of rape, foster constructive dialogues, and identify and challenge systemic issues that prevent victims from speaking out. In contrast, victim-blaming comments perpetuate rape myths by accusing Kesha of false accusations and non-conformity to gender norms. This study indicates that Facebook can emerge as a platform where individuals actively combat victim blaming and slut shaming, denounce hegemonic masculinity, and advocate for victims, illustrating its potential to foster constructive dialogues and challenge entrenched beliefs about sexual assault.

Keywords: rape culture, rape myths, victim blaming, gender norms, social media

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BÌNH THƯỜNG HÓA HIẾP DÂM VÀ NHỮNG HIỂU NHẦM KHÁC VỀ HIẾP DÂM ĐƯỢC THẢO LUẬN TRÊN FANPAGE FACEBOOK CỦA BILLBOARD: TRƯỜNG HỢP CỦA KESHA VÀ DR. LUKE

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu xem xét việc bình thường hóa hiếp dâm và những quan niệm sai lầm về quấy rối tình dục thông qua các cuộc thảo luận trên trang Facebook của Billboard, tập trung vào vụ việc liên quan đến Kesha và Dr. Luke. Phân tích 1000 bình luận dưới bốn bài đăng cho thấy hơn một nửa số bình luận bày tỏ sự ủng hộ và đồng cảm với Kesha, trong khi khoảng một phần ba đổ lỗi cho cô. Các bình luận ủng hộ chỉ ra những quan niệm sai lầm về hiếp dâm và quấy rối tình dục, chia sẻ câu chuyện cá nhân, nhấn mạnh sự phức tạp của vấn đề tấn công tình dục và chỉ trích Dr. Luke. Những bình luận này ủng hộ các nạn nhân và phản đối những thái độ gây hại, nhấn mạnh sự cần thiết phải mở rộng định nghĩa xã hội và pháp lý về hiếp dâm, thúc đẩy đối thoại mang tính xây dựng và giải quyết các vấn đề hệ thống ngăn cản nạn nhân lên tiếng. Ngược lại, những bình luận đổ lỗi biện minh cho các hiểu lầm về cường hiếp bằng cách buộc tội Kesha không tuân thủ các chuẩn mực giới tính. Nghiên cứu này chỉ ra rằng, Facebook là một nền tảng có thể được sử dụng để chống lại việc đổ lỗi cho nạn nhân, lên án nam tính bá quyền và thúc đẩy các cuộc đối thoại mang tính xây dựng để thay đổi các quan niệm cố hữu liên quan đến tấn công tình dục.

Từ khóa: hiểu lầm về tấn công tình dục, đổ lỗi cho nạn nhân, chuẩn mực giới, mạng xã hội

1. Background of the Study

Online social media platforms have democratised information exchange by allowing citizen journalists' instant reaction to news and sharing of feelings and viewpoints. In this post-truth era, where people are more influenced by emotion rather than facts (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.), and where public perception is consequential, studies on how people discuss controversial issues online helps us understand current cultural dynamics.

Billboard, a global music media brand, plays a significant role in shaping these discussions. Launched in 1995 by Prometheus Global Media, Billboard presents music charts, music breaking news, videos, interviews and scoops of artists and their lives. Billboard has featured the international music market targeting chiefs and tastemakers in the industry through Billboard Magazine, Billboard Conferences, and Billboard Bulletin together with music fans through Billboard.com and Billboard Events (About Billboard Magazine, n.d.). The Billboard fan page on Facebook was created on May 9, 2009 and by July, 2024 reaching 14 million followers.

The case of the pop star Kesha and her producer Dr. Luke exemplifies how the public discourse on a social issue unfolds through social media. They reached a settlement in June 2023, when both sides dropped charges against each other (Coscarelli, 2023), resolving long-standing legal disputes involving allegations of rape and defamation. The case, which began in

2014 when Kesha accused Dr. Luke of sexual, physical, verbal, and emotional abuse (Gardner, 2014) spanning nearly a decade, garnered significant public attention and legal manoeuvring. Initially, Kesha filed a lawsuit against Dr. Luke alleging he forced her to consume substances and raped her (Lynch, 2014), followed by Dr. Luke's countersuit claiming contractual disputes. Despite Kesha's amended lawsuit adding allegations against Sony Music Entertainment for allegedly concealing Dr. Luke's assaults on her and other female artists, her claims of sexual assault were dismissed in 2016 by New York Judge Shirley Kornreich (Vincent, 2018), which led to ongoing public discourse and debate. The settlement in 2023 marked a significant development of the case, indicating its enduring impact on discussions surrounding sexual assault and the music industry.

This case can represent a broader societal issue: the normalization of sexual assault or sexual abuse cases and the blaming of their victims due to gender inequality and patriarchal values, which conditions the acceptance of “rape myths” (Paulson, 2018). Social networking sites now have allowed individuals to openly discuss these issues. Despite being exposed to multiple streams of information and educated about human rights and equality, people still accept and spread rape myths or exchange negative language about sexual assault as jokes. Studies have found the representation of rape culture and rape myth on mass media including news coverage (O'Hara, 2012), television (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011), online websites and social networks like Twitter (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). However, less is known about how viewpoints towards rape cases are expressed or how rape myths and rape culture are portrayed on Facebook even though this social networking site has reached the largest number of users.

To understand the issue better, the research aims at exploring the portrayals of rape myths and rape culture on Facebook discussions about sexual assault involving the case of Kesha and Dr. Luke on Billboard fanpage on Facebook from October 2014 to February 2016.

The study aims to answer two questions:

1. How do Facebook users respond to and discuss sexual assault in the case of Kesha and Dr. Luke under posts on Billboard fanpage?
2. How are rape myths and rape culture reflected in Facebook users' responses towards sexual assault and its victims?

The study aims to understand public reactions on social media to the sexual assault lawsuit involving Kesha and Dr. Luke. It will examine perceptions of sexual assault and survivors, the influence of rape myths and rape culture, and the complexity of sexual assault in the context of these online discussions. The study does not aim to explore the “truth” about what had happened, but focuses on public perceptions due to their potential consequences.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is illegal physical contact of a sexual nature that compels upon a person without their consent (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). It usually inflicts upon the ones who lack capacity to consent or who put the penetrator in a trust or authority position. Sexual assault is believed to be a life-changing event that survivors have to suffer trauma such as “depression, low self-esteem, flashbacks, fear, and difficulty with intimacy” (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape [PCAR], n.d.). During sexual exploitation, the survivors tend not to show their feelings since expressing them may increase their risk of getting hurt. In some cases, saying “no” seems useless to protect the victims from being sexually attacked. Therefore, silence

becomes the only choice that sexual assault victims can make (PCAR, n.d.).

Studies have found that the rate of rape victims reporting their case varies in different contexts, from 1% reporting forced first sexual intercourse in Japan, to nearly 30% in rural Bangladesh; or women reporting sexual violence by their own partners ranging from 6.2% in Japan to 59% in Ethiopia, while in other contexts ranging from 10% to 50%, and sexual assault by non-partners is less likely to be reported as one by intimate partners (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). These variations in report might result from the differing number of cases of sexual assaults or might result from the cultural and psychological reasons that prevent victims from reporting. Reasons for sexual assault not being reported include insufficient support system, and victims' feelings of shame and fear or risk of being retaliated, blamed, not believed, and socially ostracized (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2012). Thus, it is important to understand the complexity of sexual assaults and how the public's responses pertain to sexual assault victims' feelings of shame and fear to report their case. However, while analysing public responses can reveal cultural reasons that prevent victims from reporting, promote constructive discussions on the complexity of the sexual assault cases, and might help prevent further happenings, it does not provide evidence to uncover what actually happens in the cases of sexual assault.

2.2. Gender Roles

Gender role, or sex role, is a socially constructed role comprising a set of behaviours, attitudes and psychological traits generally considered proper, accepted and expected for a person based on their biological sex (Gochman, 2013). Gender roles are assigned during the socialisation process (Anderson & Doherty, 1997) and can be constructed around the concept of masculinity and femininity (Alters & Schiff, 2009). Gender roles exert an influence on people's behaviours and beliefs about themselves, encompassing sexual behaviours (Anderson & Doherty, 1997). Men are usually expected to be more aggressive and dominant, to initiate sexual acts while women are expected to be more passive (Jenkins & Dambrot, 2006). Both genders develop normative gender role behaviours during social interaction, leading to the support of sexually aggressive behaviours and thereby creating a hostile climate of rape myths acceptance and false sexual beliefs (Burt, 1980). Traditional gender roles were found to be associated with prejudices towards rape victims (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995).

Sexism, stemming from gender role stereotypes (Parry, 2014), plays a significant role in higher levels of victim blaming in rape scenarios. Sexist attitudes include hostile sexism and benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Hostile sexism involves negative attitudes towards women who violate traditional gender roles, such as wearing seductive clothes or drinking alcohol. In contrast, benevolent sexism views women as pure and deserving of protection and reward if they conform to traditional roles. People with sexist attitudes classify women as "good" if they adhere to traditional roles and "bad" if they do not, with the latter more likely to be blamed for sexual assault and considered deserving it (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

2.3. Rape Myths

Rape myths are defined as "prejudicial, stereotyped and false beliefs about rape, rapists, and rape victims" (Burt, 1980, p. 217). Despite being generally wrong, the false attitudes and beliefs of rape are widely and consistently spread and used to "deny and justify male aggression toward women" (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 134). One of the most prevalent rape myths is that the victim's clothes can trigger sexual assault, so it is that one's fault to be raped for wearing provocative clothes (Hayes, et al., 2013). That the victim often "lies about rape," is also widely accepted (Hayes et al., 2013). This common rape myth is apparently known by the

public in the form of false accusation: “Women often falsely allege rape for compensation or for attention” (Yancey-Martin et al., 2002). Some other familiar rape myths include: “She asked for it” (Payne et al., 1999); “Women got rape deserved it” (Burt, 1980); and “He didn’t mean to” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Rape myths are strongly tied to conventional gender roles, thereby provoking interpersonal aggression acceptance and misconception of sexual assault (Burt, 1980). Rape myth acceptance is in a close association with societal gender inequality and the idea of patriarchy (Levine, 2018; Paulson, 2018). In most cultures, men are given more value than women, thereby generating a power control of men towards women (Deutsch, 2007). Moreover, patriarchy recognizes gender as a primary feature in organizing social relations, retaining a hierarchical prominence, and establishing social arrangements that emphasize domination and power control (Hunnicut, 2009). Rape myths function to excuse the rape by male perpetrators (i.e., “Boys will be boys”) as such behaviour conforms to characteristics of male gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Meanwhile, female rape victims are blamed for flouting their gender category trait via rape myths linked with unfeminine behaviours, such as “She asked for it” (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). Rape myth acceptance triggers a wide range of issues including a wrong portrayal of false rape allegations made by female victims, or inaccurate perceptions that victims are not the actual victims of sexual assault (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Social media are a favourable environment for individuals to publicly discuss rape myths (Kosloski et al., 2018). Rape myths are prevailing in the content of both newspaper articles and social networking sites. Articles with headlines endorsing rape myths allow readers to be less likely to find accused perpetrators guilty and to adopt more rape-supportive attitudes (Pennington & Birthisel, 2015). As reported by Kosloski, et.al. (2018), rape myths are strongly advocated by Internet users on social sites like Twitter or online newspaper articles webs, portrayed under victim-blaming opinions. Nevertheless, Stubbs-Richardson et.al. (2018) finds that Twitter can be used to diminish rape myth acceptance. Hence, more research is needed to discover the rape myths within the comment threads following a sexual assault case on influential networking sites like Facebook.

2.4. Rape Culture

The term “rape culture” originated in the 1970s, corresponding with the feminist movement’s second wave (Burnett, 2016). Rape culture is an environment where rape is rampant and sexual violence against women is normalized (Marshall University, n.d.). Rape culture is nurtured in various ways such as hegemonic masculinity, politics, media, language and rape myths (Burnett, 2016). Behaviours associated with rape culture encompass the use of misogynistic language (i.e., sexually explicit jokes), victim-blaming, sexual and human body objectification, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women’s rights and safety (Burnett, 2016).

Victim blaming means any indication or implication that sexual assault was the victim’s fault. Victim blaming is usually observed in sexual assault cases, based on the public judgements of rape victims (Muehlenhard & Rogers, 1998). Victim blaming reinforces power relations preventing perpetrators or persons of higher social status from being punished. Meanwhile, the victims of sexual assault, despite being the victims, are blamed for being victimized, even to the extent of taking responsibility for sexual assault happening to them (Muehlenhard & Rogers, 1998). Rape myth acceptance, gender role stereotypes and victim’s use of substance are found to be the attributions of victim blaming phenomenon (Grubb &

Turner, 2012).

Studies have shown the prominent role of media in reinforcing rape culture (O'Hara, 2012). Rape culture highlights the demonstration of sexual violence and abuse toward women through movies, television, advertising, and magazines (O'Hara, 2012). Hegemonic masculinity is portrayed in the media with the depiction of males as aggressive, power-dominant and rape as a normal act (Burnett, 2016). Paulson (2018) finds that rape culture, specifically male privilege and women as objects, appears in thirteen Disney animated princess movies. The prevalence of rape myths on newspaper coverage is another example of the media's role in advocating rape culture (O'Hara, 2012). Social media sites also exacerbate rape culture and sexual violence through people's use of misogynistic language (i.e., humor and jokes about genders, sexuality and sexual activities) (McCann et al., 2010). Stubbs-Richardson et.al. (2018) found that victim-blaming tweets on Twitter tend to be more influential with more followers and attract more retweets than victim-supporting ones. However, digital activism has started to respond to rape culture. The use of hashtag #AskThicke for feminism takes over Twitter's online discussions about sexual assault (Horeck, 2014). Overall, research has found that social media is used to both spread rape culture via survivors' victimization and combat rape culture via digital activism work. Further research is still needed to examine how individuals may respond to rape culture via social networking sites in a specific sexual assault case.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

Keywords "Sexual Assault," "Kesha" and "Dr. Luke" were used to search on Billboard fanpage and eight public posts were found reporting the case from October 14th, 2014 to February 23rd, 2016. Four posts chosen to analyze the comments below are those with the highest number of likes, shares and comments in each year.

The first post (1) "Report: Kesha suing Dr. Luke for alleged sexual assault and emotional abuse" uploaded on October 15th, 2014 reaches 40,000 likes, 2,900 shares and 2,500 comments. In the post, the effort of this singer in filing a lawsuit against her producer to regain control of her music and freedom in personal life is reported through her lawyer's statement. A copy of the lawsuit was uploaded on Billboard, stating that Kesha was forced to drink and drug, then being sexually assaulted by Dr. Luke. Dr. Luke also immediately filed a countersuit against the singer's one.

The second post (2) on June 18th, 2015 is "Dr. Luke wins halt to Kesha's sexual abuse lawsuit" with 3,600 likes, 47 shares and 88 comments. Kesha was reported to suffer a setback since the judge decided to put her lawsuit on hold. Her lawsuit was considered by the judge to implicate her contract with Dr. Luke and Sony, and her claim for sexual harassment and gender violence was affirmed.

The next post (3) "Kesha's sexual assault lawsuit against Dr. Luke" was posted on February 23rd, 2016 (4,700 likes, 218 shares, 112 comments). The process, from when Kesha started working with Dr. Luke to how she lost control of her music and her life due to this producer, was narrated. Details of her lawsuit were also analyzed in this post.

The last post (4) chosen to analyze comments is "Dr. Luke: 'I didn't rape Kesha and I have never had sex with her'" (4,300 likes, 112 shares, 366 comments) uploaded after post (3) on the same day – February 23rd, 2016. In the midst of their ongoing duel lawsuit, Dr. Luke

tried to defend himself by taking advantage of social network – Twitter, reported by Billboard. He wrote different tweets saying that: “I didn’t rape Kesha and I have never had sex with her. Kesha and I were friends for many years and she was like my little sister”, and “They are getting behind an allegation only - motivated by money” or “of course any sane person is against rape and sexual assault, but everybody who is commenting is doing so without knowledge or facts”. Also in the post, it is reported that various female artists such as Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift and Demi Lovato have supported Kesha with tweets and donations.

In this study, text comments are the unit of analysis. The comments under four posts were collected using the software iClick - Get Comment Facebook. Among all comments, only comments that are relevant to the post content, expressing users’ opinions of sexual assault in general or Kesha’s case in particular were chosen. The comments ranked as “Most relevant” by Facebook were considered on the grounds that Facebook itself already excluded comments that are considered spam. The comments including nested comments selected were around one day after the posts were published. Spam and irrelevant comments, stickers or emojis, or tagging their friends to follow the case were omitted. Finally, 731 under the first post, 50 under the second post, 64 below the third post, and 155 under the last post totalling 1000 comments below four posts were selected.

3.2. Data Analysis Procedure

In this paper, content analysis was applied and the results were reported according to emerging themes. Firstly, the coding system was constructed based on rape myths and rape culture literature. Then, grounded coding was employed, which incorporated initial and focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). The data were coded phrase by phrase or sentence by sentence, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. In the process of analysing data, we counted the comments and making inferences about the commenters’ perspectives. However, we did not trace whether each comment is from the same or different commenters. Once all the comments were saturated, they were categorized into major themes. Though the data were publicly available, during the analysis procedure, we assigned each comment writer a distinct pseudonym.

4. Findings

The data reveal that rape myths and rape culture are reflected in commenters’ standpoints toward the accuser and the accused. Descriptive statistics of three main standpoints are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Commenters’ standpoints by posts

Posts	Standpoints			
	Victim supporting	Victim blaming	Neutral	Total
(1)	418 (54.7%)	239 (32.7%)	74 (12.6%)	731 (100%)
(2)	32 (64.0%)	12 (24.0%)	6 (12.0%)	50 (100%)
(3)	43 (67.2%)	13 (20.3%)	8 (12.5%)	64 (100%)

(4)	76 (47.7%)	48 (31%)	31 (21.3%)	155 (100%)
Total	569 (56.9%)	312 (31.2%)	119 (11.9%)	1000 (100%)

As can be seen in Table 1, victim supporting comments (n = 569) accounted for the minor majority of the collected data (56.9%). Meanwhile, victim blaming comments (n = 312) comprised around one third of the data, and neutral ones (n = 119) constituted 11.9% of total.

Victim blaming appears at all posts' discussions in a total of 312 out of 1000 comments, but mostly appears under post 1 (239 comments) and post 2 (48 comments).

4.1. Gender Roles Nonconformity

Rape culture is evident in comments under four posts in 134 comments, where Kesha was criticized for defying traditional gender roles, and in 70 comments, where Internet users make rape jokes about her behaviour and dressing. Examples included:

I thought she always woke up in the morning feeling like P. Diddy? (Nate)

Maybe she doesn't remember because she brushes her teeth with a bottle of Jack? (Sean)

Interesting that an artist who consistently sings anthems of getting drunk, drugged up, wild, and sexual would find herself blacked out in a stranger's bed. Guess none of that is evidence, huh? (Babin)

According to her music, she always wakes up naked, hungover, and with no memory..... I dunno... if you sing about it....it makes it harder to take seriously. (Nelson)

but let's see her drug screening and see if she was 100% sober... and the dr. I'm just saying most of this stuff happens to girls who don't hold much respect for themselves... Learn how to say no to drugs and alcohol and maybe u won't be a super slut and flirt with guys and give them the wrong signals... just saying. (Morrison)

In these comments, Nate, and Sean implicitly express sarcasm toward Kesha's suing by using the lyrics in her song named "Tik Tok." The use of misogynistic language, correlated with rape culture, implies that this female singer is an indecent woman who is too drunk herself, which is considered inappropriate behaviour for a woman. In Babin's view, the act of "getting drugged," "being wild" and "sexual" would function as evidence for her being assaulted as deserving. Morrison accused not just Kesha but other victims of sexual assaults as they themselves not respecting themselves and sending men the wrong signals. They take what she conveys in her songs as evidence not to trust her. These comments indicate that women are supposed to conform to their gender roles, or sex roles, encompassing a set of behaviours and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable and appropriate by society. Consequently, any women who have improper behaviours such as getting drunk and hungover are untrustworthy and deserved to be raped (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

This idea is further reinforced by the following comments: "Good that what she gets for being a slut!" (Kelly), "After whoring now she's suing...WHORES AINT LOYAL" (Joseph), "The abuser is only at fault when he sexually assaults someone who is not 'slutty'!" (Chou), and "Guess that image as a drunk party girl didn't help much." (Tom). Kesha is condemned for being sexually assaulted, and rape is considered a normal act as she is viewed as "slutty." By calling her "a slut," "whoring," or depicting her "a drunk party girl," the commenters slut-shame Kesha, lower her value and regard her as an object for male aggression. These victim-blaming comments are closely linked to the rape myths: "She deserved it," and "She asked for it," by dressing and acting promiscuously, as represented in the comments: "Hey Kesha...stop dressing

how you don't want to be treated. And stop singing about it too...then people wouldn't think you are easy and don't have to ask you before they go for it" (Vicky), or "She deserved it. Get over it" (Ambrose). As a whole, these comments exemplify a viewpoint of Facebook users that dressing and acting improperly is a root cause of sexual assault.

To these commenters, Kesha deserved what happened to her, as a consequence of the rape myths: "She lied about it," "She deserved it," "She asked for it" and conventional gender roles. She is accused of making false allegations and acting not in accordance with what society considers appropriate or desirable for a woman. This means the women must be responsible for their own victimisation, which fosters the continuation of rape culture, trivializes the seriousness of sexual assault and exonerates the perpetrators from all responsibilities. Concurrently, gender inequality is also manifested as people blame the rape on the women for having behaviours that do not adhere to the gender norms.

4.2. The Netizens' Support for Kesha

The most common stance in the comment thread is support for Kesha and sexual assault victims, with over 50% (569 out of 1000) of comments being victim-supporting. Specifically, 11% (114 comments) oppose rape jokes, 21% (213 comments) debunk rape myths, and 116 comments recount personal experiences from survivors. Nearly one-third (302 comments) discuss the complexity of sexual assault, while 85 comments express hatred towards the accused.

4.2.1. Rape is not Something to Joke

While only 10 comments indicate that rape jokes are funny, 114 comments express commenters' anger and dissatisfaction towards people making fun of sexual assault and its victim. The following comments exemplify how rape joke is opposed:

But when it comes down to a topic that no one is taking seriously AT ALL, that's where you draw the line. [...] If Kesha is comfortable joking about it, that's fine, but if the joke is being dragged out to the point that she can't get the help she needs and actually has to SUE him because of it, that's when it isn't a funny joke anymore. (Donald)

I've a friend who is a MALE and was raped, he went to get help and a restraining order and was literally laughed out of the courtroom. [...] Jokes are one thing, someone getting denied help because it's seen as a joke is not funny. I AM speaking from personal knowledge from not only being sexually abused by several different people, but from knowing others in varying cases. (Donald)

Donald takes a stand against making a joke about a serious problem like rape. He points out the difference between a normal joke and a serious rape joke. While benign jokes are fine, joking in case of rape can deny victims of the help they need. In the second comment, Donald accentuates the seriousness of making jokes out of sexual assault by citing a real case of his male friend who was raped but "was literally laughed out of the courtroom." Humour on such serious issue like rape can prevent people from obtaining justice and further humiliate victims in places that they seek support and justice. This can contribute to silencing victims further and justifying or covering the act of the offenders, creating an unsafe environment.

All the negative people on here are sick. I bet more than half of you are hypocrites. And it's just music. You don't know her lifestyle. What freaking difference does it make? Rape is serious and not something people should joke about. I hope none of you are so unlucky to wake up somewhere and not know how you got there. (Amy)

As can be seen in her ironic tone of voice, Amy rebukes "negative people" who made

jokes or encouraged rape jokes as “hypocrites.” She points out another problem of telling rape jokes, which is the difference in Kesha’s song lyrics and her way of life. Amy argues that the lyrics and ideas in the artists’ songs cannot be used to deduce about her actual lifestyle. The consequence of making jokes about sexual assault and its victim can preclude the possibility that the victim speaks out their case and can get help from society. These comments indicate the support to the singer against the rape culture and netizens’ attempt to defend the right of Kesha, and of men and women who are victims of sexual assault.

4.2.2. Rape Myths Debunking

The aforementioned jokes were associated with one of the popular myths. The myth “Women got raped deserved it” is debunked 52 times, “She asked for it” is opposed in 50 comments, and “She lied about it” is disproven 105 times.

No one deserves it and no one is asking for it. The fact that she WASN'T asking for it indicates that it's assault! Only yes means yes. I'm glad she's standing up, that must be so difficult knowing that so many people still victim blame and are heartless A.F. Inability to consent is lack of consent. It's IMPOSSIBLE to be "asking for it" because the VERY NATURE of the crime means that she specifically was not asking for it. (Abigail)

Even if a woman willingly takes a handful of pills, and drinks an entire 5th of Jack, and flirts with a man, and wears slutty clothing... THAT STILL DOES NOT EQUAL CONSENT!!! Some of you boys think the world is yours for the taking and you need a wakeup call. (Sarah)

I don't care if Kesha has slept with 100 men or no men, no means no. It doesn't matter if it's a stranger or someone she knows, no means no. Dr. Luke didn't take no for an answer, as you can see by reading the article, and that is not okay, whether it's Kesha or someone you actually know personally. (Donald)

Rape is not supposed to be taken as a "regular" act EVER. It's an outrageous, disgusting kind of violation. It's a crime. You should take that "no big deal" back, Mohd. (Paulo)

The comments from Abigail, Sarah, Donald, and Paulo aim to dismantle rape myths, emphasizing that consent must be explicit. By using capital letter, Abigail angrily challenges the perception that anyone ever “asks” to be raped, indicating the violation inherent in sexual assault and aligning with the affirmative consent of “Only yes means yes.” She expresses her empathy by stating the difficulty victims face in challenging victim-blaming attitudes. Similarly, Sarah uses extreme examples to deconstructs the myth that certain behaviors or appearances can justify rape, stating that consent cannot be inferred from any of a victim's clothing, actions, or state of intoxication. Her criticism of male entitlement challenges a patriarchal mindset that normalizes sexual violence, reemphasizing that consent must be explicit and cannot be assumed under any circumstances.

Donald and Paulo further these arguments by stressing the universality and seriousness of consent and rape. Donald emphasizes consent must be respected regardless of the victim's sexual history or relationship with the perpetrator, reinforcing that “rape is rape” and challenging the myth that a victim's character or past can mitigate the crime's severity. Paulo condemns the normalisation of rape as a “regular” act, calling it a “disgusting kind of violation” and a crime that must be taken seriously. His insistence that rape should never be trivialized fights against the normalization of sexual violence and stresses the importance of societal acknowledgment of its severity. Together, these comments advocate for a more just and empathetic understanding of sexual violence victims.

While debunking the rape myths, commenters also discussed the consequences of those myths:

This is why women don't speak out about their sexual abuse. Because people like the ones in these comments are making fun of her, blaming her, slut shaming, etc. People are so quick to blame the victim but won't blame the abuser it's sickening. Grow up! (Hayes)

Stop slut shaming and blaming the victim. This is why people keep quiet and continue to be abused. Drunk, high or not, no one asks for it. STOP SAYING THEY ASK FOR IT. No one knows the full story either. Just because she sings about partying does not mean she does it 24/7. It's called having an image. Besides, no means NO. (Laux)

"Drunken slut" when he was the one who drugged her and took advantage? I hope you realize how idiotic you sound, victim blaming is never ok and you're just contributing to a society that blames women for being assaulted but won't blame the person harming them. (Hayes)

Slut or not...she has every right to decide who she wants and doesn't want. #stopslutshaming NO WOMAN ON THIS EARTH DESERVES TO BE RAPED!!! Some of u f***tards need to get a f***** grip. You sound so ignorant. Especially u slut shaming females. (Alisha)

The comments from Hayes, Laux, and Alisha critically address and debunk prevalent rape myths, especially those involving victim-blaming and slut-shaming. Hayes and Laux emphasize that the societal tendency to blame victims rather than perpetrators discourages survivors from speaking out about their abuse. Hayes points out that mocking, blaming, and slut-shaming victims perpetuate a culture that protects abusers, while Laux argues that assumptions about a victim's lifestyle or behavior, such as singing about partying, do not equate to consent. Both highlight the importance of recognizing that no one, regardless of their state or image, ever "asks for" or deserves sexual assault. Their comments stress the need to shift the focus from the victim's actions to the abuser's accountability, advocating for a societal change in how sexual abuse is perceived and addressed.

Alisha's comment reinforces the idea that every woman has the right to decide who has access to her body, irrespective of any labels or judgments placed upon her. She vehemently rejects the notion that any woman deserves to be raped, calling out the ignorance of those who engage in slut-shaming and victim-blaming. By using strong language and capital letters, Alisha emphasizes the urgency of stopping these harmful behaviors and attitudes. Together, these comments dismantle the myths: "Women got rape deserve it," "She asked for it" and "She lied about it," which perpetuate rape culture, advocating for a more empathetic and just approach to supporting survivors and holding abusers accountable.

4.2.3. Personal Sexual Assault Stories Sharing

To show empathy with Kesha, many Facebook users told their personal stories or stories of people they know about rape and sexual assault:

One of my best friends was assaulted by a family member of hers and waited six years to tell anyone. He scared her, there could have been threats whether actual threats to her or to her career. No one knows the true story except for them and no one really will. (Zapell)

This happened to a family member of mine. She was drugged at the bar and couldn't even walk let alone speak out. [...] Luckily he is in jail now. Just because she is famous doesn't mean it can't happen to her too because the man was desperate enough to drug her just to sleep with her seems totally plausible with a celeb... (Tiffany)

Just like her, I was also a victim. I know how she feels. :((Josephine)

The comments reveal the prevalence and complexity of sexual assault, describing the fear, threats, and power dynamics that often silence victims. Zapell recounts the long-lasting impact of threats and fear, while Tiffany points out that fame does not protect against assault. Josephine's brief yet poignant statement of shared victimhood provides a personal connection and solidarity with Kesha. These comments illustrate the pervasiveness of sexual violence and the complexity that can prevent victims from speaking out, while also showing empathy and understanding towards Kesha's experience.

This happened to me with a guy, but police said they can't do anything because I'm a guy and according to police rape can only occur with a penis and a vagina. (Evan)

Female rape is acceptable, and male rape doesn't happen. That is how society deals with rape. (Cara)

Evan scornfully describes the definition of rape by the police. Evan and Cara's comments reveal the gender biases and misconceptions surrounding rape that hinder justice for male victims. Evan's experience with the police indicates a flawed understanding of rape, where male victims are dismissed due to a narrow definition. Cara's comment further critiques societal attitudes that trivialize female rape and deny male rape, exposing a pervasive and harmful double standard. These comments suggest that societal and legal definitions of rape need challenging and broadening to ensure that all victims receive recognition and justice.

4.2.4. The Complexity of Sexual Assault

Another way that a great number of Facebook users (in 302 comments) chose to defend the artist is to provide further information related to rape and sexual assault, mostly around the intricacy of sexual assault and the victim's feeling after being sexually assaulted. The following comments are a vivid illustration of information given in support of the victims:

I work with assault victims, and I'm a doctor. I can tell you now that women get raped and at times there is no physical evidence. No tearing, no DNA, no bruises. They are drugged, taken advantage of, and left. The only knowledge of something not being right is when they wake up with hours missing from their memory and the feeling of having had sex without their knowledge. Also, coming forward about being raped is infinitely hard because of scenarios like this, because no one wants to believe you that someone could be that horrible. (Hamilton)

While many people request evidence for her accusation, Hamilton, who self-identifies as a doctor working with assault victims, describes the complexities of rape cases where physical evidence is mostly absent. Women can be drugged and assaulted without showing signs of trauma, leaving them with only gaps in their memory and a sense of violation. Hamilton points out the difficulty victims face in coming forward, as the lack of visible evidence and societal disbelief in the severity of such acts make it challenging for survivors to be believed and supported.

I don't think anyone can understand why she waited to report it unless you have been in that situation. The mental toll something like this has on anyone alone is enough to keep her silent but also the fear of what he was going to do if she told...such as ruin her career and her whole life basically. Don't judge her until you have been there then you still really shouldn't judge her. (Meghan)

Regardless of the situation, what she did or didn't do that is NOT for us to assume. What would you do if you were in this situation? Sexual assault doesn't just happen, it builds from mental abuse and slowly tearing someone down. [...] To say someone deserved it

or should have known better, you are the reason why we never progress because comments like those who make girls stay quiet on what types of abuse are going on. (Salcedo)

For one, the percentage of alleged rapes that turn out to be lies is so tiny... Less than 1%. The percentage of rapes that DO happen that are also reported is way too small! One in four women is sexually assaulted. (Rachel)

Very common for rape, sexual assault victims to wait years (if ever) to report the crimes. Victims rarely see justice in court. Threats and further abuse in all kinds of forms are what awaits most victims for speaking out against their abuser. #FREEKesha (Smith)

The above comments describe the challenges and misconceptions surrounding the reporting of sexual assault. Meghan explains the delayed reporting by citing the psychological obstacles and fear of repercussions, such as career ruin, that keep victims silent, insisting that no one should judge without personal experience. Salcedo explicitly criticizes the harmful assumptions and judgments that perpetuate silence and hinder societal progress.

Rachel and Smith provide statistical and contextual support to these arguments, stressing the rarity of false rape allegations and the high incidence of unreported sexual assaults. Rachel notes that only a small percentage of rapes are reported, with one in four women experiencing sexual assault, highlighting the prevalence of the issue. Smith points out that many victims wait years to report, if they report at all, due to the lack of justice and the threats and further abuse they face. These comments challenge the systemic and cultural perception issues that prevent victims from speaking out and call for greater support and justice for survivors.

Comments highlighting the complexity of sexual assault receive significant engagement, with Hamilton's comments garnering over 100 likes each and similar comments attracting 50 to 70 likes. In contrast, victim-blaming comments receive about 10 likes. This suggests that informative comments about sexual assault can shape public beliefs and raise awareness about the issue. By attracting attention and encouraging understanding of the mental and emotional challenges faced by victims, these comments help dispel rape myths and contribute to a more informed and empathetic view of rape victims.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Social media has emerged as a significant arena for discussions and reactions to cases of sexual assault, including high-profile instances like Kesha and Dr. Luke. This study examined responses on Billboard's fan page, revealing a predominant trend of victim-supportive comments (569 comments), followed by victim-blaming attitudes (312 comments) and neutral stances (119 comments). This contrasts with previous findings suggesting that victim-blaming content often garners more attention on social media platforms. Qualitative analysis identified three key response patterns: victim blaming, strong support for the victim, and calls for legal justice.

Victim blaming was evident in comments that portrayed rape culture through accusations that victims fabricate assaults for personal gain, echoing historical biases identified by Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994). Gender roles also played a significant role, with comments employing sexist jokes and attitudes toward victims who did not conform to societal expectations, aligning with research by Burt (1980) and Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995). These comments perpetuate a harmful narrative that blames victims for their own assaults, contributing to a culture where responsibility for sexual violence is misplaced onto victims.

Conversely, a substantial number of comments expressed unwavering support for Kesha

and other victims, rejecting rape jokes and challenging societal norms that enable rape culture. The data show that Facebook users are more supportive of victims than inclined to blame them, contrasting with Stubbs-Richardson et al.'s (2018) finding that victim-blaming tweets often receive more followers and retweets than supportive ones. Previous studies found how social media provoke the pervasiveness of rape culture and rape myths acceptance (McCann et al., 2010; O'Hara, 2012; Pennington & Birthisel, 2015; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). The data in this study revealed that social media like Facebook, even though being considered environments exacerbating rape culture (O'Hara, 2012; McCann et al., 2010), can be used to combat victim blaming and slut shaming, denounce the hegemonic masculinity, and muster support for sexual assault survivors. This study indicates that Facebook emerged as a platform where individuals actively dispute harmful attitudes and advocate for victims, illustrating its potential to foster constructive dialogues and challenge entrenched beliefs about sexual assault.

This study reveals that Facebook users actively challenge and debunk prevalent rape myths surrounding sexual assault. Comments reject notions such as victim blaming ("she asked for it"), justifying rape ("women got rape deserved it"), and lying about assault, aligning with findings from Stubbs-Richardson et al. (2018). Empathetic support towards victims reflects a broader societal shift away from traditional victim-blaming attitudes. Furthermore, survivors of sexual assault use Facebook to share personal narratives, fostering empathy and challenging misconceptions about why victims may delay reporting. The use of hashtags like #FreeKesha illustrates digital activism against sexual assault, echoing research by Horeck (2014). The study brings out Facebook's role as a platform for public discourse on sensitive issues, where sentiments against rape and rapists are outspoken despite societal norms of hegemonic masculinity that normalize such violence (Burnett, 2016; Paulson, 2018). By bringing out stories of male victims, the commenters demand to broaden societal and legal definitions of rape, address systemic issues preventing victims from speaking out, and ensure all survivors receive recognition and justice.

While these insights contribute to understanding public attitudes towards sexual assault, it is crucial to recognize that the opinions shared on Facebook represent a subset of society, in this case from American context, and the platform's selective display of content and policies on sensitive material may skew the data analyzed. Moreover, the absence of nonverbal cues and the platform's data access restrictions present challenges in fully capturing nuances in public discourse. Nevertheless, this study highlights Facebook's potential as a tool for shaping public perceptions of sexual assault, advancing societal awareness of its complexities and addressing Garcia-Moreno et al.'s (2012) concern that fear of blame and lack of support are significant barriers to reporting assault. Further studies, especially in the contexts of Vietnam, where recent controversies related to sexual assault cases have emerged, would provide fruitful results for comparison.

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A HISTORY OF THE SELF-CONTRADICTIONARY NATIONALISM OF THE U.S.

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Abstract: This paper constructs a genealogy of American nationalism that follows major historical events and periods, from the genesis of nationalism since the country's early state-building to the War on Terror in response to September 11th attacks in 2001. It argues that as an overarching, singular and generic term, American nationalism is paradoxical since it is a configuration of contradictory forces striving for equality and supremacy, unity and division. By organizing the discussion chronologically, the paper emphasizes how nationalism has been shaped by historical contexts. Through a critical, extensive review of relevant historiographies and scholarly research, it identifies contradictory forces that have emerged and persisted in the history of American nationalism, including civic-political nationalism and various forms of ethnic nationalism. The lens of self-contradictory nationalism contributes to nuanced understanding of American nationalism as a discourse for power struggle, meaning, and identity.

Keywords: nationalism, discourse, self-contradictory, history, American studies

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết này xây dựng một phả hệ của chủ nghĩa dân tộc Hoa Kỳ theo các sự kiện và thời kỳ lịch sử quan trọng, từ khởi nguồn của chủ nghĩa dân tộc thời kỳ xây dựng nhà nước đầu tiên của đất nước đến “Cuộc chiến chống khủng bố” nhằm đáp trả các cuộc tấn công ngày 11 tháng 9 năm 2001. Chúng tôi lập luận rằng nếu xét chủ nghĩa dân tộc Hoa Kỳ như một hiện tượng bao quát và đơn nhất, nó là một cấu hình của những lực mâu thuẫn, cố gắng đạt được sự bình đẳng cũng như thượng đẳng, sự thống nhất cũng như chia rẽ. Cấu trúc theo trục thời gian của bài viết làm nổi bật những bối cảnh khác nhau của chủ nghĩa dân tộc Hoa Kỳ. Thông qua việc xem xét các cách viết sử và nghiên cứu học thuật liên quan, bài viết xác định những lực mâu thuẫn đã xuất hiện và tồn tại trong lịch sử của chủ nghĩa dân tộc Hoa Kỳ, bao gồm chủ nghĩa dân tộc chính trị và các hình thức khác nhau của chủ nghĩa dân tộc sắc tộc. Lăng kính của chủ nghĩa dân tộc tự mâu thuẫn góp phần tạo dựng sự hiểu biết tinh tế và sâu sắc hơn về chủ nghĩa dân tộc Hoa Kỳ, một diễn ngôn cho đấu tranh quyền lực, tạo nghĩa và xây dựng bản sắc.

Từ khóa: chủ nghĩa dân tộc, diễn ngôn, tự mâu thuẫn, lịch sử, Hoa Kỳ học

1. Introduction

Observing current events in the U.S., it appears that the so-called “American identity” is in crisis. Trump’s rise and continuing popularity have brought along a divisive nationalism, weakening both American democratic ideals and the country’s globalist agenda. Headlines like “Is the U.S. on the brink of civil war?” and “Could the United States be headed for a national divorce?” are unsurprising. Stokes (2024) remarks that the U.S. is experiencing its deepest ideological and political divisions since the 1850s—the period before the Civil War—with these divides evident in a wide range of contentious social issues, extending beyond electoral outcomes. Harris’ candidacy carries hope, but the divisiveness has certainly not abated yet. We also notice that even before Trump came to power, the prolonged conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, marked by increasing casualties, financial burdens, and a lack of decisive victories, fostered growing skepticism and war-weariness among Americans. U.S. forces’ killing of Osama Bin Laden in 2011 briefly unified the nation in relief, joy, and pride, but this sentiment quickly dissipated. The historic election of the first Black president in the U.S. initially raised hopes for better race relations; however, by 2016, following numerous high-profile incidents of police violence against Black Americans and the resulting protests, public perception of race relations had soured. Moreover, rampant inequality driven by neoliberal policies eroded confidence in the U.S. as a beacon of democracy, paving the way for Trump’s “Make America Great Again” and “America First,” a form of nationalism that many people would argue un-American.

To characterize American nationalism and its uniqueness, American exceptionalism is usually invoked. Accordingly, American nationalism is unique in that it is characterized by a belief in the supremacy of democratic ideals rather than ideas of ethnic superiority, breaking from Old World nationalism. In line with this characterization, “a dual paradox in the American

psyche” has been identified as follows: “First, although the United States is highly nationalistic, it doesn’t see itself as such. Second, despite this nationalistic fervor, U.S. policymakers generally fail to appreciate the power of nationalism abroad” (Pei, 2009, para. 1). These observations are valid; however, the terms of American exceptionalism tend to divert attention from the very fact that ethnic nationalism has been integral to American nationalism. American nationalism is paradoxical in its own composition and difficult to grasp.

Indeed, many nationalisms have emerged in specific contexts during the relatively short history of the U.S. They then persist, not as diversity but as forces that interact with and contradict each other. Contradictions have not impeded but constituted American nationalism. As an overarching, singular and generic term, American nationalism is paradoxical since it is a configuration of contradictory forces striving for equality and supremacy, unity and division. To illuminate the issue, this article constructs a genealogy of American nationalism that follows major historical events and periods, from the genesis of nationalism since the country’s early state-building to the War on Terror in response to September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001.

In historiography, the question of periodization is undeniably important. The stop at the end of the War on Terror is justified based on what we perceive as marking a discontinuity in American nationalism. After the War on Terror, American nationalism’s uniting force eroded in the face of rampant inequalities and stark divides. This situation culminated in a turning point, Trump’s presidency. Trump’s “Make America Great Again” and “America First” gathered his supporters together, but has divided the nation to an unprecedented extent as mentioned in the opening paragraph. Such a turning point does not imply that American nationalism ceases to be contradictory or that deep divisions have never been seen in its history. The story of contemporary American nationalism is unfolding, and we would wait till there is a moment possibly signifying another turning point. We believe that despite its limits, this genealogy of American nationalism is helpful to understand contemporary American nationalism.

This paper approaches nationalism as a political issue rather than an economic issue. It occasionally touches upon but does not focus on how markets and industries have shaped American nationalism. An overall chronological structure is adopted, not (only) to show how nationalism has changed through time. Although chronology is often not the structure that makes it easiest to present an argument, it is chosen to highlight that American nationalism has been self-contradictory as it is historically constructed. Our historiography characterizes the self-contradictory nature of American nationalism by demonstrating how it, in specific contexts, has been made of democratic ideals as well as ethnic supremacy, universalist values as well as ethno-culturalism, national interests as well as globalism, benevolence as well as hostility. Through the lens of self-contradictory nationalism, this critical, extensive review of relevant historiographies and scholarly research contributes to nuanced understanding of American nationalism as a discourse for power struggle, meaning, and identity.

2. National Identity for Independence: Ethnocentrism, Democracy, and Universalist Values

The genesis of American nationalism is largely tied to the development of a national identity rooted in the pursuit of independence from the British Empire. This identity was shaped by narratives of European settlers who sought to build a nation untainted by Old World traditions, believed to be divinely favored as they endured hardships. This installed ethnocentrism in American nationalism. Also, the fight for national independence against a monarchical empire, for the first time, successfully summoned democracy and universalist values, which have defined American creedal nationalism.

The fight for independence

The main point of contention in the debate over the nature of American nationalism has been the issue of when an American nation was established (Trautsch, 2015). For a long time, the dominant school of thought on American nationalism has held that it had its origins in the colonial era and that the Declaration of Independence officially declared the formation of the United States of America on July 4, 1776 (Kohn, 1957; Smith, 2000). The widespread belief that an American identity emerged after the first European immigrants arrived on the shores of the New World is still strong today. Thanksgiving, for example, propagandizes the myth of national founding that starts with the Pilgrims who fled to build a new nation uncorrupted by the Old World institutions and were blessed by God so that they survived through the harsh times. By eating American game such as turkeys and cultivating native plants such as squash, pumpkins, beans and corn, the Pilgrims grew out of their European origin and became Americans (Pleck, 1999; Siskind, 1992). The story exemplifies the lasting ethnocentrism and religiosity in American nationalism.

Determining the existence of an American nationalism prior to the American Revolution is important, mainly because scholars feel the need to distinguish between a war of independence and an insurrection, to term secessionists “patriots” or “traitors,” and from this point, one can claim whether Americans are “one people” according to the Declaration of Independence and their secession from the British Empire is accordingly legitimate (Trautsch, 2015). Some academics such as Bancroft (1834/2016) and Frothingham (1872) even promote American nationalism by conflating a centuries-long past with the formation of the American nation, claiming that an American national sense of self existed long before the American Revolution and had in fact contributed to it.

In this vein, the U.S. is recognized to have its origins back to the Thirteen Colonies founded by Britain in the 17th and early 18th century. In 1754, the Albany Plan proposed a union of the colonies. Despite its failure, it acted as a point of reference for future discussions about independence. Colonists were gradually “Americanized” due to migration, increased intercolonial trade, communications, and marriages, which were facilitated by the construction of roads, the establishment of a continental postal system, and population growth, and which led to the evolution of common perceptions and attitudes (Adams, 1932). Soon after, the colonies faced common grievances, including taxation without representation, as a result of acts passed by the British Parliament. Americans were generally in agreement that only their own colonial legislatures, not Parliament in London, had the authority to tax them. Parliament was adamant that this not be the case, and no consensus was reached. The Thirteen Colonies grouped together and organized the Continental Congress, which lasted from 1774 to 1789, after the London government punished Boston for the Boston Tea Party. Fighting erupted in 1775, and opinion shifted toward independence in early 1776, inspired in part by Thomas Paine’s appeal to American nationalism. In 1776, his pamphlet *Common Sense* became a runaway best seller. The United States of America was established after Congress unanimously issued a Declaration of Independence declaring the formation of a new government. The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson is believed to have brought American nationalism to the apex.

The American Revolutionary War was won by the Patriots, who received generous peace terms from Britain in 1783 (Savelle, 1962). The minority of Loyalists (those loyal to King George III) had the option of staying or leaving, but the majority chose to stay and become full American citizens (Waldstreicher, 1995).

Creedal/civic/political nationalism

The Declaration of Independence in 1776 animated a particular force of American nationalism—creedal nationalism, also referred to as civic nationalism or political nationalism in this paper. The second paragraph of the Declaration is widely regarded as the most succinct, direct, and eloquent expression of the American creed. The first axiom of the American creed is natural human equality. While it has been suspected that “all men” in “all men are created equal” was meant to apply to white men only, the wording of the axiom has given rise to the interpretation that people, regardless of color, religion, sex, are born free and autonomous and cannot be governed without their consent. The second axiom of the American creed is that human beings are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” Other Founding era documents say that a person possesses them by birth or by nature and any citizen is entitled to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (published in two volumes, the first in 1835 and the second in 1840), a classical work on American politics, emphasizes the rational and universal values of democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, equality, and racial tolerance. Tocqueville’s thesis is that America has been most shaped by the unusually free and egalitarian ideas and material conditions that prevailed at its founding.

Creedal nationalism, thus, engenders the notion that American nationalism is peculiar and exceptional, since “it is not sustained by the hatred of the other; and knows no resentment” (Kohn, 1957, p. 47). According to Kohn (1957) and Greenfeld (1995), American nationalism is not only exceptional because it is founded on universal values, but it is also morally superior because it does not include the negative aspects of nationalism such as exclusions, resentments, and wars. Greenfeld (1995) argues the American nation lacks a history of ethnic exclusion and has been free of outward hostility since it was established on the exclusive basis of civic nationalism principles. Arieli (1984) also claims that as ethnic minorities effectively invoked the principles of the Declaration of Independence to claim full citizenship, American nationalism gradually became more inclusive. He concludes that “the history of the American nation is the history of the successive integration of individuals of ethnic groups and of the group itself into the general body of American society and the American polity” (pp. 858–859).

In this sense, American nationalism is inclusive and is considered to be the “purest” form of the civic-political type. According to these authors, only the American nation is the product of a nationalism founded solely on political values (Greenfeld, 1995; Smith, 2000). The archetypal formulation of this view of American nationalism was offered by Gleason (1981, p. 62) as follows:

To be or to become an American, a person did not have to be of any particular national, linguistic, religious, or ethnic background. All he had to do was to commit himself to the political ideology centered on the abstract ideals of liberty, equality, and republicanism. Thus the universalist ideological character of American nationality meant that it was open to anyone who willed to become an American. Although the idea that American nationalism is based on universal values is later on criticized as a narrow view, it continues to shape the public discourses about American identity and the process of Americanization as “an experience of willed affiliation.”

3. The Early Republic (1783-1861): Sustained National Unity and Growing Ethnoculturalism

The years following the American Revolution were marked by rapid social, political and cultural transformations. The U.S. was still a young nation in 1800, less than 20 years after gaining independence. Political parties were in their infancy, and infrastructure was virtually

non-existent, and a catastrophic war with a world power such as the United Kingdom or France could have completely wiped it out. And yet, less than fifty years later, the U.S. had progressed significantly as a unified independent country, despite contradictions. Politics saw the rise and fall of two-party systems. Westward expansion revealed an imperialist disposition of American nationalism. The period before the Civil War was, however, a turbulent one that divided American people. Ethnoculturalism, a form of nationalism that emphasizes the importance of shared heritage, language, religion, traditions, and other cultural markers in defining membership and belonging within a nation, developed in tension with American creedal nationalism. Regional nationalism emerged from North-South differences. Nativism arose in response to immigration waves. The gradual weakening of national sentiments and the concurrent formation of stronger sectional identities resulted in the secession of 11 Southern states from the U.S. 1860-1861.

Invention of tradition

Notably, during the early republic, shared experience and the sense of national unity was cultivated with the celebration of public ceremonies. The Fourth of July has succeeded in being “the American Jubilee,” a “truly American Festival,” overshadowing and even eclipsing local or regional patriotic observances (Travers, 1997, p. 3). A newspaper reporter boasted in 1815 that the U.S.’s entire population of “eight millions of citizens joined in one festive celebration of the National Birth Day” (Travers, 1997, p. 4). The statement was exaggerated, but July 4th definitely encouraged a large number of Americans from all walks of life to take time off work to attend the military shows, parades, public and private dinners, formal orations, and fireworks that were all part of a proper July 4th celebration. As people glorified the mythic past, hyperbolized the present, and breathlessly envisioned America’s future, solemn ceremony mingled with civic abandon. The flag, with its ever-changing number of stars, validated the federal concept of an indefinitely expandable union of states on a common basis. In this way, the Independence Day ceremony not only preserved tradition but also “traditionalized” new materials and values. During times of rapid social, political, or cultural change, such as the early republic, this innovative process of “inventing tradition” is typical (Travers, 1997, p.11).

The rise and fall of two rival political parties

This period saw the rise and fall of two political parties. Conservative Americans who adhered to the classical definition of republicanism sought to secure and enshrine elitist politics through the federal establishment established by the 1787 Constitution, and hence adopted the word “federalist” to describe their stance. The federalists, advocating for a strong central government and close ties with Britain, called supporters of the “liberal” republican strain “anti-federalist,” but later referred to them as Democratic-Republicans, reflecting their more populist stance. The two parties’ long and bitter rivalry sparked political passions that occasionally erupted in serious social unrest and violence, especially in the 1790s (Howe, 1967). By the early 1800s, the Democratic-Republicans became the dominant political force, winning numerous elections and leading to the “Era of Good Feelings,” where they faced little opposition after the Federalist Party’s collapse in the War of 1812. However, the party eventually fractured in the 1820s, leading to the rise of new political factions.

The War of 1812: Renewal and reinstatement of national feelings

While political parties were dividing, the War of 1812 may be the most important event in this period when people “feel and act more as a nation” (Gallatin, 1816/1879). The War of 1812 was, in several respects, the second chapter of the American Revolution. It was between the U.S. and the United Kingdom, with the aim of restoring the U.S.’s political and economic

sovereignty once and for all. It was actually a war between several nations, each with vested interests in the land called America. The U.S., Great Britain, her colony Canada, Spain, and thousands of Native nations were all involved in this war. Former Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin described the sense of American nationalism in a letter written after the War ended in 1816 as follows:

The War has renewed and reinstated the national feelings which the Revolution had given and which were daily lessened. The people have now more general objects of attachment with which their pride and political opinions are connected. They are more Americans; they feel and act more as a nation; and I hope that the permanency of the Union is thereby better secured. (Gallatin, 1816/1879)

As partisan rivalry diminished dramatically, a new image of the generation evolved, rendering a shared “national feeling” once again (Robertson, 2001). The settlement of the crisis in the immediate aftermath of the War of 1812 owed a great deal to the widespread establishment of a national consciousness, even if it was a fragile and conditional one. Military conflict brought people together, as it had done previously in American history. The War of 1812 brought together Americans for military service, ignited anti-British sentiments comparable to those felt against the French, and, most importantly, centralized state control under James Madison, allowing for widespread infrastructure improvements. People thought they had conquered Britain, so they chose new heroes to represent their triumph. Andrew Jackson, rather than the godlike George Washington, was a better representative of the modern generation (Travers, 1997). For young Americans, the war was the “Second War of Independence,” not only from Britain, but also from the tyranny of old patriotism models. The war accelerated the process of American society’s democratization and the emergence of the “self-made man” conceit, which was personified by war hero Andrew Jackson.

Growing difference between the South and the North: Regional nationalism

The downside of the new partisan unity was an upsurge of sectional unrest. The identity of the South and the North was growing in difference. The southern colonies’ culture had always been apart from the northern ones. Southerners were generally more faithful to British customs than their Northern counterparts prior to the period of independence. They were heavily influenced by new fashion and art trends in England, studied English architecture and literature, and were proud of England’s liberal constitutionalism (Blassingame, 1968). However, the sense of difference felt in many parts of the South, bolstered by a shared desire to keep slavery alive, had yet to coalesce into a cohesive regional identity. As all of the North American colonies became increasingly isolated from England, the South’s affection for Britain faded, and was replaced by a growing identification with the American nation, which was aided by increased intercolonial interaction with the North. Nonetheless, political tensions exacerbated pre-existing cultural gaps between the two regions in the post-Revolutionary period. During the War of 1812, disagreements over government policies erupted, with New England denouncing the dispute as Western and Southern expansionist insanity (Kohn, 1957). During the Era of Good Feelings, tensions subsided, but resurfaced with new vigor in the mid-1800s, as regional nationalism engulfed the American South.

Persistent political conflicts across the Mason-Dixon line intensified pre-existing tensions to the point that many Southerners began to see the North and the South as separate countries populated by two different peoples (Kohn, 1957). This new collective self-understanding was promoted by political and economic elites in order to gain support for their economic interests, especially on the issue of slavery (Faust, 1988). Due to the lack of

differences between the populations of the South and the North, Southern nationalists created new myths of dissimilarity based on race, such as viewing themselves as heirs of the Normans fighting against the Saxons in the North and regarding themselves as the true heirs of the Revolution (Faust, 1988). Religious faith legitimized the Southern cause, strongly justifying the war and its slavery system. While Southern public opinion focused on ethnic disparities and religious differences, the North defined the South's behavior in mostly civic terms as "rebels," "traitors," and "despots" (McPherson, 1999).

In general, while the North and the South were in conflict regarding political and economic issues, Southerners resorted to ethnoculturalism and advanced Southern nationalism.

The nativist movement in the face of immigration waves

The period after the War of 1812 also challenged civic nationalism as immigration to the U.S. increased dramatically, accounting for 30 percent of population growth by 1851, compared to 3 per cent in 1810 (Kaufmann, 2000). Furthermore, for the first time, the majority of the new immigrants were Catholics rather than Protestants, and they did not come from the United Kingdom. As a result of this shift in the demographics of major American cities, a common exclusionary movement led by the Know-Nothing party arose, aiming to defend Protestant Anglo-American ideals by limiting Catholics' political and social rights, whose religious affiliation was also a marker of their non-English ethnic background. This was the first of several repeated outbursts of American "nativism," a phrase coined in the 1850s to describe intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign "un-American" connections (Higham, 1995). Following waves of immigration, particularly from outside of northern Europe, nativist responses from groups like the Populists, trade unions, and patriotic groups, who feared that foreign influences would corrupt American culture, undermine their economic interests, or both, were inevitable. Economic downturns were often the catalyst for such responses, with immigrants serving as convenient scapegoats. The nativist movement demonstrated that the American creed was incapable of maintaining social and political cohesion in reality.

Westward expansion: the new American dream

The California Gold Rush in 1848 signified a departure from the old American dream of gradual, modest wealth accumulation towards the new dream of instant riches (Matthews, 2021). This shift redefined the American character as impatient and volatile, influencing public sentiment and economic practices. The Gold Rush accelerated industrialization, creating a brutal economy dominated by large banks and mechanized mining. It also spurred significant territorial expansion, notably through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which added vast lands to the U.S., totaling approximately 525,000 square miles. The lands ceded by Mexico included all or parts of present-day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. This expansion, marked by militarism, set the stage for ongoing injustices, including the genocide of Native Americans, discrimination against Chinese immigrants and Mexican Americans, and the rise of mass incarceration and racial violence. Despite California's early ban on slavery, many of these issues persist today, reflecting the darker legacies of 19th-century expansion and exploitation. Matthews (2021, para. 8) deems California's Gold Rush and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as "together constituted an undeclared revolution, essentially re-founding the United States with different peoples, different borders, and far different aspirations."

4. Civil War (1861-1865): Creedal Nationalism Challenged by Ethnic Nationalism and the Reinforcement of National Bonds

The American Civil War, known as the War Between the States, was fought in the U.S. from 1861 to 1865, between Northern states loyal to the Union and Southern states that had seceded to form the Confederate States of America. It is a significant milestone in which the American creed and values were challenged by ethnic nationalism.

The discourse of the Civil War propagated by Northern and Southern leaders displayed how they defined the War, and what values each side believed it represented. Northern leaders argued that legitimizing the Confederacy would jeopardize not only the Union, but also the country's very foundations. In June 1861, a Philadelphia newspaper editor wrote, "We are fighting to protect our constitutional institutions... to establish the supremacy of the Constitution and laws over violence and anarchy... [and for the] great fundamental principle of republican government-the right of the majority to rule" (Mcpherson, 1999, p. 102). Meanwhile, the citizens of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas overwhelmingly supported the Confederacy. "We must go with our Southern brothers." A North Carolina newspaper editor repeated, "Blood is thicker than water." Virginia's attorney general asserted that Virginians were "homogeneous with the [people of the Confederate] States in race," while the Northern people were an "alien race.... The cotton States swarm with Virginia's sons and her son's sons. They are bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh" (Mcpherson, 1999, p. 102).

The issue of slavery was one exception to the common citizenship that was the centered idea of American civic citizenship. Even free blacks, as descendants of slaves, were considered non-citizens in the Dred Scott decision of 1857. As a result, one-seventh of the population was not entitled to American citizenship. This breach of civic nationalism fueled the anti-slavery movement. "The monstrous injustice of slavery robs our republican example of its just power in the world," Lincoln said in 1854, and "allows the enemies of free institutions to mock us as hypocrites with plausibility" (Mcpherson, 1999, p. 104).

Nativism and exclusionary rhetoric was condemned by most mainstream Democratic and Republican leaders, who called it an organized scheme of bigotry and proscription. By 1860, a looming civil war had pushed nativism into the shadows. The true danger to American nationalism did not come from nativists or immigrants, but from Southern nationalism.

Southern whites spoke the same language as other white Americans, practiced the same Christian and primarily Protestant faith, had a predominantly British ancestry, shared a common memory of the fight for independence, and shared loyalty to the Constitution and the political institutions that grew up under it. However, the belief that Northern and Southern whites were two distinct races with increasingly hostile interests grew in popularity. By 1858, the Charleston Mercury, a prominent Southern newspaper, declared that on the issue of slavery, the South and North were not just two peoples but hostile rivals (Mcpherson, 1999). Northerners and Southerners were also believed to have diverged so much in climate, morals, and values that they could no longer coexist under the same government. Their relationship was likened to oil and water.

The Civil War helped end sectionalism and reinforce national bonds throughout the U.S. when it ended. Although the reconciliation process was contentious, it helped solidify American nationalism (Kohn, 1957). America was faced with the question of whether to memorialize the war in a way that emphasized national reconciliation or social justice. Southern elites who wanted to return to the old ethnic system repeatedly stressed the mutual exclusivity of the two

goals. While slavery was not restored, the South was able to institute a legal system of racial dominance that guaranteed the continued exclusion of blacks from full citizenship. While America had been healed, justice had been placed on hold for nearly a century (Bonikowski, 2008).

5. Late 19th to Early 20th Century: Manifest Destiny, Social Darwinism, and Americanization

The constitution of American identity in the period from the late 19th century to early 20th century, with World War I marking a critical period in the way certain groups of Americans viewed immigrants, centered around two main concerns: (1) Imperialism, Manifest Destiny, and social Darwinism and (2) Americanization movements. Creedal nationalism was still in currency, but violence in rooted doctrines of inequality was inscribed in the heart of American identity. The self-contradictory nature of American nationalism was emphatic.

Imperialism: Manifest Destiny and social Darwinism

American nationalism was invented to fight against the British Empire and led to the formation of the U.S., but the U.S. itself gradually became imperialist, both at home and abroad. This imperialist disposition has been characteristic of the U.S. until now, definitely a persistent force of American nationalism. The notion of an American identity created by Manifest Destiny and the colonial philosophy of social Darwinism were central to this imperialism. Manifest Destiny is a phrase coined in 1845 to denote the idea that the U.S. is destined by God to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent. To justify the West's expansion into Native American territory and the colonization in the Pacific and Caribbean, social Darwinism was also used. Believers of this philosophy believed that "inferior" classes of people, unlike Americans, were incapable of self-rule.

Social Darwinism and discrimination of immigrants

Social Darwinism engendered new ways of perceiving what American identity meant. Consequently, new limits on immigration were set. Since the new arrivals were categorized under social Darwinism as "inferior," the nativists felt that the new arrivals were unfit for American democracy and society.

Between 1870 and 1920, over 25 million immigrants arrived in the U.S. Before the Civil War, most immigrants had come from Northern and Western Europe, including large numbers of Irish and Germans. New groups such as Italians, Poles, and Eastern European Jews made up a larger percentage of the arrivals after the Civil War. Many Chinese came to the U.S. as well, with most settling on the west coast. Of these groups, immigrants from Northern and Western Europe were viewed as more American, while southern and eastern Europeans and Jewish people faced some discrimination. Chinese immigrants were viewed by many as a completely foreign group, one that needed to be kept from entering the United States altogether. By the end of the nineteenth century, the focus of American nativism had changed from religion (Gleason, 1980) and republican politics (Walzer, 1996) to ethnicity and what was referred to as "race."

The First World War (WWI) contributed to a surge in parochialism, which Kallen (1998) identified as a significant factor influencing attitudes toward immigration. He noted that the war shifted concerns from property to people, with race, heritage, and attitudes (rather than legal factors) becoming perceived as threats to property and social status. This shift led to a sense of despair over the survival of American culture, which was already viewed as lacking a cohesive national identity due to the post-Civil War economic boom. This anxiety fueled the

growth of traditionalist and nativist ideologies. Immigration, once beneficial to large businesses, started to be seen as problematic. Racist ideologies, particularly those favoring Nordic or Anglo-Saxon superiority, gained traction as some saw advancements in science and industry as threats to traditional lifestyles.

The time leading up to the U.S.'s entry into WWI provides an insight into the potential link between immigration and foreign policy. The war not only contributed to the introduction of anti-immigration laws but also created an environment that encouraged such acts. For immigrants, there was a lot of tension concerning the connections to their home countries (Gleason, 1981). For natives, the fact that immigrants could have a voice in whether or not the U.S. joined the war was a source of increased annoyance. A recommendation for a literacy test was included in the 1910–11 Congressional commission report as a way of limiting unnecessary immigration (Boissoneault, 2017). However, the bill containing this proposal was passed and rejected and eventually vetoed by President Taft and Wilson between 1911 and 1917. Their rejection was driven by concerns over economic development and cosmopolitan idealism. But once the U.S. became involved in the European war, public opinion was powerful enough to override the president's veto and pass restrictive legislation in 1917. This bill contained a ban on Asian immigrants, a literacy test, and an exclusionary clause prohibiting representatives of extremist groups from entering the country and allowing expulsion of foreigners who took radical positions. German Americans were often seen as the enemy, and they faced bigotry that sometimes escalated to mob violence. Anti-Semitism peaked in the late 1910s and early 1920s. The kind of fear that drove this highly unusual event such as lynching a Jew also motivated far more mundane activity aimed at lowering rates of immigration and limiting the rights of those already present.

Americanization and the assimilation of all immigrants

Americanization, one of the "Progressive" movements during this period, was a program aiming at rapid assimilation of all immigrants. The goal of the movement was for immigrants to become integrated into a particular kind of America with the intervention from the government. Although Americanization was not a new program at the beginning of the 20th century, it had changed from its earlier forms. Gleason (1981), in his classical essay "American identity and Americanization," argues the social movement had become more organized with a structured agenda than its antebellum predecessor. Americanization after the Civil War meant more options, whether it was forcible assimilation, or accommodation and coexistence. Since WWI, the belief that America could incorporate all newcomers gradually weakened. Other factors fueling nativism was racialism, urban issues, economic changes, and the growth and mobilization of Anglo-Saxonism. Thus, forms of Americanization became more coercive and institutionalized (Gleason, 1981).

According to Gleason (1981), the Americanization movement progressed as follows. The first phase took place during the first two decades of the 20th century. Via patriotic groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution or social gospel churches, it sought to establish a more harmoniously integrated society in a relatively benign manner. The beginning of WWI marked the second phase, with a transition toward mobilization of the Americanization movement. State departments and local organizations joined in by 1915. The National Americanization Committee, led by Frances A. Kellor, a Progressive, was one of the most important agencies. Kellor believed in forced assimilation and, with the support of her institution, partnered with American manufacturers to provide immigrant workers with Americanization courses. This connection between industry and an organization to assimilate

new immigrants was a powerful weapon, and it was the first time that training immigrants to be workers in the industrial economy was equivalent to making them Americans. Following the war's end, the third phase of the Americanization movement arose, accompanied by a growing fear of social change, especially as embodied by the Bolsheviks. The relationship between industry and Americanization tightened during this period, as owners tried to protect their employees from what Gleason referred to as "the radical few" (1981). Groups such as the American Legion sought to expel those they saw as a threat. Immigrants were explicitly angry at how oppressive these new initiatives were during this era, and they increasingly saw the Americanization movement as hostile to their cultures and existence. The fact that the Ku Klux Klan finally embraced Americanism's rhetoric only seemed to prove their case.

The legacy of the movement is to demonize the use of the word "Americanization." The movement resulted in conflicts related to national identity, a situation in which those who were against Americanization on the practical level and used it as an idea could claim to be the "purest" Americans of all.

This period also saw intellectual discourses on assimilation, which offer an insight into how intellectuals have considered the best way or ways to deal with new arrivals as a nation, namely Anglo-Protestantism, American melting pot and multiculturalism (Anderson, 2016). They envisioned America by making assumptions about who is or is not assimilable, how the process should work, and most importantly, what people should be assimilating towards. Anglo-Protestantism is a conservative view of the U.S., founded on a national identity rooted in the past. It demands that America be restored to its former glory. Supporters of this perspective see danger and loss over the course of the twentieth century. As a result, the ideology ascribes a particular type of American identity. In comparison, the melting pot shows that what it means to be American will still be fluid when immigrants arrive. The original sense of the melting pot, in contrast to its neutral, non-threatening media image, was that national identity changes everyone; and thus, it is more dynamic and forward-looking. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, argues that the American population is diverse and thus, should live side by side.

6. World War II: Revival of American Creeds and American Greatness to Lead the World

The period during and after World War II (WWII) witnessed the Civil Rights Movement to integrate people into the U.S., demonstrating the revival of American creeds. After the war, the role of the nation in world affairs changed, engendering new ideas and understanding of the nation's foreign policies. American globalism/internationalism could be seen as a reinvention of imperialism that mitigated the ideological violence of Manifest Destiny and social Darwinism. However, within a framework of nationalism, it remained imperialist.

Revival of American creeds: Fair representation for minorities and rejection of ethnocentrism and bigotry

Following WWII, the Civil Rights Movement started a long and arduous journey to ensure fair representation for minorities. Albeit the National Origins Act of 1924 marked the end of an era of significant European immigration to the U.S., it did not mark the end of controversies over what it meant to be an American or who qualified. There was a sense of relief when the number of immigrants fell from nearly a million per year from 1902 to 1915, to hundreds of thousands in the 1920s, and then to the tens of thousands from 1931 to 1946 (Patterson, 1996). Catholics, Jews, blacks, and others were starting to fight for fair access and a role in American society prior to the founding of groups such as the Southern Christian

Leadership Conference in 1957. Catholics and Jews, it seems, were the first to make serious demands for community recognition while respecting the existing political and legal structures (Schultz, 2011). One of the consequences of defeating Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese was that the social Darwinism that characterized most of WWII lost its sense of validity. Groups of citizens will no longer be excluded or discriminated against deliberately and lawfully on the grounds of “inferior blood.”

Following WWII, minor adjustments were made to the 1924 Immigration Act. These included allowing entry for “war-brides,” spouses of veterans, and a limited number of immigrants from India, the Philippines, and Chinese wives of Americans. However, Roosevelt and Truman faced challenges in addressing the refugee crisis due to the restrictive 1924 quotas. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 allowed over 400,000 Europeans to enter, though it contained anti-Semitic provisions that excluded many Jews.

The war also led to a strong rejection of ethnocentrism, and bigotry, with efforts to foster national unity and intergroup understanding. Initiatives like the Progressive Education Association’s “Education for Democracy” campaign and the “Americans All... Immigrants All” radio series promoted tolerance and diversity. The ideological revival post-war emphasized a common American identity based on shared ideals of freedom and liberty rather than ethnicity or pluralism.

American greatness to lead the world

For many Americans, the end of WWII arrived sooner than predicted, with the massive, mushroom-like clouds that descended over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Despite worries and concerns about the atomic bomb, most Americans felt relieved and proud of their country when the war ended. For them, the American way of life had withstood the war with totalitarian enemies. Nationalist sentiments pervaded all aspects of American public life at this time of triumph, including widespread talk of foreign cooperation. The moment of victory was nationalistically constructed, setting a pathway for public understanding of the U.S. foreign policy after the war.

Truman shaped the moment by announcing the war’s end and the events that led up to it, as well as by proclaiming national days of celebration and prayer. The victory symbolized the glory of the U.S., the righteousness of its cause, and the guidance that God bestowed upon the people, according to Truman’s public pronouncements. The victory was interpreted by the Truman administration and the media as solely belonging to the U.S. rather than to all of the Allies equally.

After visualizing the image of Europe being destroyed by the war, the president expressed gratitude to God for the country’s safety and expressed urgency about the need to protect the country from future wars:

How glad I am to be home again! And how grateful to Almighty God that this land of ours has been spared! We must do all we can to spare her from the ravages of any future breach of the peace. That is why, though the United States wants no territory or profit or selfish advantage out of this war, we are going to maintain the military bases necessary for the complete protection of our interests and of world peace. (Truman, 1945/2024)

This passage represents key elements of American “internationalist” thinking in the 1940s, and it also expresses strong nationalist sentiments. Truman expressed the love of the country that is central to war talk in any nation-state by declaring his joy at returning home, particularly against the bleak European backdrop he had drawn. He offered a classic formulation of “holy nationalism,” claiming that God has chosen to spare America from the

destruction of war. More importantly, the nationalism Truman expressed here was self-consciously benign and “disinterested,” or selfless, qualities that are indicative of American nationalism, though not unique to it.

The central themes, including national glory, global duty, and the victory of freedom, were touched on by almost every writer and speaker in public debate about WWII’s end in 1945, and about America’s position in the world after the war had ended. Even before the actual moment of triumph, the construction of the meaning had begun, and it had continued long after the moment had passed. However, in the prevalent discourse of the day, it meant that the U.S. had matured into a great nation capable of leading the world. Even before the Hiroshima bombing, a Gallup poll found that 63 percent of Americans thought the US would have more impact in world affairs after the war than any other nation (Freeland, 1972). From late 1945 to early March 1947, the president and the media framed U.S. global duty in terms of American national greatness. The U.S. was undeniably the most powerful country in the first year after the war ended. The prevailing discourse held that the dominant role in world affairs meant more global duties, not only to Europe or Asia but to the world. These duties included feeding the hungry and restoring the global economy, providing moral leadership in the name of American democratic ideals to a world that had clearly lost its bearings, and maintaining a permanent peace. The postwar world meant a new, smaller planet, and the U.S. was both its economic steward and its moral leader. Nevertheless, the actual reach of American power was more constrained in reality. The self-aware assumption of global responsibility was due to America emerging from the war not only unscathed but also strengthened, particularly in comparison to the prewar Depression period, when much of Europe and Asia was destroyed.

7. Cold War: Red Scare and American Nationalist Globalism

The discourse that shaped the Cold War period was built on three main pillars: national greatness, global obligation, and anticommunism—elements that keep shaping American nationalism until now.

The Cold War commenced after WWII, as the Soviet Union and the U.S. were unable to see eye to eye on either particular global concerns or the ideological ones. The Truman Doctrine, which was declared in 1947, crystallized the tension with the Soviets. The U.S. would then openly support those seeking to free themselves from communist regimes. Later that year, Secretary of State George C. Marshall outlined a proposal to help Europe’s recovery, which became known as the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan’s central argument was that if Europe’s economy could be strengthened, capitalist European governments would be able to survive. Economically and politically, the Plan was a huge success on both sides of the Atlantic. It also widened the gap between the West and the Soviet Union. The U.S. formally joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, signaling yet another indication of the American alliance with Western Europe. On the domestic front, the Cold War sparked a Red Scare. The House Un-American Activities Committee went out looking for communist sympathizers, inflaming public fears. The political left’s vulnerability, combined with the rise of “Cold War fears” tempered the optimism that followed WWII.

Anticommunism was hardly a new concept in American politics in 1947. However, with the Soviet Union astride Eastern and Central Europe, global anticommunism became a defining feature of public discourses in the U.S. With the “loss” of China to Mao’s army and the Soviet Union’s first atomic device explosion in 1949, the belief that the communist threat was global grew significantly. Anticommunism justified why the U.S. was having such a difficult time

fulfilling its global commitments and simultaneously reinforced the nation's claims to greatness. Thus, the core philosophy was American nationalist globalism rather than anticommunism.

During the Cold War, the world was divided into “free” and “unfree” in the dominant discourses, not “free” and “communist.” In the official discourse of the Truman administration and in the majority of the commercial mass media, freedom was embodied by capitalism, and communism was considered a new slavery. The foreign-policy elite did not have exclusive control over the newly expansive, global vision of U.S. security interests. The globalist outlook was based on a concept of national mission, which had deeper origins in American nationalism. The foreign-policy elite had always shared with the general public and taught them about the country's new global obligations. This sense of mission arose from American Protestantism, primarily New England Puritan values, but its reach extends beyond its theological roots. By the end of WWII, most American liberals agreed that the U.S.'s foreign policy should be focused on achieving human dignity, democracy, and justice around the world. Such responsibilities were often couched in paternalistic language. For example, after WWII, the American media often referred to Germans as “our subjects” and “our Germans,” while stressing U.S. attempts to instill democratic ideals in a culture that had devolved into barbarism.

The U.S.'s national greatness during the Cold War also manifested in its power of science and technology. After pulling itself out of the Great Depression and scoring a technology-intensive victory during WWII, the country was eager to enter a new age of science and technology—the Space Age. The explosion of science and technology energized the American economy and touched the lives of Americans everywhere in the country. Armed with ever-increasing expertise and resources to harness the awesome power of the atom, Americans had high hopes that they would positively remake the planet, take control of the planet's far reaches, forcing Antarctica and outer space to do their bidding, and serve the rising aspirations of humankind. Public leaders repeatedly proclaimed the U.S. the necessary leader of the “Free World,” promising that the country's benevolent leadership and wellspring of science and invention would deliver a better world for all humanity.

Actually, the Cold War period witnessed many hot wars around the world involving American intervention. The Vietnam War stood out since the U.S. lost in the War. On one hand, the war fueled a sense of patriotic duty. On the other hand, the war led to widespread disillusionment and a profound questioning of American values and policies. The anti-war movement became a powerful force, with large-scale protests and civil disobedience challenging the government's actions and contributing to a broader critique of American imperialism and military interventionism. This division highlighted the fragility of national unity and the complexities of American identity. The War led to a more cautious and restrained U.S. foreign policy, with a reduced commitment to internationalism and interventionism.

The Vietnam War had far-reaching and lasting consequences for the U.S. However, as the Cold War era ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, most Americans were certain that their country won the Cold War and that they were citizens of the world's most powerful country.

8. The War on Terror: Chauvinist Nationalism

On September 11, 2001, al Qaeda terrorists launched a vicious attack on the U. S., placing the country into a new age in its history. When the World Trade Center crumbled into a dusty heap and the center of the American military might have burned with a passenger jet

stuck, a generation of Americans, who had not yet been born when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, had their tragic defining moment. Terrorist attacks offered a remarkable moment in the nation's collective consciousness, where both American national identity and U.S. foreign policy were revived independently and in relation to one another, and a national emphasis and sense of purpose, which had been missing since the end of the Cold War, emerged once again.

September 11th was the most recent case, similar to WWII or the Cold War, when Americans turned to their leaders to help them understand what they were going through and what it meant for them as a nation. In such times, the president was able to restore control of the national agenda and shape the country's foreign policy strategy. President Bush had achieved both goals by putting nationalism and foreign policy in support of one another.

Freedom is one of the Founding Fathers' ideals which reemerged in Bush's rhetoric. Freedom and democracy are arguably the most esteemed principles of the U.S. Americans prize these ideals as universal and self-evident. As early as September 12th, President Bush began referring to the terrorist attacks as an attack on freedom. He expanded on this theme two days later at the National Cathedral during a civil-religious ceremony commemorating the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, which was one of the healing activities that followed any major national disaster, charged with religious and nationalist imagery. Bush (2001a, para. 18) proclaimed in this political sermon: "In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America, because we are freedom's home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time." Terrorists "can't stand freedom; they hate what America stands for," he said in a subsequent press conference (Bush, 2001b, para. 20). These examples can be found easily in his speeches, and his repetition that the U. S. was attacked because it reflects freedom soon became ingrained in Americans' perceptions of their enemies.

Alongside freedom, Bush highlighted compassion and tolerance as key elements of the American national identity, noting that terrorists aimed to undermine these values. In his speeches, he asserted that the nation's greatness prevents evildoers from damaging its spirit, praising the country as magnificent due to the decency, strength, and compassion of its people.

These demonstrations of American essence were meant to reaffirm Americans' sense of worth and to encourage proper behaviors during a chaotic time. In tandem with his nationalistic rhetoric and identification of the enemy as evils who not only lacked American virtues but specifically attacked the US because of them, his consistent association of America with virtuousness dichotomized the world between those who are good and bad, as he put it "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Bush, 2001d, para. 30). The patriotic narrative spread the mythology that America is a great country with a divine role and it is never wrong in its domestic and international affairs.

By framing the attack as one driven by hatred of democracy and compassion, Bush was able to stress that America would attack those who did not follow its moral values, not Islamic countries. He declared, "We don't view this as a religious war in any way, shape, or type." "And for those who try to pit religion against religion, our great nation will stand up and reject that kind of thought – We're going to lead the world to fight for freedom, and we'll have Muslim and Jew and Christian side by side with us" (Bush, 2001c, para. 11).

Nonetheless, one of Bush's own comments, "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while" (Bush, 2001b, para. 17) added to the suggestion of holy war. Given the importance of civic religion in America's nationalist mythos, it is understandable that Muslims

and many non-Muslims, including Europeans of all colors, believe America's war on terrorism had a Christian dimension to it. Muslim and Arab Americans were attacked by some white, Christian compatriots who appeared to believe that September 11 marked the start of a religious war. As Bush talked of the "unfurling of flags" in his speech, he put it in the context of "the lighting of candles, the offering of blood, and the saying of prayers" (2001d, para. 4). These three other practices are all linked to faith and mirror Christian religious behavior: the light of Christ, Jesus' sacrifice and blood, and prayer, which is how one communicates with God. Bush invoked the U.S.'s and Americans' messianic position and mission in the world. His remark served as a subliminal reminder to Americans that they are divinely chosen to propagate Christian values.

Following these presidential discourses, Bush waged wars on Iraq and called it a war against terrorism, which some have called "the monstrous crime" and others say it left Iraq a better place. The Iraq war has killed hundreds of thousands of people, displaced over four million people, sparked ethnic cleansing, and destroyed the country's already shattered economy.

As can be seen, mobilizing nationalist symbolism was an effective way for Bush to promote foreign policy objectives. This is both beneficial and problematic, because while American national identity has proven to be resilient, the ensuing Islamophobia and terrorism suggests that Bush's rhetoric was dangerous to humanity. It reflects chauvinist nationalism, an extreme form of nationalism marked by the belief in the superiority of one's own nation often coupled with contempt or hostility towards others. Chauvinist nationalism fostered xenophobic attitudes and policies, leading to increased suspicion and discrimination against Muslims and immigrants, who were frequently viewed as threats to national security. Bush's rhetoric and the Global War on Terror ultimately contributed to the emergence of terrorist groups like ISIS. The Iraq War was a key factor in the rise of ISIS. After the 2003 invasion, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian leader of a small radical Islamist group, transformed it into an Al Qaeda affiliate and took advantage of the instability in Iraq to expand its influence. ISIS and Al Qaeda recruiters often cited U.S. policies, such as drone strikes, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the imprisonment of Muslims in Guantánamo, as evidence that the West was waging a war against Islam.

Americans' views on the War on Terror have been mixed and have evolved over time. Initially, there was widespread support for the military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, driven by a strong desire to combat terrorism and protect national security after the 9/11 attacks. However, as the wars dragged on and the human and financial costs mounted, public opinion shifted, with many Americans becoming increasingly skeptical about the effectiveness and justification of these prolonged conflicts. Concerns about civil liberties also grew, particularly regarding the government's expanded surveillance powers under the Patriot Act, leading to ongoing debates about the balance between security and individual rights.

The September 11th attacks once again testified the existence of different strands and discourses of nationalism in the US. This is what Lieven (2004) terms the thesis and antithesis of American nationalism. American civic nationalism stemming from the Creed dominates official and public political culture and has a natural tendency to rise to the surface in times of crisis and conflict. For Lieven (2004), it looks forward to the nation's future and distinctive greatness. The antithesis to the American Creed, on the other hand, continuously looks backward, to a vanished and idealized national past. This "American antithesis" is populist and sometimes chauvinist nationalism. It sees America as a closed national culture and civilization

under attack from a violent and barbaric outside world. The Republican Right, and particularly the Christian Right, with their rhetoric of restoring an older, purer American society is the representation of American radical conservatism. According to Lieven (2004), America has a self-correcting mechanism that has kept the country from collapsing into authoritarian rule or a permanent state of militant chauvinism, and has restored a tolerant and pluralist equilibrium after periods of extreme nationalism. It prevented ethnocentrism and chauvinism from becoming the norms.

9. Conclusion

The nation-building history of the U.S. has been characterized by the tension and coordination between contradictory forms of nationalism, which constitute a distinct American identity.

American creedal nationalism, which emerged during and as a result of the fight for independence from the British Empire and has persisted since then up to now, is defined by universalist values such as democracy, liberty, and equality. On the basis of creedal nationalism, the U.S. was shaped as a modern democratic republic, widely recognized as the first one in the world. This form of political nationalism has also facilitated the successive integration of individuals and various ethnic groups into the general body of American society and polity.

American creedal nationalism has been challenged by forms of ethnic nationalism, divisive and exclusionary. When there are political and economic conflicts between groups of people, ethnic nationalism is often invoked. For example, before and during the Civil War, Southern nationalists contended that the North and South were distinct nations, inhabited by two groups with different racial backgrounds and religious beliefs. The nativist movement, particularly strong in the 1850s, opposed immigrants and promoted the interests of native-born Americans, reflecting a recurring theme in U.S. history.

American nationalism also has an outward dimension. Creedal nationalism embraces equality, but it has also engendered the ideas of American exceptionalism and superiority. Thus, paradoxically, it has joined Manifest Destiny, social Darwinism, and then the victory of the U.S. in WWII to fashion and strengthen American exceptionalism, a form of nationalism that has been used to justify the westward expansion of the country, imperialist acts abroad, and the world leadership of the U.S. In the Cold War, U.S. globalism, fueled by the spirit of national greatness, acquired a strong anticommunist element. American nationalist globalism has become part of American nationalism. In response to the September 11th attacks, the U.S. launched the Global War on Terror. Chauvinist nationalism arose, not only assuming the nation's superiority but also animated contempt and hostility towards others, especially the Islamic world.

The self-contradictory nature of American nationalism has led to an identity fraught with challenges. U.S. failures in international interventions, along with domestic inequalities and divisions, highlight the country's numerous issues. Donald Trump leveraged these internal rifts and dissatisfaction with U.S. foreign policy to propel his "Make America Great Again" campaign, which amplified divisive nationalism and garnered significant support from nearly half the electorate. Today, the various strands of nationalism discussed in this paper continue to thrive, leaving uncertainty about how the deepening divisions will unfold and whether the "self-correcting mechanism" mentioned by Lieven (2004) will function effectively.

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POVERTY AS A CONCERN FOR HUMAN SECURITY: VIETNAM'S POLICIES ON MULTI-DIMENSIONAL POVERTY

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Abstract: Although different countries may set various strategies for economic development, the problem of poverty continues to be a serious concern in both the developed and developing economies. In fact, many policy makers, administrators, academics, politicians, also see poverty as a fundamental threat to humanity. Some even consider it to be the root of practically all global issues. This is established due to the intimate relationship between poverty and human security- a paradigm that attaches security to human focus, rather than to the traditional understanding of security. This relationship is illustrated more thoroughly as attention is paid to multidimensional poverty. This approach to poverty is used more widely nowadays by governments due to its encompassing effects, and the Vietnamese government is not an exception. This study, via qualitative and secondary method, investigates different perspectives of poverty to reveal an intellectual history of how poverty has been defined and how poverty reduction orientation may have been influenced. A case study of Vietnam also examines how its government views multidimensional poverty and develops their poverty reduction policies accordingly. A constructivist approach is also sought to explain the link between poverty and human security.

Keywords: human security, poverty, multidimensional poverty

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NGHÈO ĐỐI LÀ MỐI QUAN TÂM ĐỐI VỚI AN NINH CON NGƯỜI: CHÍNH SÁCH CỦA VIỆT NAM VỀ NGHÈO ĐA CHIỀU

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Tóm tắt: Mặc dù mỗi quốc gia có thể đặt ra các chiến lược khác nhau cho việc phát triển kinh tế, vấn đề đói nghèo vẫn là mối quan tâm cấp bách ở cả các nước phát triển và đang phát triển. Trên thực tế, nhiều nhà hoạch định chính sách, học giả, chính trị gia cũng coi đói nghèo là mối đe dọa cơ bản đối với nhân loại. Một số người thậm chí còn coi đói nghèo là gốc rễ của hầu hết mọi vấn đề toàn cầu. Điều này được nhận định từ mối quan hệ mật thiết giữa đói nghèo và an ninh con người - một mô hình gắn liền an ninh với trọng tâm là con người, thay vì với cách hiểu truyền thống về an ninh. Mối quan hệ này được minh họa triệt để hơn khi trong bài viết này, sự chú ý đặc biệt được dành cho nghèo đa chiều. Cách tiếp cận này đối với đói nghèo được các chính phủ sử dụng rộng rãi hơn hiện nay do tác động bao trùm của nó, và Chính phủ Việt Nam cũng không phải là ngoại lệ. Thông qua phương pháp định tính và thứ cấp, nghiên cứu này sẽ xem xét các góc nhìn khác nhau về đói nghèo nhằm tiết lộ sự thay đổi trong cách đói nghèo được định nghĩa và ảnh hưởng của điều này tới định hướng xóa đói giảm nghèo. Một nghiên cứu điển hình cũng xem xét cách Chính phủ Việt Nam nhìn nhận về đói nghèo đa chiều và cách họ phát triển các chính sách xóa đói giảm nghèo tương ứng. Cách tiếp cận theo chủ nghĩa kiến tạo cũng được sử dụng để giải thích mối liên hệ giữa đói nghèo và an ninh con người.

Từ khóa: an ninh con người, nghèo đói, nghèo đa chiều

1. Introduction

Although there have been countless policies and programs schemed to tackle poverty, approximately no less than 700 million people are still living in extreme poverty all over the world (World Bank, 2022). “Poverty” is a concept that has been too familiar yet complex, since there are many types and dimensions to measure it. In the past, most countries would use the monetary approach to measure poverty, identifying it with a shortfall in income or consumption from a poverty line. However, broader approaches would understand poverty as the lack of opportunities to enjoy the lives valued by people, as well as every element contributing to that; or to be understood as a person is being excluded by other members of society.

People suffering poverty often live in fear, abuse, forced eviction, and to live completely insecure lives, deprived of voice, basic needs, work, and opportunity. As a result, an intimate relationship between poverty reduction and human security is inevitable. The two concepts of “human security” and “poverty” will be considered in terms of their interrelationship from a constructivist perspective. Constructivism puts humans at the center and believes that the world is socially constructed, which creates the possibility of change for the idea of security to expand from the traditional meaning to the idea of human security, which in turn, includes poverty as a factor contributing to the deterioration of human security. In another word, human security will not only be defined as a state in which citizens are protected from physical harm, but also

from other different social risks including poverty.

Poverty is a widespread global phenomenon that brings negative impacts to every country in the world including Vietnam. Although a number of policies and programs have been implemented to assist the country's development, poverty is still among its greatest threats. Since gaining independence, one of Vietnam's main development planning goals has been to reduce poverty and improve the lives of people who are harmed by suffering and hardship. The Vietnamese government also showed its adaptability and flexibility while choosing to tackle this issue from the multidimensional point of view, which takes into account diverse indicators rather than merely financial aspect of poverty. The government's policies on multidimensional poverty for the 2016-2020 period will be analyzed in the case study section.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Human Security

The UNDP first proposed the novel idea of human security in 1994. Since then, academics and state officials have used this idea as the foundation for numerous works of literature and speeches. Nevertheless, many intellectuals were inhibited from pushing the idea because it was far from becoming widely accepted in the field of development. Robert J. Hanlon and Kenneth Christie, however, were more successful in promoting the concept of human security with their work "Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want: An Introduction to Human Security". (Christie & Hanlon, 2016). It covers a number of subjects related to human security, such as development, transnational crime, civil society, global governance, violence, and human rights. In addition to highlighting the connections and synergies between the ideas of "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want," the book also supported the bottom-up approach to human security. Humanitarian interventions brought attention to the top-down, state-centric strategy, which Hanlon and Christie criticized for failing to adequately address human crises and even for making them worse.

Scholars studying human security are deeply acquainted with the concepts of "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want," but their origins can be found in the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "The Four Freedom Speech" (1941), which was intended to justify the US's "isolationist policies" in the wake of World War I. He believed that the freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, and "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want" are the four fundamental liberties that every person must possess. Many actors in the sector, including the UNDP and the UN Commission on Human Security, consider these two phrases as strong frameworks for human security. Subsequently, in an effort to expand the scope of human security, the phrase "freedom from indignity" is added. The three freedoms therefore act as the three strong pillars of the human security concept, which encompasses many aspects concerning the well-being of every citizen. "Freedom from fear" describes protecting individuals from threats to their physical integrity and safety, which includes a variety of violent crimes that may originate from abroad as well as those carried out by states against their own citizens, as well as crimes committed by individuals against other individuals and groups. To seek the root causes of human insecurity, "freedom from fear" argues that the list of dangers should be enlarged to include disease, famine, and natural disasters. It also proposes focusing on a complete plan for achieving human security. In contrast, the phrase "freedom from want" refers to the guarantee of an individual's economic, social, and environmental well-being as well as their protection in order to fulfill their basic needs. Finally, "freedom from indignity" relates to improving human welfare and quality of life, granting people the ability to make their own

choices and equipping them with the means to utilize opportunities in daily life.

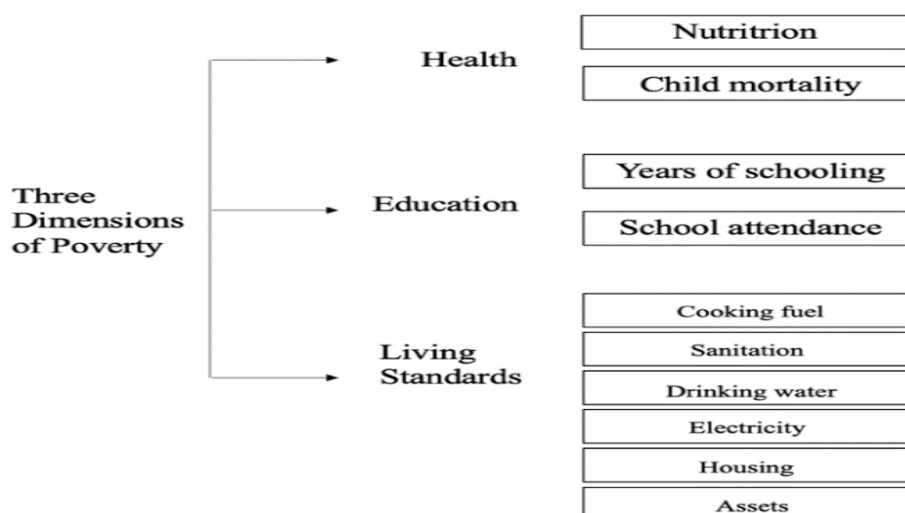
The concept of human security is quite advanced, compared to that of traditional security in several ways. First of all, regarding the referent object, traditional security mechanism is meant to encourage demand for the state, where the state's interests come before all others. On the other hand, human security is focused on individuals and their basic needs. Secondly, the goal of conventional security is to protect governments from beyond-boundary threats, while human security would broaden the spectrum of protection to encompass a wider variety of risks, such as environmental pollution, epidemics, and economic distress, etc. Finally, the means for achieving these two types of security are different. While enhancing national capacity and military defense are essential for traditional security, transforming social welfare, including poverty reduction, is the main tool for human security achievement.

The literatures above although show merely different approaches to human security, they all agree to the idea that the well-being of citizens can be secured only if fundamental needs of citizens are met. These needs cover not only financial stability, but also other developmental aspects such as education, healthcare, living environment, etc. Having said that, not only citizens are entitled to be lifted from poverty – which exclusively focus on economic matters, but also from multidimensional poverty, a much more far-reaching access to human development.

2.2. Multidimensional Poverty and Poverty Reduction

Before the multidimensional perspective of poverty becomes prominent, it used to be widely understood in monetary terms. Poverty is generally defined by income or consumption levels according to the World Bank. Based on the sum of money needed to meet necessities like clothing, food, and shelter, The WB established the international poverty line, which is calculated according to the variations in purchasing power throughout nations. This poverty line has been adjusted from \$1 per day per person in the 1980s to \$1.90 per day per person in the 1990s. It was not until fall 2022 that the researchers of the WB adjusted this poverty line to \$2.15 according to their data gathered from 28 of the world's poorest countries (WB, 2022).

Nevertheless, it is essential that we also take into account other multiple dimensions to poverty. People living in this situation may experience numerous negative factors at once, such as poor health or hunger, lacking access to drinkable water or power, low working environment conditions, or inadequate education. To understand the actual nature of poverty, one cannot only concentrate on one aspect, such as income. Therefore, larger metrics and data are required to evaluate discrepancies within the global community. These metrics must account for the socioeconomic disparities that underlie unequal development and their effects on the present and even the next generation. A variety of poverty measurements can be crucial in creating more accurate assessments of the poor and enable more precisely targeted actions. Numerous methods for assessing poverty exist, but a few stand out, notably the *Multidimensional Poverty Index* (Figure 1), which gauges a variety of impairment factors, including unhealthy life, insufficient livelihoods, an illiteracy, a low income, marginalization, low-quality work, and the risk of suffering physical harm. From a different perspective, the *Well-being Measure* bases their calculations of welfare across or within nations on factors deemed crucial for adequate living circumstances and a high standard of living. Shelter, assets and property owned, employment, education, environmental quality, civic involvement and governance, etc. are among the factors that the well-being metric considers. Many comparable wellbeing indexes have evolved globally such as the *OECD's Better Life Index* (Table 1), which prioritizes 11 distinct well-being criteria.

Figure 1*Components of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (Alkire & Santos, 2010)***Table 1***Compendium of OECD Well-being Indicators (OECD, 2011)*

Your Better Life Index	Compendium of OECD Well-being Indicators
Housing	Housing
Income	Income and Wealth
Jobs	Jobs and Earnings
Community	Social Connections
Education	Education and Skills
Environment	Environmental Quality
Governance	Civic Engagement and Governance
Health	Health Status
Life Satisfaction	Subjective Well-being
Safety	Personal Security
Work-life Balance	Work and Life

Most of the dimensions mentioned in the measurements above are closely related to human security, as they are essential elements that contribute to the well-being of a person. Without these elements, humans would lack basic needs and fulfilments entitled to them. From this perspective, poverty is directly relevant to security studies, in fact, some people believe that poverty and human security are in many respects synonymous.

International scholars in the field also have different notions on the way poverty can be alleviated. In order to identify the most effective ways to address this worldwide problem, several viewpoints on the causes of poverty need to be considered.

Barnes Atkinson (1989) shares his idea on the spread of poverty in industrialized states and how social security policies might end it. In addition to addressing the issue of measuring

poverty, he discusses in depth how poverty should be defined, the development of new methods to address social disparities in the selection of the poverty threshold and gauges of poverty, with a focus on changes over the past half century and the impact of unemployment. Notably in his book "Measuring poverty around the world", Atkinson explored the definition of poverty from the perspective of political authorities, who apply different standards on which level of income should be considered poor, overtly or implicitly. In addition, he pays attention to the influence of social security, its efficacy, the function of unemployment insurance, the function of income pensions, and the evolution of retirement incomes over the next five decades. To increase the level of social security, he suggests a variety of tactics, including resource redistribution, agriculture and labor market reforms, food programs, and public projects. Such suggestions cover a considerably wider ground than the constellation of regulations that developed nations often group together under the name of "social security."

In 2003, Jean-Pierre Cling discussed the new worldwide strategies for alleviating poverty launched by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1999, claiming their goal was to place the battle against poverty in the center of the two organizations' development schemes. In accordance with this strategy, low-income nations must develop poverty reduction plans in order to seek financial help from either of the organizations or bailouts. The authors present a professional thorough examination of the necessary poverty reduction techniques and emphasize three major improvements offered by these tactics considering this new conditionality and the extreme necessity that comes along with it, including: priority placed on poverty alleviation; encouraged participation in policymaking; and improved collaboration of formal development aid. These techniques are designed specifically to treat poverty in financial terms. Nevertheless, Cling also claims that a significant gap still exists between the strategies' guiding concepts and their actual implementation.

On the other hand, Ted K. Bradshaw (2007) describes poverty theories that concentrate on the roots of the issue and its effects on people, society, culture, and the community. The author examines academic materials on poverty for a theoretical justification that aligns with the fundamental community development initiatives, from which he established four main theories. The first theory, according to Bradshaw, holds that poverty is sustained by personal or family irresponsibility, which has to be restrained by harsh punishments. The second hypothesis, however, focuses on subcultures of poverty and aims to ingrain mainstream ideals into disadvantaged children. The third views poverty as a societal issue that must be handled politically and structurally rather than as a personal one. The fourth theory uses geographically targeted advantages to alleviate the concentration of poverty in terms of location. The author contends that, in order to effectively direct anti-poverty initiatives and maximize their effectiveness, individuals who are responsible for their design and implementation must construct proper conceptions of poverty. It is safe to say that this work offers a general understanding of poverty alleviation in relation to the community development factor. As a result, students and academics can use this paper to better comprehend the numerous facets of programs to reduce poverty.

In 2013, Ban Ki-moon, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations who was in office for almost 10 years, referred to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as the most significant and effective anti-poverty initiative all over the world. He pointed out that eight specific goals were established in 2000 when an unprecedented number of world leaders gathered at the United Nations. These goals included halving global poverty and hunger, combating disease and climate change, enhancing water quality and sanitation, promoting education, and widening opportunities for girls and women. Since grandiose pledges from

politicians were not new, cynics predicted that the MDGs would be abandoned as being too unrealistic. Instead, the Millennium Development Goals have encouraged action, helped establish international and national objectives, and produced amazing achievements.

2.2. Vietnam's poverty reduction literature

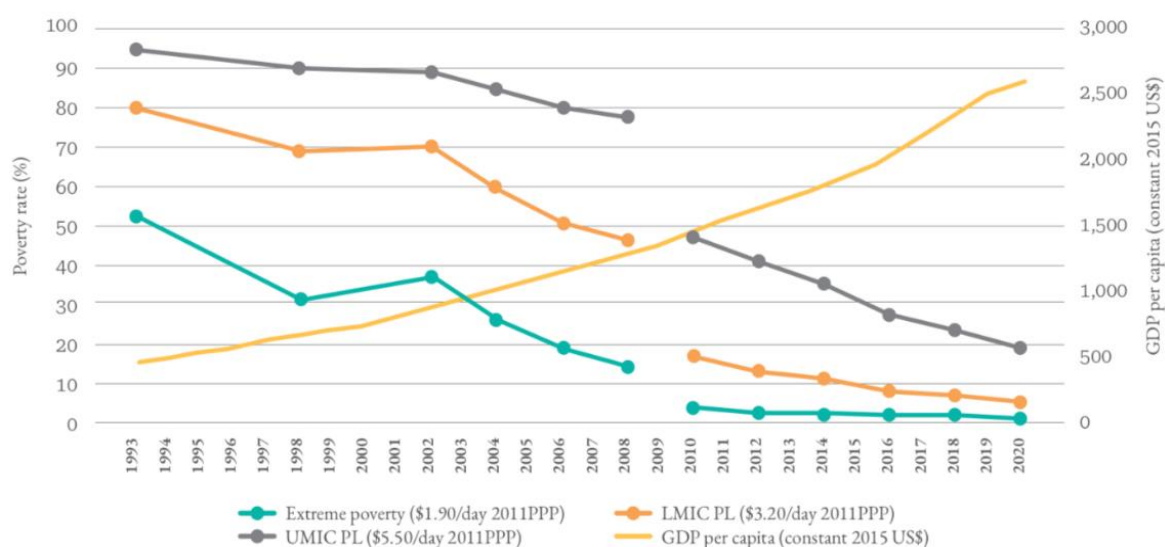
In Vietnam, a nation that has seen several periods of colonization as well as catastrophic wars, poverty has long been a point of concern. Ho Chi Minh, the former president who was in office when Vietnam briefly achieved independence in 1945, declared that illiteracy and poverty were the nation's new adversaries. Although the country has made considerable improvement in recent years, poverty is still a significant issue that must be addressed. Thus, the following section discusses different approaches of scholars on poverty reduction in Vietnam.

Duong An Hoai attempts to find the relationship between poverty and microfinance and to evaluate its effectiveness as a tool for poverty reduction. In short, microfinance refers to the provision of a wide variety of financial services to low-income households and their microbusinesses, including deposits, loans, payment services, money transfers, insurance, and remittances. The phrase "low-income" as employed in this definition differs from nation to nation, or even within a single nation. Microfinance is seen as having the potential to be a successful instrument in the battle against poverty. The emergence of microfinance appears to be related to a dramatic decline in both global and Vietnam's poverty rates.

Barbara Coello, Madior Fall, and Akiko Suwa-Eisenmann (2011), on the other hand, study the effects of trade-related factors at the individual domestic level and trace the progression of poverty alleviation in Vietnam during the phase of trade liberalization. In addition to the anticipated benefits of employment in an export-related business or in agriculture, expansion in non-farm self-employment seems to be effective at reducing poverty for the poor. Additionally, the industries and agricultural sectors that compete with imports also contribute to the poverty reduction progress of Vietnam.

According to the World Bank in its report "From the last mile to the next mile" conducted in 2022, despite Vietnam's significant economic advancement, poverty was still a major issue within the society. In a study of the populace, poverty and hunger were determined to be the most pressing problems that the government must address.

As a result, the report by World Bank examines the poverty reduction progress of Vietnam in 2 stages called the "last mile" and the "next mile". The "last mile" part of the report addresses the tendency of poverty and inequality from 2010 to 2020. Strong growth, significant progress in reducing poverty, a positive trend in literacy shown by higher education, and an increase in the number of laborers working outside of the agriculture sectors, etc. were all features of the decade. A vast number of young people entering the labor market were given greater economic prospects in part due to higher earnings and the emergence of off-farm occupations. However, ethnic minority households and farming households still have a substantially higher poverty rate.

Figure 2*Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction, 1993–2020 (World Bank, 2022)*

The “next mile” section of the report, however, focuses on the opportunities and obstacles to Vietnam in making greater prosperity for its citizens. In 2019, at the 13th National Congress, the board declared its objective to achieve high-income status for the country by 2045. This is a high-reaching goal that is appropriate for a nation with a track record of comprehensive progress, but it calls for fresh ideas and even bigger accomplishments.

Despite different approaches to poverty reduction, ranging from top-down measure at national scale, to bottom-up approach, curing poverty at the household scale or microfinance, we can see a corresponding pattern. It is essential that poverty reduction is now considered in a broader perspective rather than a traditional one, and government’s policy-making plays a considerable part in this matter. People’s daily necessities must be fulfilled, and opportunities to access different aspects of life like education or health care must also be put into consideration. This proved that the Multidimensional Poverty approach to Poverty Reduction is a much smarter move to go forward.

3. Poverty Reduction as a Concern for Human Security

In order to understand the relationship between the notion of human security and poverty Reduction, it is substantial to look at the conceptual aspects of human security and poverty, and indeed, the perspective of constructivists contributed significantly to the foundation for this connection.

First, constructivism holds that knowledge and social significances are built by social structures and human’s perception, and from that their actions are made. In terms of human security, this notion is built and constantly developed throughout discussions, reports, initiatives, programs, intellectual reports by a wide range of actors including government elites, social institutions, international organizations, NGOs, scholars within the field. Without the engagements of different parts of society, such a new concept cannot find its way to emerge. Indeed, after the end of the Cold War, to find a solution for world peace, all actors have come together to discuss on something that can bring about a comprehensive security that does not only concern the sake of state’s territorial boundary - which was deemed inadequate, but

concern also the elimination of insecurities at the root, the security of human beings. And that also was when the UNDP set out the notion of human security within its Human Development Report in 1994. The issue of poverty was also formed the same way. When people realize that poverty is the original cause of many world problems, which constitute many different aspects, only then do they acknowledge the importance of coming together and acting. Poverty reduction now is not only a domestic issue that needs to be dealt with by each government, but it must be of universal concern by the entire international community.

Constructivism also holds that identity and interest are not fixed, but they change with the present of new issues and concepts. New issues and threats to the safety of human beings such as terrorism or plague break-out stimulate the formation of human security to deal with these problems. New challenges also emerge, which require academics to broaden the definition of poverty to tackle the issue more thoroughly. These new threats also make nations start considering changing their interests. For example, in the past, nations only need to care about the safety of their physical territories, but now when the climate change starts to pose negative impacts on the lives of human in general, regardless of which country do the people come from, governments begin to alter their interest to the protection of the global human security and to the alleviation of the impact posed on the people's quality of life, which is also an aspect concerned by poverty reductions.

Since human security considers the numerous non-military dangers to peace and people's dignity, it goes beyond fundamental notions of security. It entails defending individuals against all-encompassing dangers, building on their capabilities and desires, and enabling them to achieve self-empowerment. Helping people escape poverty and providing them the opportunity to have a decent life are the initial actions to accomplishing both wealth and freedom. When humans live healthier, more optimistic, well-informed, and fulfilled lives, they are given the power to live without facing danger of any kind. It is safe to say that human insecurity is primarily the result of poverty. People must not experience poverty, poor health, discrimination, violent threat, illiteracy, or denial of political and social inclusion for rights and liberties to be fully utilized. In other words, ensuring human security is a prerequisite for human development.

Once security is viewed from a human perspective, the existing growth pattern is unable to address the demands of most human beings throughout the globe and, in some situations, it appears to be significantly worsening human quality of life. Poverty is a persistent situation for almost 700 million individuals currently living under the globally recognized poverty threshold of \$1.90/day (World Bank, 2022); in some cases, it may be only temporary, such as after yield loss, leading to food shortage. These statistics have already included certain vulnerable populations, such as the handicapped, young people, asylum seekers, people who are suffering chronic diseases, etc. Also concealed within these numbers are the impoverished population who are made even more destitute and more fragile due to instances such as natural disasters or financial crises.

4. Vietnam's approach to multidimensional poverty

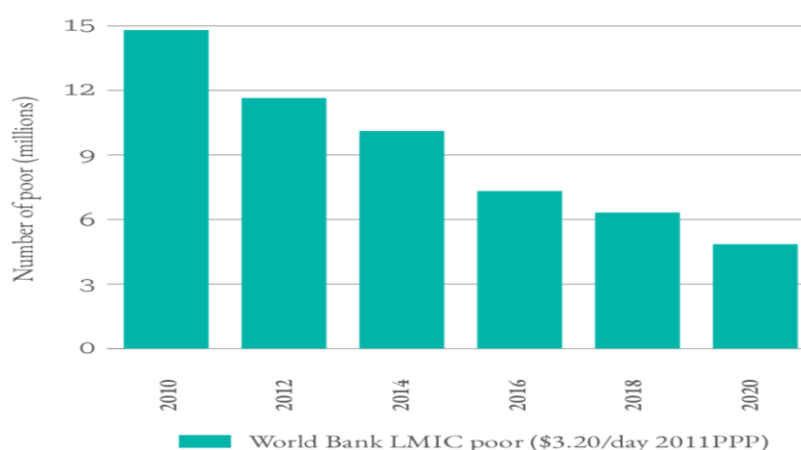
4.1. Vietnam's Poverty Scenario

Vietnam's poverty reduction has been outstanding between 2010 and 2020, although there are significant discrepancies. This necessitates innovative strategies for Vietnam to take the following step towards transforming into a middle- and high-income country.

According to the World Bank's (WB) study on the evaluation of poverty and equality in Vietnam in 2022, which was published in April 2022, the decade 2010-2020 saw Vietnam's strong growth and poverty reduction accomplish excellent outcomes. The poverty rate has plummeted from 16.8% in 2010 to 5% in 2020, according to the Bank's low-middle-income country (LMIC) poverty standard (US\$3.20/day), which indicates 10 million people have been rescued from poverty. In 2020, the number of individuals who were impoverished were only 5 million.

Figure 3

The Number of Poor, 2010-2020 (World Bank, 2022)



Vietnam's expansion over the past ten years has been mostly inclusive as family welfare has increased across the spectrum. As many families transitioned out of poverty after only one generation, there seems to be several routes to escape poverty for most populations. Some part of the population, who entirely abandoned agriculture or found formal occupation after only two years, had better odds of moving up to a more affluent socioeconomic group and less chances of tumbling down.

Inequality did, however, somewhat worsen in the last five years. The Gini index, which measures income disparity, reached its pinnacle at the start of the previous decade, during the period of the world financial crisis, but it quickly turned around in the subsequent years. However, expenditure by wealthy families rose more than that of low-income families in the second part of the 10-year period, creating inequities in common prosperity and escalating disparity. The most impoverished families have particularly concentrated on weak productivity agricultural work over the past ten years. As a result, they are facing the danger of slipping farther behind and cutting themselves off from the economy's resource development. Increases in wages and the creation of new jobs are two of the most important factors in alleviating poverty, but both channels have been barred by the Covid-19.

Impacted by the abruptness of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, the pace of income growth and the increase in employment quality were hindered. The job market was substantially influenced, which is shown by the shift to temporary employment. Many workers also lost their jobs or had to stop working. The World Bank estimated that by the end of the decade, there were around 830,000 individuals in Vietnam who lacked employment, particularly in the agriculture sector. The Covid-19 epidemic has decelerated the poverty alleviation progress due

to all these harmful effects it brought. In Vietnam, Covid-19 caused a decade of wage growth to stall, although the progress on PR is maintained in 2020. This is still, nevertheless, a greater achievement than the majority of developing nations in the area and throughout the world.

The Communist Party of Vietnam and the State always attach considerable importance to policies and social security, social justice, social equality, hunger eradication, and poverty alleviation, and further enforce these policies to ensure human security. Vietnam is delighted to be one of the 30 nations using the multidimensional poverty line, and its successes in reducing poverty have long been a source of pride and great admiration for the rest of the world. President Ho Chi Minh initially recognized PR as a national goal for the Vietnamese people in 1945. Following the emancipation in 1975, the government has made it a top priority. The Vietnamese Communist Party is primarily responsible for allocating and redistributing assets and establishing programs to combat poverty. Considering this view, Vietnam has carefully created a good number of PR strategies and programs with the goal of resolving the issues of starvation and poverty as soon as possible. In addition to impoverished individuals and families, these programs also target poor villages, municipalities, and cities on a broader scale. In order to guarantee stable growth, and a thriving, vigorous, fair, transparent, and civilized society, Vietnam views poverty reduction as a necessary prerequisite as well as a long-term objective. The substantial number of social resources particularly committed to PR projects may be perceived in the near future as a redirection of resources away from achieving economic progress. While from a broad view, poverty reduction is the basis for creating even more opportunities for economic development.

4.2. Approaches and Poverty Reduction Policies

As already mentioned, in order to uphold its commitment to the international community, the Vietnamese government has proactively modified its poverty measuring technique from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional, applicable for the period 2016–2020. On September 15th, 2015, the Prime Minister approved the Master Project "Transforming the poverty measuring approach from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional application for the 2016-2020 term" in order to achieve the objective of effective and sustained poverty reduction. The poverty line in Vietnam is calculated by taking into account both the level of access to essential social services and the income poverty line. As a result, the criteria for measuring poverty are based on income, including the minimal level of living, the poverty line, the average standard of living, and the lack of access to essential social services. Ten factors make up the index used by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs to gauge the severity of the lack of fundamental social services are illustrated in the Table 2 below:

Table 2

Vietnam Multidimensional Poverty Indicators (MOLISA, 2015)

Poverty Dimensions	Indicators	Deficiency Indicator	Legal Basis
Education	Adult education level	Household with at least 1 member who is full 15 years old, born in 1986 or later, has not graduated from secondary school and is not currently attending school.	Constitution 2013; Resolution 15/NQ-TW; Resolution No. 41/2000/QH (added by Decree No. 88/2001/ND-CP).

	School attendance status of children	Household with at least 1 school-age child (5-14 years old) who is not currently attending school.	Constitution 2013; Education Law 2005 Law on protection, care and education of children.
Healthcare	Access to healthcare services	Household in which someone is sick but does not seek medical care (illness is defined as an illness/injury so severe that he has to stay in one place and must have a caregiver at his or her bed, or is absent from work/school and unable to participate regular activities).	Constitution 2013; Law on Medical Examination and Treatment 2011.
	Health insurance	Household with at least 1 member aged 6 or older who currently does not have a health insurance.	Constitution 2013; Health insurance law 2014.
Housing	Housing quality	Household who is living in a plain or unstable house.	Housing Law 2014; Resolution 15/NQ-TW Some social policy issues for the period 2012-2020.
	Housing area per person	Household area per capita that is less than 8m ²	Housing Law 2014; Decision 2127/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister approving the National Housing Development Strategy to 2020 with a Vision to 2030
Living Quality	Domestic water source	Households who do not have access to hygienic water sources.	Resolution 15/NQ-TW Some social policy issues for the period 2012-2020.
	Sanitary latrines	Households who do not use hygienic latrines.	Resolution 15/NQ-TW Some social policy issues for the period 2012-2020.
Access to Information	Access to information	Household with no members using phone and internet subscriptions.	Law on Telecommunications 2009 Resolution 15/NQ-TW Some social policy issues for the period 2012-2020.
	Assets for information access	The household has none of the following assets: TV, radio, computer; and do not have access to the commune/village radio speaker system	Law on Information and Communication 2015; Resolution 15/NQ-TW Some social policy issues for the period 2012-2020.

Based on the above indicators, the government can identify the subjects that need to be benefited from the assistance of poverty reduction policies, and therefore, it implements these policies accordingly. Some of these PR programs that have been under operation by the Vietnamese government would be discussed below. These programs concentrate on the underprivileged who are mostly living in rural, mountainous, remote areas, or belong to ethnic minorities. Different aspects of these citizens' wellbeing are also under the government's

concern, including their income, housing, or education, etc.

The first and foremost legal document that must be mentioned is the Program 135, one of the most important poverty reduction programs in Vietnam implemented by the State since 1998. Initially, the Program was set out to last for only 7 years from 1998 to 2005, which is divided into two stages. However, during the process, as the Vietnamese government became more ambitious about the goal that this program can achieve, it decided to prolong the Program 135 into another two stages, constituting in total four stages within the agenda of the Program, each of which contains different contents and objectives. The name of Program 135 originates from Decision No. 135/1998/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister of Vietnam. Its name according to this decision is "Socio-economic development program for extremely difficult communes in ethnic minority and mountainous areas". Later, although the program moved to the second phase and the legal basis was the decision number 07/2006/QĐ-TTg, the program was still called Program 135. From 2012, Program 135 is still used to refer to the National Target Program for Sustainable Poverty Reduction. The first stage concentrated on the underprivileged living in rural and remote areas. Its objective includes supporting production development and economic restructuring, raising the production skill of ethnic minorities; developing essential infrastructure in extremely difficult communes, hamlets and villages, building roads for people's livelihoods from villages to commune centers in accordance with their capital sources, publicize state support norms; supporting services, improving the quality of education, hygienic residential life, reducing environmental harm to people's health, etc. The second stage's objective (2006-2010) remains the same but expands its provision to reaching more hamlets, villages, communes throughout the country. The third stage (2012-2015) and the last stage (2016- 2020), however, became the National Target Program for Sustainable Poverty Reduction. Within this period, the Program 135 aims to encourage infrastructure investment in underdeveloped localities with peculiar difficulties in coastal areas and islands, and in extremely difficult communes, border communes, safe zone communes, and villages with special difficulties; to expansion of the poverty reduction model; to assist capacity building on PR, communication, supervision and assessment of the Program's operation.

Another policy on PR initiative implemented by the Vietnamese Government is the Decision 33/2015/QĐ-TTg that focuses on housing support policy for poor households under the Poverty line. The main objective of this Decision is to provide housing support for about 311,000 poor households in rural areas, ensure safe and stable housing, gradually raise living standards, and contribute to hunger eradication, sustainable poverty reduction. The subjects under these PR policies are the families who do not have a house or are having a house, but the house is too temporary, damaged, dilapidated, in danger of collapse and are unable to self-improve. The implementation of this Decision is based on a couple of principles. The support to each household needs to ensure democracy, publicity, fairness and transparency based on laws and policies of the State; to be suitable to the customs and habits of each ethnic group, region or region, to preserve the cultural identity of each ethnic group. The assistance of the State should also be suitable to practical conditions and associated with socio-economic development master plans and plans of each locality, contributing to the implementation of the new rural construction program. Furthermore, in order to maximize the efficiency of the initiative, there is a need to mobilize from different sources of capital for implementation, and the work must be done in cooperation between the State and the people. Besides, the support should be carried out according to the principle: the State provides support in the form of loans to build new or repair houses with preferential interest rates, the community would provide assistance, and households would organize their own housing construction.

The last policy to be discussed in this part of the paper concerns the improvement in education for citizens with an overall objective of alleviating poverty in Vietnam. The Decree 86/2015/ND-CP outlines the framework for managing and collecting tuition fees at academic institutions that are part of the national education system, as well as the practice for waiver, lowering, and facilitation of tuition fees in the academic years from 2015 - 2016 to 2020 - 2021. The subjects that the Decree applies on are preschool children, secondary and high school students, bachelor students, doctoral students belonging to educational institutions of the Vietnamese national education system in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Education, the Law on Higher Education, the Law on vocational Education. In terms of the regulations for tuition fee collection, there are some principles that the government promises to oblige. For pre-school education and public general education, the tuition fee rate must be suitable to the economic status of each residential area, the actual contribution capability of the people and the annual growth rate of the consumer price index. On the other hand, for public higher education and vocational education, these institutions' tuition fee is self-financed for intermittent and investment expenditures in accordance with the Government's regulations, based on economic - technical norms. The Decree also establishes regulations for tuition waiving and support for citizen's study cost. In Article 6, it states that subjects not eligible to pay tuition fees at public educational institutions, include: primary school students; pedagogical students; students of particular professional disciplines meeting the requirements of socio-economic development, national defense and security in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Higher Education. Students also are not obliged to pay for tuition fees if they are: people with meritorious services to the Revolution or their relatives; kindergarten children and students with disabilities who are suffering economic difficulties; ethnic minorities enrolled in higher education and vocational programs who come from low-income and quasi-poor families.

Other than these mentioned programs, there are many others that are being implemented by the Vietnamese government, which serve with the aim to help alleviate Poverty within the country in terms of almost all dimensions that the State believes to be constituting the multidimensional Poverty. All things considered, it is inevitable to see that, not only do the multidimensional poverty reduction directly implies that although Human Security has not been officially institutionalized in Vietnam, its notion and objectives are still represented in different national laws and legal documents; the PR programs enacted also portray the Government's strong desire of to achieve different aspects of Human Security.

5. Conclusion

Poverty has long been determined by how much people earn for their living, but its victims believe that their perceptions of poverty are much more diverse. People who live in poverty may deal with a variety of problems at once, including poor health or hunger, no access to power or clean water, unfavorable job conditions, and limited education. We cannot merely focus on the financial aspect of poverty to comprehend its true character. Multidimensional poverty emerges as the answer to this global issue at that point. Since they are crucial components considering a person's wellbeing, the majority of the dimensions of Multidimensional poverty are strongly tied to human security.

Although belonging to the South-East Asian region where human security's maximum potential is not fully utilized due to the region's norms and values, as well as their primary concern on economic security and, at best, non-military risks to the security of state members, Vietnam has always been prioritizing human issues and the protection of its citizen since the

day of its establishment. The 1930 Political Thesis which identified several issues relating to human beings, such as society, politics, and the economy, as well as the Independent Declaration of Vietnam, provides a very clear illustration of this. Vietnam recognizes the viewpoint that the global community have on the concept of human security, particularly the one established by the UNDP in their report in 1994.

The most vivid evidence for Vietnam's motto in securing its citizen's security is shown through the country's efforts in alleviating poverty, the issue that hinders the progress of achieving human security the most. Since the government perceives poverty in a multidimensional way, it does not take for granted aspects such as the citizen's living environment, healthcare, education, etc. Indeed, a lot of poverty reduction programs have been implemented since the end of the War for independence against the Americans, with special focus on the most vulnerable citizens living in remote areas or the more disadvantaged populations. The programs range from large projects which encompasses the whole country's progress in poverty reduction such as the Program 135, to specific Decrees, regulations that pay attention to clear-cut initiatives such as the universal provision of health insurance, or education tuition fee waiving and scholarships for poor students, etc.

Although it is still a long way to go for Vietnam to become a strong and developed country where the issue like poverty is no longer worth concerning, as long as the nation and its citizens are united and reach a consensus about maintaining the effort in achieving human security, that day is not going to be far away. President Ho Chi Minh once said:

"Poverty eradication and alleviation are the responsibility of the entire society; the entire people must join to promote the spirit of kindness and traditional values of the nation 'good leaves cover torn leaves'. When the power now belongs to the people, it is vital to instill in them the value of true freedom and equality, which is the true meaning of independence and liberty. When the independence and liberty have been achieved, but the people are still poor and suffering; then independence and liberty are meaningless." (Ho Chi Minh, 1945)

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE “HOSPITAL PLAYLIST 2” MOVIE POSTERS: A VISUAL GRAMMAR APPROACH

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Abstract: In the present digital era, movie posters have gained increased significance; hence, it is crucial to understand the significance of each component in movie posters in effectively communicating the overarching message (Ashari & Rochmawati, 2022). Previous research in this field often focused solely on only one out of the three meanings proposed in the Visual Grammar framework, developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in 1996 or centered around a few movie posters. To address these gaps, this study was conducted to analyze all three meanings proposed in the framework and expand the scope of analysis beyond a single poster in a movie. The researchers identified certain findings about creating effective movie posters via the application of the framework. From the results, it is recommended that visual promotion should be carefully analyzed for better audience engagement.

Keywords: movie poster, Visual Grammar, Hospital Playlist 2

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PHÂN TÍCH ÁP PHÍCH PHIM “HOSPITAL PLAYLIST 2”: PHƯƠNG PHÁP NGỮ PHÁP HÌNH ẢNH

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Tóm tắt: Trong thời đại kỹ thuật số hiện nay, áp phích phim ngày càng có ý nghĩa quan trọng, do đó, rất cần phải hiểu tầm quan trọng của từng thành phần trong áp phích phim trong việc truyền đạt thông điệp tổng thể một cách hiệu quả (Ashari & Rochmawati, 2022). Các nghiên cứu trước đây trong lĩnh vực này thường chỉ tập trung vào chỉ một trong ba nghĩa được đề xuất trong khung Ngữ pháp hình ảnh được Kress và van Leeuwen phát triển vào năm 1996 hoặc xoay quanh một vài poster phim. Để giải quyết những vấn đề trên, nghiên cứu này được thực hiện để phân tích cả ba ý nghĩa được đề xuất trong khuôn khổ và mở rộng phạm vi phân tích ra ngoài một áp phích duy nhất trong một bộ phim. Tác giả của nghiên cứu này, thông qua việc phân tích các áp phích của bộ phim “Hospital Playlist 2”, đã có những phát hiện nhất định về việc tạo ra các áp phích phim hiệu quả thông qua việc áp dụng khung lý thuyết trên. Từ kết quả đó, chúng tôi khuyến nghị rằng các chiến lược quảng bá hình ảnh nên được phân tích cẩn thận để thu hút khán giả tốt hơn.

Từ khóa: áp phích quảng cáo phim, Ngữ pháp hình ảnh, Hospital Playlist 2

1. Introduction

In the present digital era, movie posters have gained increased significance as a method of disseminating information, especially through aesthetics and collectability. It has been observed that “there are many other modes of meaning, in any culture, which are outside the realm of language” (Halliday, 1978, p. 4), and that not only text but images also greatly contribute to the understanding of meaning (Kaindl, 2004; Lim Fei, 2007). Consequently, movie posters have predominantly been examined using Visual Grammar, a theoretical framework established by Kress and van Leeuwen in 2006.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the visual elements in the movie posters for “Hospital Playlist 2” using the Visual Grammar framework. Understanding the movie’s messages through the posters is crucial. To accomplish this objective, this research aims to address the following questions:

What messages of the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie are conveyed through movie posters to the audience?

With this study, we make academic and practical contributions to the related fields. First, this research aims to contribute to the field of visual communication studies by examining the proposed framework and identifying the messages communicated through the posters. Second, the study provides an examination of choices made when promotional materials are created for media content, especially movie posters, to improve the efficiency of the efforts and effectively communicate the desired messages of the movie.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Posters as a Distinct Means of Information Transmission, Visual Communication and Advertisement

A poster is a unique method for transmitting information, distinguishing itself from traditional written forms. It is essentially a visual medium that emphasizes the presentation of intricate ideas through the combined use of graphics and concise written text (Vujakovic, 1995). While posters are a unique tool for conveying information, movie posters can act as instruments for visual communication and advertisement as they encompass graphic images, color schemes, and other minor elements, and it is crucial to understand the roles of these elements in capturing audiences (Chen & Gao, 2013; Wang, 2019). Besides, by condensing the essence of the film into a visually appealing image, movie posters can effectively capture the attention of potential viewers and anticipate the film's release. In other words, movie posters seek to inform customers about a product and drive sales through effective strategies (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Visual Grammar is one of the approaches that could help understand the way posters of movies do this job.

2.2. Visual Grammar

The Visual Grammar framework, starting with Halliday's (1978) idea of the three main functions of language in Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), was developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in 1996 and expanded later in 2006.

2.2.1. Representational Meaning

"Representational meaning" addresses the depiction of objects and their relationships in a certain cultural context, including internal connections between represented participants, objects, actions, and settings, and it can be categorized into "narrative process," "conceptual process," and "circumstances."

In the "narrative process," three key sub-processes are identified. First sub-process, the "action process", refers to the depiction of dynamic physical actions or events in an image. Second, the "reaction process" refers to the formation of vectors by the participants' eye lines, where the "reactor" is the one looking while the "phenomenon" is what they are looking at, and it relates to the responses or emotional reactions of the character. Lastly, the "mental process" refers to dialogue balloons that specify thoughts or speech of characters. In the "conceptual process," three key sub-processes are identified. First process is the "classification process," which is about how things in an image are arranged to suggest a type or class they belong to; in this sub-process, "covert taxonomy" refers to when the superordinate is not shown directly in the image but may be implied between the subordinates, while "overt taxonomy" refers to when the superordinate is direct in the image, usually in the form of a diagram or tree structure. The second is the "analytical process" indicating a part-whole structure in which the "carrier" represents the whole, while "possessive attributes" represent the parts, illustrative of how various components contribute to the subject matter's structure. Last, in the "symbolic process," the "carrier" denotes the represented participant, and the "attribute" refers to what signifies the meaning or identity, as it is the use of symbols to represent ideas that carry meaning beyond their literal existence.

The final process, "circumstances", provides context without direct vector connections to the main subjects, including circumstances of setting, indicating time and place; circumstances of means, illustrating how an event occurs; or circumstances of accompaniment,

showing who or what is present alongside the main subjects.

2.2.2. Interactive Meaning

The “interactive meaning” pertains to the relationships in society between participants and viewers. It includes four elements, namely “contact,” “social distance,” “perspective,” and “modality.” “Contact” is established through the presence of gaze, which is classified into “offer” (participants looking away from viewers, providing a sense of intimacy among participants) and “demand” (participants directly looking at viewers, creating a connection between them). Secondly, “social distance” is conveyed through choices regarding the size of the frame, which ranges from close-ups (showing intimacy) to long shots (indicating distance). Third, the angle of the camera is an important part of showing whether a scene is subjective or objective. Also, the horizontal perspective shows equal relationships and interactions that happen in an equal position by putting subjects or objects at the same level of the poster, while the vertical perspective shows hierarchy and status by putting characters at different heights in the poster. Finally, “modality” involves the examination of modality markers. Low modality is characterized by extreme abstraction, resulting in a simplified abstract representation with a significant reduction in depth, detail, background, and color. By contrast, high modality represents the utmost degree of these modality markers, enhancing the three-dimensionality of visuals.

2.2.3. Compositional Meaning

“Compositional meaning” acts as a link connecting the “representational meaning” and the “interactive meaning,” resulting in a cohesive and significant entirety in visual communication. The analysis of “compositional meaning” involves the examination of three elements: “information value,” “salience,” and “framing.” First, “information value” is divided into three types of placement: (1) horizontal placement considers elements placed on the left side of the image to be the “given,” representing what viewers already know, while elements on the right are seen as the “new,” conveying information that viewers may not yet be aware of; (2) vertical placement divides the poster along the vertical axis, suggesting contrast or opposition between the upper (considered “ideal,” presents idealized and generalized information) and lower sections of the image (regarded as the “real,” provides more specific and practical details); and (3) center-margin placement considers the central area of the image as the most crucial section. Secondly, “salience” relates to the hierarchy of importance among the elements in the image and how they are presented to capture the viewer’s attention, including foreground or background placement and size variation. Finally, “framing” refers to the inclusion of framing lines in a poster, which can either separate or connect elements. These lines typically indicate a sense of separation or independence among the elements in the composition.

2.3. Review of Related Studies into Movie Posters Adopting Visual Grammar

There have been numerous studies on posters adopting Visual Grammar (Chen & Gao, 2014; Hu, 2019; Moya & Pinar, 2008; Nguyen, 2021). Different studies apply the framework differently in terms of the types of meanings. For example, regarding a study solely examining the “representational meaning” of movie posters, Chen and Gao (2014) chose seven movie posters with the primary aim of illustrating how semiotic tools are utilized in the visual designs of these posters to convey different dimensions of “representational meaning.” By looking at how different visual elements interact with each other, the study showed how important it is to tell the difference between “narrative processes” and “conceptual processes” through seven

movie posters that were all different. Each poster showed a different aspect of “narrative processes” and “conceptual processes” with a different message. Therefore, it could be seen that accurately interpreting the “representational meaning” is crucial for predicting the movie’s storyline appropriately and understanding the central theme and message of the film.

In terms of a study that concentrated solely on the “interactive meaning” of the framework, Hu’s research in 2019 concentrated on the “interactive meaning” of a particular movie poster. It explored how various symbols, including images and color, work collaboratively to establish an interactive relationship with the audience and effectively convey the movie’s underlying meaning. From the analysis, it appeared that the selected symbols, such as images and colors, share a reciprocal relationship, reinforcing each other’s impact. The images, carefully positioned at the center, elicited a strong visual impact on viewers. The chosen contrasting color palette of black and bronze not only aligned with the protagonist’s image but also carried a profound and dignified symbolism that resonates with the theme of the movie. This intricate coordination of symbols resulted in a poster that encapsulated the film’s thematic essence: love and war.

As for studies that analyzed all three meanings of the Visual Grammar framework, Moya and Pinar (2008) employed a multimodal analysis of a picture book with a view to examining how visual and verbal components together create meaning. The analysis of the visual meaning shows that there is a predominance of narrative patterns. From an interpersonal perspective, “gazes are typically the kind of offer utilized, and there is a predominance of long shots, which tend to imply objectivity and distance” (p. 1601). They found that the images are presented from a medium angle, creating involvement on the part of the viewer. Nguyen (2021) analyzed official posters from American romantic comedy movies. The focus was on uncovering patterns in the use of semiotic elements to create meaning within the specific genre of romantic comedy. For “representational meaning,” the key finding was the distinction between relationship-oriented and character-oriented posters. Relationship-oriented posters usually featured a couple, and the main focus was on their romantic connection. In contrast, character-oriented posters highlighted individual characters’ features and personalities, creating ambiguity about the genre. In the “interactive meaning,” the “demand” gaze, where participants engage with the viewers, was commonly used to establish interaction, while the size of the frame, often medium shots or medium long shots, aimed to strike a balance between conveying emotions and maintaining viewer detachment. With regard to “compositional meaning,” “framing” focused on harmonizing the ideal and real pattern, where the upper part typically visualized the promise or ideal, while the lower part provided factual details (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Our review reveals that first, for the research that focused solely on one out of the three meanings proposed in the Visual Grammar framework, while providing certain insights into the visual communication of movie posters, it did not cover the remaining meanings mentioned in the framework, which could be equally important in understanding the complete semiotic structure of movie posters. Second, as for some studies that centered around only one movie poster in its analysis, these studies did not successfully explore the diversity of visual communication strategies employed within different movie posters in one movie or across different movies. As a result, this could limit the research’s significance, as the findings may not be comprehensive enough for designers and visual creators to implement. Third, as Korean culture is becoming more universally popular, there has been little research on how posters in Korean movies contribute to the resounding success of the movies.

In conclusion, the identified research gaps suggest opportunities for another study to analyze all three meanings of the Visual Grammar framework and expand the scope of analysis beyond a single poster in a movie. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how visual elements are consistently employed across various posters.

3. Methodology

3.1. Subject of the Study

Six out of 16 posters, three released before and three after the movie broadcast, were randomly chosen from “Hospital Playlist 2”, a South Korean television movie released in 2021, set in the fictional Yulje Medical Center and centered on 5 doctors: Yang Seok-Hyeong, Ahn Jeong-Won, Lee Ik-Jun, Chae Song-Hwa, and Kim Jun-wan. The reason for this selection of an equal number of posters released before and after the broadcast was to ensure an unbiased analysis.

As for the movie choice, “Hospital Playlist 2” is distinct from other medical dramas because of its slice-of-life approach. The researcher selected this movie for analysis due to its significance following its broadcast. To illustrate, after broadcasting the 17th episode, the movie received a rating of 14.1%, which far exceeded the average rating for movies in the year 2021 (11.6%) (Lee, 2021), according to Nielsen Korea. Besides, the movie was nominated and eventually won a number of awards, including the Baeksang Art Awards and the Asia Artist Awards, as reported by IMDb in 2020, one of the most highly regarded award ceremonies in the industry.

3.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The six posters from the movie “Hospital Playlist 2” were collected from the tvN official website, a South Korean cable channel specializing in media content production, and could be accessed through the link: <https://tvn.cjenm.com/ko/doctorlife2/photo1/>. The visual elements in the six posters from the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie were analyzed using Visual Grammar. The steps consisted of describing the movie posters according to the meanings of the Visual Grammar framework and suggesting the underlying messages conveyed through the posters using the principles given in the framework.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Representational Meaning

Table 1

Summary of Findings on Representational Meaning

Representational Meaning							
		Poster 1	Poster 2	Poster 3	Poster 4	Poster 5	Poster 6
Narrative process	Action process						
	Reaction process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Mental process						
Conceptual process	Classification process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Analytical process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Symbolic process	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

4.1.1. Narrative Process

Both the “action process” and “mental process” are absent from the posters. Notably, the “reaction process” relating to the responses or emotional reactions of characters appeared in all the posters of the movie. Specifically, the main characters, or “reactors,” all display positive emotional expressions, yet the way they express positivity varies from one poster to another. For example, the characters exhibit a sense of positivity, camaraderie, and comfort, evident through their smiles and casual poses (1, 4). Instead of interacting with external objects, their deep connection with one another reveals a shared understanding or mutual support, a characteristic of the collaborative nature of healthcare teams facing the rigors of hospital work. The joyful and optimistic depictions highlight another aspect relevant to healthcare professionals: the achievement and satisfaction derived from overcoming challenges; the confidence and hopeful outlook of the characters, as they stand with hands in pockets or crossed arms, mirror the sense of accomplishment that healthcare workers may feel after a successful diagnosis or treatment (3, 6). The seriousness and assertiveness of posing without smiling, akin to the conventional representation of a rock band in poster 5, however, do not necessarily convey negativity or pessimism. The absence of smiles aligns with the typical image associated with rock bands, and their deliberate decision to refrain from smiling may be attributed to the possession of photographs. The characters appear to be making an effort to blend in with the music performance’s atmosphere, implying that they are at ease and find joy and happiness in listening to music. Finally, multiple scenes utilized in poster 2 with “reactors” exhibit an overall positive reaction with the “reactors” engaged with one another and their surroundings, ranging from the hospital hallway or its garden to the music studio or an open-air space, encompassing activities from work to leisure, weaving a variety of interrelated experiences throughout the image. Collectively, these posters leverage the reaction process to portray a wide range of human positive emotions and experiences, crafting narratives that draw viewers to interpret and feel the characters’ different positivity states in the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie. Indeed, the typical portrayal of doctors in the media often includes dynamic, action-oriented scenes, such as performing surgery, responding to medical emergencies, and having critical patient interactions (Chory-Assad & Tamborini, 2001; Turow, 1996). These conventional representations usually show doctors in the high-stakes environment of operating rooms, dressed in surgical attire, or actively engaging with patients during examinations, illustrating their professional responsibilities and medical expertise (Turow, 1996). However, the six analyzed posters in the movie “Hospital Playlist 2” present characters in a manner that differs from these standard depictions. For the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie posters, their atypical representations in the promotional materials could possibly play a vital role in impacting the audience’s perception by humanizing the doctors; they are depicted as multi-dimensional

people whose lives extend beyond their clinical roles. This portrayal is likely to foster a sense of relatability, inviting viewers to see the characters as individuals with personal interests and relationships both inside and outside the hospital setting. By not making use of the typical images of doctors immersed in medical procedures and emergencies, the six movie posters could capture the audience's interest and curiosity about the unique narrative of this medical movie.

4.1.2. Conceptual process

Classification process

As one of the sub-processes of the “conceptual process,” the “classification process” pertains to how elements within an image are organized to suggest a type or class to which they belong. It demonstrates a “covert taxonomy” used in the posters to organize and categorize the characters, meaning that the superordinate is not explicitly shown in the image; for example, all characters are portrayed with a certain feature, such as clothes, to recognize whether they are doctors or not in this movie. Despite its consistent application across all posters of the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie, the context that frames these groupings varies. While the characters are clustered based on their professional identities as doctors as demonstrated by their hospital attire (2, 3, 6), their classification as close friends is also highlighted (1, 4, 5).

Analytical process

The “analytical process” dissects how “possessive attributes” of individual elements enrich the composition or overarching theme represented by the “carrier”. A commonality among all the studied posters is their use of each main character of the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie as the “possessive attributes,” which are the parts of a poster used to represent the whole context or meaning of the poster and the movie. The unique expressions, postures, and perceived roles of individual characters distinguish them and contribute to the overall themes of companionship in both professional and personal settings in this movie.

More specifically, the character representations across all six posters of the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie highlight both the individuality and balanced significance of each member within the group. To start with, Chae Song-hwa and Yang Seok-hyeong present a more tranquil front, with their calm expressions, light-colored attire, and practical hairstyles conveying an air of simplicity and composure. It aligns with their images of stability and meticulous care within the narrative. Song-hwa's refined presence is accentuated by her glasses, underscoring her thoughtful and methodical approach to both surgery and life. Similarly, Seok-hyeong's understated appearance reflects his gentle and empathetic personality. In contrast, Kim Jun-wan's portrayal leans toward the archetype of a composed professional. His sharp, sophisticated styling, complete with glasses and tailored clothes, mirrors his serious, no-nonsense approach to his duties as a surgeon. His polished hairstyle further enhances this aura of proficiency and authority. These visual cues across the six analyzed posters collectively underscored the equal importance of each character's role in the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie. The uniform positioning of the characters, with none dominating the visual space over the others, reinforces the narrative's emphasis on equal importance. Lastly, Lee Ik-jun and Ahn Jeong-won exude approachability, their warm smiles, and neatly groomed appearances, signaling friendly and confident personalities. This relaxed demeanor dovetails with the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie's portrayal of charismatic and compassionate qualities.

Symbolic process

This process appears in five out of six posters except for poster 2. It is observed that

rain and umbrellas are used in poster 1. The rain, often symbolizing adversity or transformation, serves as a metaphorical representation of the challenges or obstacles, with the background being outside the hospital, specifically outside the emergency center. This suggests a sense of struggle or difficulty that the characters must overcome in their personal or professional lives. In contrast, the umbrellas in the poster symbolize readiness and protection (Wilson, 1967). By putting these symbols of rain and umbrellas together in one picture, with the latter appearing more dominantly, the poster effectively contrasts themes of adversity and solidarity. While rain symbolizes the challenges that the characters may encounter, the umbrellas symbolize their resilience and unity in confronting and overcoming these challenges. This contrast adds depth to the poster's narrative, suggesting a story of triumph and camaraderie amid adversity. The inclusion of rain in the background of the movie poster may symbolize the adversity inherent to the medical field, akin to how rain is used in "The Kite Runner" as a motif for hardship. The image of the rain in "The Kite Runner" may not be as immediate or explicit in conveying characters' reactions as the "Hospital Playlist 2" movie posters, but it does evoke a contemplative atmosphere that mirrors the internal struggles of the protagonist, Amir, set against the broader political and social challenges in Afghanistan. The protagonist, Amir, faces numerous challenges throughout the novel, and the presence of rain serves as a visual and emotional backdrop for these struggles. Thus, rainy weather, acting against the characters' smiles and optimism, shows their positive expressions and paints a narrative of resilience and collective fortitude in the face of trials occurring in the "Hospital Playlist 2" movie.

Blue skies (3, 6) come to fore, symbolizing hope and aspiration (Holt, 2009). Their being in professional attire and looking forward possibly allude to a shared vision or sense of progress. While the characters' attire signifies their roles as medical professionals, the backdrop of clear skies suggests that they are looking beyond their immediate responsibilities and towards a brighter future. The main characters lean towards the front row in a car, carrying profound symbolic undertones that extend beyond mere transportation (poster 4). The car serves as a visual symbol of mobility and journey, as mentioned in the 2011 book "The Kite Runner" by Hosseini, representing the characters' movement and perhaps life's various dimensions. This could imply a sense of exploration and growth, suggesting that the characters embark on a metaphorical journey of self-discovery and personal development. Furthermore, the smiles on the characters' faces hint at their sense of relaxation and close bonding, a feeling of joy and camaraderie. Poster 5 stands out by embracing rock-band iconography, incorporating symbols such as leather jackets, electric guitars, and performance settings. This is in contrast with other movies, as discussed above, which do not focus on the musical aspects or hobbies of doctors, making "Hospital Playlist 2" a unique perspective. Rock band uniforms often include leather jackets, which adds to the characters' edginess and refusal to fit in. together with that, electric guitars, a powerful symbol of self-expression, rebellion, and the desire to break free from convention, further reinforce the theme in the poster.

4.2. Interactive Meaning

Table 2

Summary of Findings on Interactive Meaning

Interactive Meaning							
		Poster 1	Poster 2	Poster 3	Poster 4	Poster 5	Poster 6

Contact	Offer	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Demand					✓	✓
	Social distance						
	Close-up						
	Medium			✓	✓	✓	✓
	Medium-long	✓	✓				
	Long						
Perspective	Horizontal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Vertical						
Modality	Depth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Detail	✓	✓			✓	
	Contextualization	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Color	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Illumination	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

4.2.1. Contact

Posters 1 to 4 present what is termed “offer” contact, where the main characters do not engage in direct eye contact with the viewer. This encourages spectator-like engagement, invites viewers to become observers, and interprets the scenes at their own pace, creating a narrative distance that allows for thoughtful consideration of this movie’s themes. Conversely, posters 5 and 6 switch to a “demand” contact, as the characters look directly at the audience, creating direct engagement. This shift commands the viewer’s attention and intensifies the connection with the characters, essentially “demanding” an emotional or cognitive response that might lead to watching the movie or exploring its content further.

The combination of “offer” and “demand” contacts across the six studied posters is not just a design choice to attract audiences to watch the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie, but a reflection of a larger pattern in Korean cinema, where combining both approaches serves to engage viewers at different levels. The viewer forms a diverse relationship with the narrative by alternating between the perspectives of an outsider and direct address (Nurudeen et al., 2021). The strategic blend of these two contact modes within the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie posters perhaps aims to strike a balance, cultivating a personal connection between the viewers and the five doctors while preserving the space for personal interpretation. By doing so, these six posters capitalize on the emotional pull of direct engagement and the introspective allure of being a detached observer, ensuring that every potential viewer, regardless of their preference for involvement, finds a point of entry into the movie’s world.

4.2.2. Social Distance

The concept of “social distance,” conveyed through the size of the frame to show either intimacy or distance, remains relatively similar across the six movie posters. The first two posters utilize medium-to-long shots that present the characters in their work environment. This choice creates a comprehensive view of the hospital world, providing context to the daily lives of medical professionals. Posters 3 to 6 spotlight medium shots that bring the audience closer to the characters, fostering an intimate connection with their personal experience. These shots draw viewers into moments that might ordinarily go unseen, depicting the team’s quieter and more personal interactions.

4.2.3. Perspective

The aspect of “perspective,” which conveys the subjectivity or objectivity of a scene through the camera angle, is consistently employed in the horizontal perspective across all examined posters. This perspective evokes equality, teamwork, and camaraderie within the medical setting. Notably, all characters are depicted at the same level, devoid of any hierarchical positioning, thus signaling the narrative’s emphasis on the equitable value of each character’s contributions. In addition, the horizontal perspective across movie posters not only aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen’s concept of conveying equality and teamwork but also underscores the narrative’s core principles of inclusivity and mutual respect as by positioning all characters on an equal position. The posters accentuate the collective essence of the storyline, wherein every character assumes a pivotal role, irrespective of their individual backgrounds, expertise, or roles within the medical profession. This portrayal resonates with the real-life dynamics of medical practitioners, where collaborative endeavors and mutual regard are indispensable for delivering exemplary patient care and advancing medical science.

4.2.4. Modality

All types of modality are used in all the posters, except for the absence of detail in posters 3 and 4. High modality that features realistic portrayals that ranges from capturing the ambience of a rainy day to the vibrancy of a medical team engaged in musical expression (1, 2, 5). Poster 1, for instance, evokes a palpable sense of atmosphere with a rainy motif, affecting how the audience perceives the characters’ medical reality. Poster 2 provides a rich, visual narrative through a montage of scenes that construct a multifaceted medical setting, while poster 5 presents to the viewers the harmony of a band consisting of medical characteristics.

Posters 3, 4, and 6, while opting for simpler compositions, maintain compelling realism. First, posters 3 and 6 present the doctors in the foreground against a simple and serene sky in the background, symbolically wrapping up the day’s trials with hope, and in doing so, manage to suggest untold stories of resilience and optimism. Additionally, poster 4 portrays the setting inside a car with a sharpness that invites viewers into a journey or mobility among the characters, despite its simplicity.

The medical movie, including the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie, relates much to real-life situations, in contrast to the fantastical elements of the fantasy and science fiction genres. In the context of fantasy and sci-fi genres, “modality” operates differently from genres that depict more realistic narratives, like medical movies. The “modality” in fantasy and sci-fi is less about realistic representation and more about the creation of convincing alternate realities (Barnes, 2015; Dittmer, 2010). For this purpose, imagery often includes magical elements, mythical creatures, and enchanted landscapes. In contrast, medical movies should invoke vibrant colors, detailed textures, and elaborate designs that differentiate the fantasy world from the mundane

reality. Indeed, the “Hospital Playlist 2” posters bring more authenticity to viewers. The dedication to portraying medical narratives with high “modality,” or, in other words, realistic elements, allows for an engaging experience that resonates on a personal level with viewers, as they recognize and empathize with the genuine experiences of medical professionals.

4.3. Compositional Meaning

Table 3

Summary of Findings on Compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning						
Information value	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Salience	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Framing		✓				

4.3.1. Information Value

“Information value” is about the arrangement of elements in the posters that is intentionally crafted in order to convey distinct messages and themes. All six movie posters demonstrate a reduced focus on left-right disparities, with the main characters positioned horizontally, standing next to each other, and without any characters consistently standing at the far left or right. Therefore, it can be inferred that this movie does not intentionally use the left-right distinctions to convey any message. Rather, we observed a deliberate use of top-bottom distinctions and center-margin focus.

Significant top-bottom distinctions to effectively structure their compositions are employed (1, 3). Poster 1 features a prominent upper segment where the movie’s title, broadcast time, and detailed hospital environment, which can be seen as the “ideal,” serving to set the scene, situate the narrative, and remind viewers of the medical context amidst more casual imagery of the characters who are situated outside in everyday clothing. Meanwhile, the lower segment of poster 1 offers a glimpse into the “real,” presenting a different depiction of the characters engaged in a moment of leisure-standing in the rain with expressions of positivity. Similarly, the high-reaching sky in poster 3 occupies the top region, perhaps alluding to aspirations or escape. Below, the characters are positioned against the sky backdrop, capturing their professions’ daily realities. The serene, hopeful sky contrasts with the grounded reality of doctors’ experiences.

A clear center-margin distinction is also used to structure their composition (2, 4, 5). Poster 2 is divided into multiple panels, each portraying a unique scene. The central panel is the most prominent, with the main characters in medical attire signaling it as the main plot of the story, while the surrounding panels enrich this narrative with additional context and subplots, which helps to provide a more comprehensive glimpse into the narrative that awaits viewers. On the one hand, the central panel of the characters with medical attire stands as the focal point, representing the main storyline; on the other hand, the surrounding panels play a pivotal role in offering additional layers of context that serve to enhance the viewers’ understanding and interests in the characters, their professional roles as doctors, and their personal lives. Furthermore, posters 4, 5, and 6 adhere to a similar characterization pattern,

centering the main cast with minimal margins to emphasize the collective.

As can be seen from the findings, the central-margin positioning is mainly adopted, which helps to underscore the narrative of unity better as none of the characters is shown to have greater importance than others. Indeed, all of them stand in one line equally.

4.3.2. Saliency

The analysis of “saliency,” the hierarchy of importance among the elements and how they are presented to capture viewers’ attention across these posters, reveals that, with the exception of poster 2, the characters consistently emerge as the most prominent features. Poster 1 shows the similarity in size and substantial occupancy of the poster space among the characters positions them as the dominant element. While the contrast between them and the background is modest, their distinct facial expressions are engaging. The muted color scheme is punctuated by the characters’ warm-toned clothing, offering a subtle distinction from the cooler, rainy environment. Their central placement and foreground positioning uniformly emphasize their collective importance, anchoring them as the core focus of posters. Posters 3 to 6 also resonate with this theme, presenting characters that are both large and proportionally sized. The use of a simple backdrop, like the clear sky in the two aforementioned posters or the monochromatic wall in poster 5, counterbalances the minimal contrast between the foreground and background, making the characters stand out. The soft and light colors add understated prominence. Diverging from this pattern, poster 2 alone utilizes a different approach to highlight its characters, with the central image featuring the characters in blue medical attire standing out as the most predominant image because of its larger size and central position on the poster. The warm tones in this central image draw a stark contrast to the cooler tones featured in the surrounding pictures. Despite this central prominence, the adjacent images are comparable in sharpness and framing, which might suggest a deliberate balance in visual weight.

4.3.3. Framing

Lastly, it is notable that poster 2 stands alone in its application of this technique, with evident frames separating various scenes, which likely correspond to different subplots within the movie, for example, their professional roles inside the hospital and their personal lives with music and journeys. In contrast, the other posters do not display explicit framing but situate the characters in a shared space. This absence of division suggests a seamless, continuous narrative thread, emphasizing the characters’ unified journey or collective experience when working in the hospital and also when enjoying their personal lives together. This stylistic choice reinforces the overarching theme of unity as it plays out across the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie’s progression.

In summary, the six examined posters from the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie collectively convey a rich, multi-dimensional narrative that highlights themes of personal and professional life, resilience, friendship, and shared experiences, using a sophisticated blend of “representational,” “interactive,” and “compositional meanings.”

As for the “representational meaning,” the absence of the “action process” and “mental process” across all six posters suggests a focus on the broader narrative and thematic elements of resilience, friendship, and shared experiences, inviting interpretative engagement from the viewers. Moreover, regarding the “reaction process,” each poster portrays the characters’ positive reactions to different degrees, creating a narrative of resilience, hope, camaraderie, and shared experiences. Additionally, all characters can be grouped based on both their professional

roles or personal relationships, highlighting their dual roles in the narrative. Finally, the movie conveys themes of adversity, rebellion, hope, and mobility through symbols such as rain, umbrellas, cars, leather jackets, and the clear sky.

Regarding the “interactive meaning,” the use of both “offer” and “demand” contact in different posters controls the viewer’s engagement level, either as an observer or as an active participant in the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie. Furthermore, the medium-to-long shots utilized across the examined movie posters suggest a balance between intimacy and a broader narrative aspect, emphasizing the collective journey. Additionally, the horizontal “perspective” in all posters indicates equality, teamwork, and camaraderie among the characters, and high “modality” is portrayed through realistic depictions.

Lastly, in terms of the “compositional meaning,” the arrangement of elements varies across the “Hospital Playlist 2” movie posters, with some emphasizing the “ideal” and “real” aspects, while others focus on the central role of the characters. Next, the characters are consistently the most salient elements, drawing attention to their emotions and relationships, except in poster 2, where multiple elements share similar “salience.” The unique “framing” in poster 2 suggests multiple subplots, while the absence of framing in others emphasizes a unified narrative experience.

All in all, the study’s results align with other research’s results and it contributed to the field of analyzing movie posters by using the Visual Grammar framework, potentially assisting movie directors, designers and producers in creating movie posters.

5. Conclusion

The analysis holds significance for visual communication, marketing strategies, and film promotion. The study contributes to the field of visual communication by demonstrating how different visual elements work together to convey complex messages of the movie through movie posters, especially those with high viewership ratings. This study, with its narrow scope, examined only six of the available sixteen movie posters from “Hospital Playlist 2.” This selection could restrict the overall applicability of the conclusions and might not reflect the full spectrum of design approaches in movie promotions. Future studies could consider analyzing movie posters from various genres to validate and compare the findings of this study. Also, comparing the visual elements of movie posters across different cultures, languages, and film industries could offer more insights.

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Appendices

Poster 1



Poster 2



Poster 3



Poster 4



Poster 5



Poster 6



Source: tvN official website (Hospital Playlist 2 – On-site Photos, n.d.)



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THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MONG ETHNIC GROUP IN THE VIETNAMESE TV DRAMA SERIES “MÙA XUÂN Ở LẠI” (2020)

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Abstract: This research examines the representation of Mong ethnic group in the TV drama series “Mùa xuân ở lại” (2020) and discusses the implications of this representation for a wide-ranging social and cultural context. Employing the framework of Fairclough (2001) and Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T. (2006), the data analysis has revealed the following findings on the Mong people in the film: (1) Mong people’s living environment is underdeveloped and insecure; (2) Mong people’s economy is agricultural-based with a heavy reliance on nature, (3) Mong people are poorly educated, (4) Mong people still preserve backward social and cultural practices, (5) Mong people play a passive role in the interethnic relationship with Kinh people. Apparently, the way that the Mong people and their life are portrayed in the film tends to perpetuate long-held stereotypes of this ethnic group in Vietnamese media.

Keywords: ethnic representation, multimodal CDA, Mong ethnic group, TV series

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CHÂN DUNG NGƯỜI DÂN TỘC MÔNG TRONG BỘ PHIM TRUYỀN HÌNH VIỆT NAM “MÙA XUÂN Ở LẠI” (2020)

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu chân dung người dân tộc Mông trong phim truyền hình Việt Nam “Mùa xuân ở lại” (2020) và thảo luận về ý nghĩa cũng như những hàm ý của cách khắc hoạ hình ảnh người dân tộc Mông trong bộ phim trong bối cảnh xã hội và văn hóa rộng lớn hơn. Sử dụng khung phân tích của Fairclough (2001) và Kress, G. và van Leeuwen, T. (2006), quá trình phân tích dữ liệu tìm ra được những phát hiện sau về hình ảnh người dân tộc Mông trong phim: (1) Môi trường sống của người Mông kém phát triển và không an toàn; (2) Kinh tế của người Mông dựa vào nông nghiệp với sự phụ thuộc nhiều vào tự nhiên; (3) Người Mông có trình độ học vấn thấp; (4) Người Mông vẫn duy trì các tập tục xã hội và văn hóa lạc hậu; (5) Người Mông đóng vai trò thụ động trong mối quan hệ liên dân tộc với người Kinh. Rõ ràng, cái cách mà người Mông và cuộc sống của họ được miêu tả trong phim vẫn có xu hướng tiếp nối những định kiến lâu đời về nhóm dân tộc này trên các phương tiện truyền thông tại Việt Nam.

Từ khoá: đại diện dân tộc, phân tích diễn ngôn đa phương thức, dân tộc Mông, phim truyền hình

1. Introduction

Media is an influential tool for depicting different groups in society and reflecting social ideologies. On-screen representation especially influences perceptions of audiences in the real world (Bertuzzi & Venosta, 2022). TV drama series are among the most popular entertainment media nowadays and as they can reach a huge audience, their representation inevitably helps shape public understanding of a group and its culture.

According to Taylor (2008), Vietnam is home to great cultural diversity, and ethnic minority groups are an intriguing subject that garnered the interest of numerous filmmakers in the cinematic sector. Representation of ethnic or cultural groups in media in general and in broadcasted TV drama series in particular is a compelling topic attracting the attention of many researchers. Often ‘marginalized or overlooked’ (Ross, 2019), ethnic minorities might benefit from precise and respectful media representation. This research investigates how the makers of the TV drama series “Mùa xuân ở lại” portray the Mong ethnic people, aiming to find out whether this portrayal reinforces or challenges the preconceived ethnic stereotypes.

The research question is: *How are the Mong ethnic people portrayed in the TV drama series “Mùa xuân ở lại”?*

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Media Representation of a Cultural Group

Representation is the creation of meaning via language, image, and discourse (Hall, 1997). Hall (1997) also emphasized the significance of representation as a form of

communication and social interaction.

Media representation is not always an objective reflection of reality but is often affected by various factors such as media producers' intentions, the audience's interpretation, cultural and social contexts, and power dynamics. According to Hall's (1973) model of encoding and decoding, media representations are encoded by producers and decoded by audiences. Encoding is the process influenced by producers' intended meaning, interests, and dynamic power (Hall, 1973). On the other hand, decoding refers to the process by which the receivers of the information interpret the code, and recreate the imparted ideology, which reflects the complexity of the communication process and the diversity of society (Murdock, 2017).

A cultural group is a group of people having common beliefs, behaviors, and values (Gilbert et al., 2007). Regardless of size, the groups can be distinguished by their respective philosophies and modes of conduct (Gilbert et al., 2007).

Media representation of a cultural group is the portrayal of a group of people in various forms of media (Teletonusa, 2023), in which specific concepts, cultures, and identities are offered or produced through pictures or languages. In the modern context, media is considered one of the most powerful institutions for shaping viewpoints, informing people, and framing debates around social issues; how media depicts marginalized groups has significant implications for social attitudes (Albany State University, n.d.). Positive and accurate media portrayal could enhance self-esteem for marginalized groups (Nadal, 2021). Moreover, it contributes to eradicating social stereotypes and boosting social diversity. In contrast, biased representation can reinforce stereotypes or discrimination, resulting in negative emotions or experiences for the people of this group.

2.2. *Ethnic stereotypes*

Stereotype is “a belief system in which psychological characteristics are ascribed more or less indiscriminately to a member of a group” (Jost & Hamilton, 2008, p.209). Stereotypes limit the perspectives of those who hold them and keep them from looking for sufficient, unbiased explanations of the phenomena (Koshmanova & Hapon, 2007). Allen and Webber (2019) reported that people of various racial groups, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds are affected by the phenomenon of stereotyping.

Ethnic stereotypes are commonly accepted generalizations that paint an overly simplistic picture of members of particular ethnic groups (Nguyen, 2021). For definition,

“Ethnic stereotypes are perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes that deviate from the cultural characteristics of one group of people to another group or class of people. This process is based on the subjective perception, or simple generalization of a few individual expressions for an entire ethnic community. These perceptions and behaviors can be unconscious or conscious, objective, or subjective, exaggerated, or visual, direct or convex.”

(Nguyen, 2010, p.32)

According to Nguyen (2010), ethnic stereotypes revolve around some main issues, such as cultural inferiority and backwardness, simplicity of social organization, and closed self-sufficient economy. Hogg and Abrams (1998) stated that some ethnic groups were labeled as ‘backward’, ‘ignorant’, and ‘innocent’. Hogg and Abrams (1998) also found that negative stereotypes are frequently connected to members of minorities (for instance, more illiterate or poorer), whereas positive stereotypes are linked to members of the majority group (for example, more intelligent and wealthy).

There are numerous reasons behind ethnic stereotypes. As Nguyen (2010) stated,

those reasons include differences in natural conditions, biological characteristics, culture-language, employment, religions, education; geographical isolation; political system; social organization; the influence of political/scientific doctrines, and rumor mechanism. And one of the most important factors is the media. According to Castañeda (2018), ethnic stereotypes endured because of the significant influence of the media on societal perceptions. The media explosion has further blurred the distinction between fact and fiction, which might make audiences view the broadcast of ethnic stereotypes as true representations of an ethnic group (Castañeda, 2018).

2.3. Mong Ethnic People

Based on language, culture, and ethnic self-awareness, Vietnamese Ethnologists released a list identifying 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam in 1979 (Nguyen, 2010). The Mong (or H'mong) is one of Vietnam's 54 ethnic groups, contributing to the country's rich cultural diversity.

Mong people reside mostly in the northern mountains and the central highlands of Vietnam. With around one million people, the Mong constitute the sixth most significant ethnic minority in Vietnam. ("The Hmong people, ethnic minority in Vietnam," 2023)

The Mong people's cultural and linguistic diversity is reflected in their unique language, rich traditions, and vibrant traditional attire. In terms of language, the Mong people have their distinct language, a member of the more prominent Austroasiatic language family. Their language features various dialects spoken in different regions. Besides, they can also communicate in other languages such as Vietnamese, Thai, Muong, and Dao (Nguyen, 2021). Concerning the traditions, the Mong possesses a rich tradition of handicrafts, music, and festivals. Strong community sense and natural surroundings worship are two outstanding features of the Mong people. Festivals, which remain vital, are often celebrated. About the costume, traditional Mong clothing, particularly for women, is known for its intricate embroidery and vibrant colors.

Regarding their economic situation, they are among the ethnic groups with a deep-rooted history of cultivating wet rice (Nguyen, 2022). They also practice livestock raising. The Mong people have faced challenges related to economic development, access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

Among 54 ethnic groups, the culture of the Mong stands out as particularly unique and well-maintained (Bui, 2014). Efforts are ongoing to promote their cultural preservation and socio-economic development while respecting their traditions and way of life.

2.4. "Mùa xuân ở lại" Vietnamese TV Drama Series

"Mùa xuân ở lại" (2020), a TV drama series produced by Vietnam Television Film Center and Vietnam Television is one of the numerous films using Vietnamese ethnic minority material. Being aired in prime time during the Lunar New Year holiday on the national television channel VTV1, the series has drawn significant attention from the audience (VTV Entertainment, 2020).

The storyline revolves around Hoa, a Kinh girl who has just been awarded a bachelor of pedagogy. Hoa decides to take the teaching job in a mountainous district where the Mong people reside because, according to state policy, after three years of service in mountainous regions, teachers will be offered a permanent position in lowland provinces upon return. This policy is aimed at encouraging teachers to work in remote and poverty-stricken areas. When

living with the Mong community there, witnessing many families being tricked into selling their land due to their lack of education and information, Hoa feels a profound sympathy for their situation. Her desire is that all the children in the village can go to school and learn to read and write, so they can step out into the world with confidence. During her time working there, Hoa gradually develops a deep love and attachment to the people and the land. Therefore, she faces difficulty in choosing between returning to her hometown for a stable job as her initial plan or staying and continuing her teaching career in the highlands. In the end, Hoa follows her heart and decides to stay in the highlands to continue her teaching mission.

The series was filmed in Phong Tho district, the habitat of the Mong ethnic (VTV Entertainment, 2020). There appear two ethnic groups in the film: Kinh and Mong. The Kinh characters are mainly teachers, soldiers, and outsiders (e.g. land purchasers). The Mong characters are local people. Because of the setting of the film story, Mong's cultural elements are strongly emphasized, which is a remarkable feature of the series.

2.5. Related Studies

Regarding ethnic stereotypes in Vietnam, according to Nguyen (2021) in the study “*Ethnic stereotypes in the Central Highlands of Vietnam: Minority students’ perspectives*”, Kinh people are seen as having a higher level of economic, cultural, and social development compared to the minorities. Nguyen (2010) in “*Ethnic prejudices: An overview and some proposals for further research steps*” also stated that the Kinh, as a majority group, often place themselves above the minority. Kinh people tend to consider ethnic people as inferior groups. The image of ethnic minorities sticks to backwardness, conservativeness, and inability to do business (Nguyen, 2010). As a result of such ethnic stereotyping, minority people have suffered negative effects. In the research “*Minorities need to catch up with majorities: Prejudices in interethnic relations in Vietnam*”, a major finding is minority people's access to the market, to education, to employment, and to social and health services has been restricted by negative stereotypes about them (Pham et al., 2015).

Ethnic groups are frequently depicted in media in narrowly stereotyped roles: as “less than” dominant groups—in terms of intelligence, wealth, or power (Ross, 2019). According to the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy, and Environment (n.d., p.19), ethnic groups are also often portrayed with “the negative implication one such as poverty/hunger, disadvantaged, shabby, deprived, backward-thinking, depraved customs, child/premature marriage, lots of children” and depicted as “those in disadvantaged situations, being passive and even dependent on external assistance rather than finding ways to overcome difficulties.” Concerning the representation of ethnic groups in Vietnam's media, particularly in the press, minority people are still attached to negative stereotypes (Nguyen, 2010). They are depicted as being poor, passive, superstitious, and dependent on the state (Nguyen, 2010).

To sum up, the aforementioned studies identify ethnic stereotypes in media representation of ethnic groups. However, the subjects of these studies are ethnic minorities in general and there is a lack of nuanced examination of one specific ethnic minority. Although films are considered one of the most popular forms of entertainment that garner the attention of numerous viewers, there is little research investigating the portrayal of ethnic groups in cinematic aspects. Therefore, research into the portrayal of the Mong people in a single media product (a film) is a relatively unexplored area. Besides, the previous studies tend to overlook the underlying factors influencing how ethnic minority groups are portrayed in the media. Since media representation plays a crucial role in shaping or sustaining certain narratives, further in-depth research is then crucial to understand the nuances of how media represents

ethnic minorities like the Mong ethnic group.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method

Qualitative methods are employed to find out the answer to the research question. The qualitative analysis of the characters, plots, and visual and linguistic elements in the TV drama series gives a critical understanding of the themes and ideologies implied in the TV series.

3.1.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a Theoretical Approach

Principles of CDA

The research employs the CDA approach as a theoretical framework for analyzing the linguistic elements of the film. According to Fairclough (1989), CDA aims to uncover the relationships between discourse, society, power, and ideology. CDA is “a type of discourse analysis research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts” (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466).

Fairclough's 3-dimension framework

Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional framework includes:

Description: Researchers are encouraged to focus on the analysis of the linguistic characteristics presented in the text, including vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and rhetorical devices (Fairclough, 2001). The research into the topic “The representation of Mong ethnic group in the Vietnamese TV drama series “Mùa xuân ở lại” analyzes the dialogues between characters and focuses on the language that the characters use to portray the Mong people.

Interpretation: This dimension focuses on the broader discursive practices that shape how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed (Fairclough, 2001). By examining contexts in which discourse occurs, researchers scrutinize how particular language choices depict any ideologies, or contribute to manipulative discourse (Fairclough, 2001). The research examines the contextual factors of “Mùa xuân ở lại” and how those factors might affect the description of ethnic people.

Explanation: In the last phase, researchers perceive discourse as a component of a social system, demonstrating how social orders influence discourses and how such power relations may be affected by discourses, either maintaining or reforming them (Fairclough, 2001).

The application of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to this research enables such a nuanced and critical examination of the controversy surrounding ethnic representation in the TV series.

3.1.2. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Framework

The research aims to examine the portrayal of the Mong ethnic minority through both linguistic and visual elements. Wang (2014) pointed out that CDA places the primary focus on verbal texts and considers the visual text as secondary to the verbal text. Therefore, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar is used as a tool to analyze the visual features of the film.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework of visual grammar provides a systematic

way to analyze the visual elements within a visual or multimodal text, enabling researchers to comprehend how visual components operate within a particular context and help the texts' meanings. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework consists of three visual metafunctions controlling the organization of visual elements in a text:

Representational Metafunction: This deals with how the text's objects, persons, actions, and events are represented visually.

Interpersonal Metafunction: This shows how relationships between participants are indicated through visual elements.

Compositional Metafunction: This emphasizes how visual elements are laid out and arranged concerning one another.

The incorporation of Fairclough's CDA model and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Metafunctions of Visual Grammar provides a suitable theoretical framework that makes it possible to analyze different categories of data for a comprehensive view of how different modes of communication interact and give meaning to the representation of the Mong group.

3.2. Data Collection

The data of the research consists of the transcript and the images of all four episodes of the TV drama series "Mùa xuân ở lại". Each episode lasts 44 minutes. The four episodes of the film are numbered and coded from EP1 to EP4.

Each episode is carefully watched and the scenes with the appearance of the Mong people are captured, synthesized, and categorized based on aspects of representation such as language, discourse, and image (Hall, 1997).

3.3. Data Analysis

There are two steps in analyzing the data collected from the TV drama series. First, each episode is individually analyzed based on Fairclough's and Kress and van Leeuwen's framework. Then, the results are synthesized, and put into the themes. These themes are then explained and discussed to uncover the reflection of cultural context and social ideologies in the representation.

Sample data analysis: Land transaction between Mong people and Kinh people

Step 1: Each episode is individually analyzed based on CDA frameworks together with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework of visual grammar.

Figure 1 (EP2)

Land transaction between Mong people and Kinh people



Figure 2 (EP2)*Land transaction between Mong people and Kinh people**Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Framework*

In this scene, the Mong ethnic man is the seller and the Kinh man is the buyer. The contract of deed is a hand-written small piece of paper instead of the printed contract. The Mong man has his son read the contract, but the Kinh man later on takes the contract to read for a faster process. The Mong man uses a fingerprint stamp instead of a signature.

Analyzing the scene applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework, some critical findings are gained:

Representational Metafunction:

The contract of deed as a textual representation: The contract visually portrayed an essential legal document. It indicates the importance and legal aspects of the land-purchasing event.

Child reading the contract: The little boy reading the contract serves as a visual representation of a few crucial concepts. First, the fact that the Mong guy relies on his young kid to read the contract—often carefully reviewed by adults—indicates that his literacy level may be poor. Furthermore, his reliance on the young child in such an important event suggests he lacks formal education and social experience.

Fingerprint stamp: That the fingerprint stamp, not a handwritten signature, is used to authenticate a legal document is attention-grabbing. It visually represents the act of commitment in the conventional way, a practice often used by illiterate people.

Interpersonal Metafunction:

The Mong man plays a totally passive role in this transaction due to his illiteracy

The son is involved in the transaction by supporting his father in reading the contract because he is the only member of the family who knows how to read. However, his reading difficulty limits this support and reveals his low Kinh language proficiency

The Kinh man is a buyer, but he seems to take control of the whole transaction. He writes the contract, reads it, and guides the Mong man in every step. He is confident, active and dominant in the transaction.

Compositional Metafunction:

Framing: The scene's composition visually frames the key elements, including the

contract, the people involved, especially the fingerprint stamp. This compositional choice emphasizes the importance of these elements within the narrative.

Fingerprint as a Visual Element: The fingerprint stamp is visually prominent within the composition. This compositional focus draws attention to the fingerprint as the way the Mong man shows his agreement and commitment.

Fairclough (2001)'s CDA model

Text description:

During this scene, the Mong man said to his son that “Hán, đọc tao nghe” (Read this for me, Han. And the son spell to read “Ô ngờ ông, cờ ông công nặng cộng...”, and the Kinh man said “Thôi đưa đây, mày đọc thế đến bao giờ cho xong” (Give me, how long will it take you to read it?), then the Kinh man read the paper fluently “Giấy chuyển nhượng đất canh tác...”

Interpretation:

Language choice: The Mong man's request, “Hán, đọc tao nghe” (Read this for me, Han), is a command, highlighting his need for assistance in reading.

Phonetic Spelling: The son's attempt to read the contract using phonetic spelling, “Ô ngờ ông, cờ ông công nặng cộng...”, reflects his struggle with the Kinh language, facing linguistic barrier.

Kinh man's fluency: The Kinh man's ability to read the paper fluently, “Giấy chuyển nhượng đất canh tác...”, indicates his linguistic proficiency and his dominant role in the conversation.

Explanation:

Cultural Context: On account of the larger cultural context, the difficulties the Mong child faces and the usage of two different languages are reflections of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the society. The Mong child needs to be proficient in two languages. One of them is the Mong language with the aim of communicating with people of the same ethnic group, and the other is Vietnamese - the official national language to be able to communicate with people from other ethnicities.

Interethnic dynamic: The scene might indicate one aspect of the interethnic relation between the Kinh and the Mong, emphasizing the disadvantage and vulnerability of the illiterate Mong. Two Kinh men express an interest in buying land from the Mong man, but they do not hire an interpreter or seek help from bilingual individuals in the local area to facilitate communication in the process. Instead, they exploit the Mong man's illiteracy for their own profit.

Step 2: The results are synthesized and put into the themes. Data analysis sorted out into themes is then reflected in the context of society and culture.

The analysis of the scene using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework (2006) and Fairclough (2001)'s CDA model reveals the image of the Mong in the film as **“low-educated”** or **“illiterate people”**. This is a popular stereotype of ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

4. Findings and Discussion

The aforementioned aim of this research is to investigate how the makers of the TV drama series “Mùa xuân ở lại” portray the Mong ethnic people to find out whether this

portrayal reinforces or challenges the preconceived stereotypes of ethnic minorities. The data analysis reveals that the depiction of the Mong people in the film remains entrenched in stereotypes and prejudices, offering no fresh perspective compared to the traditional media portrayals of minority ethnic groups.

4.1. Mong People's Living Environment is Underdeveloped and Insecure

The life of the Mong people in the film is consistently portrayed as being destitute.

The film is set in Phong Tho district, Lai Chau Province, a mountainous area located in the North of Vietnam, and the habitat of numerous ethnic minorities, especially the Mong group. The visual elements show that the village of the Mong ethnic group is nestled in the high mountains with sparse population. The geographical location, and weather conditions, together with the underdeveloped infrastructure, cause a lot of difficulties to their life.

The living environment of Mong people in general, and the infrastructure in particular is mentioned with mostly negative discourses by the Kinh characters. The Kinh characters often describe the living environment of Mong people with negative expressions that frame their situation to be "**deficient**", and "**underdeveloped**" in the film. Specific examples of those discourses include:

“Con đường đến trường của các con rất **vất vả**” (“The road to school for the children was very **difficult**”) (EP1): The statement put emphasis on the hardship and inaccessibility to basic necessities like education. The word "**vất vả**" (**difficult**) suggests a constant struggle, positioning the Mong people as living in harsh conditions that hinder their children's educational opportunities.

“**Thiếu tiền**” (“**Lack of money**”) (EP1): This word reflects financial scarcity, which might reinforce the stereotype that the Mong people are economically disadvantaged.

“**Xa rời văn minh**” (“**Alienated from civilization**”) (EP3): The phrase "**xa rời văn minh**" (“**Alienated from civilization**”) state that the Mong people are perceived as being isolated from civilized society and may underscore the perceived development deficiency of the Mong compared to the Kinh.

“Sóng điện thoại thì **tạm tạm**” (“The phone signal is **bad**”) (EP3): The poor phone signal is a pointer to the lack of modern infrastructure, implying that the Mong village is disconnected from technological advancements and by extension, from modern society.

Those discourses create a narrative that situates the Mong people as “others”, distinct from the Kinh, who are implicitly associated with modernity and development. The repetition of themes related to “**deficiency**” (lacking infrastructure, money, and connectivity) positions the Mong people as “**underdeveloped**”.

The visual framing of the Mong village shows it nestled high in the mountains and isolated from other settlements. This setting conveys a sense of remoteness and separation from more developed areas, reinforcing the idea of the Mong people being deprived of the benefits of modern society. The high mountain location visually emphasizes the distance between the Mong and the Kinh. This distance suggests a natural barrier to progress and development, which is consistent with the verbal discourse of alienation from civilization.

Figure 3 (EP2)

The Mong Village is Located in the High Mountains With a Sparse Population



Moreover, while the houses of the Kinh people in the film are visually described as grandly and solidly built, throughout the film is the image of the Mong houses mostly built with soil or wood, with roofs made of thatch or fibro-cement sheets. In many scenes, the houses are seen terribly run-down, with numerous holes and cracks in the walls, lacking proper conditions to shelter their owners from rain or sun. Inside the houses, there are no modern household appliances such as televisions or refrigerators.

Figure 4 (EP2)

Mong People Live in Humble Houses



In terms of the transportation system, there is an absence of flat wide asphalt roads. Instead, most of the roads in this locality are winding, dirty, slippery, and rocky paths. These roads are quite narrow, only suitable for walking or two-wheeled vehicles, not for heavy transport vehicles. Mong people usually have to walk long distances on dangerous mountain passes and upland roads to get to school, to the fields, or to the neighboring villages.

Figure 5 (EP3)

Dangerous Paths on High Mountains



Figure 6 (EP3)

Mong people walk on winding, dirty, slippery, and rocky paths



Regarding the vehicles, in all scenes in the movie, the Mong people are seen primarily walking. They walk long distances carrying heavy loads without using any means of transportation. The most common vehicles seen in the film are motorcycles and bicycles, but the drivers of these vehicles are all Kinh people, not Mong people.

Generally, the infrastructure of the Mong village in the film is depicted as quite poor, not yet meeting the developmental conditions of modern society such as well-developed transportation networks or advanced telecommunications infrastructure. The lack of essential facilities to serve the people's life points out the rudimentary and deficient living conditions of the Mong people.

In addition to having deplorable and inadequate living conditions, Mong people may also encounter some dangers resulting from complicated criminal activities in the locality.

Verbally, the living environment of the Mong people is depicted as dangerous, unsafe with the occurrence of various criminal types such as illegal drug trade, human trafficking, or kidnapping.

“Tuy nhiên các hoạt động vi phạm mặc định về cơ chế quản lý biên giới vẫn còn xảy ra hoạt động của các loại **tội phạm** diễn biến phức tạp đáng chú ý là **tội phạm** tàng trữ vận chuyển sử dụng trái phép chất ma túy, mua bán người, buôn lậu thương mại vẫn tiềm ẩn nhiều yếu tố phức tạp khó lường ở địa bàn...” (However, the default violations of border management mechanisms still occur. The **criminal types** are complex. It is noteworthy that such **crimes** as illegal drug trade, human trafficking, commercial smuggling still conceal many unpredictable complexities on the ground...) (EP1)

“Tình hình cuối năm diễn biến **tội phạm** trở nên phức tạp đang có nạn buôn người bắt cóc trẻ em qua biên giới” (“As the year draws closer to an end, the **crime** situation has become more complicated, and human trafficking and kidnapping of children can be detected across the border.”) (EP3)

The text describes the Mong people's living environment as “**dangerous**” and “**unsafe**”, with specific references to “**illegal drug trade**”, “**human trafficking**”, and “**kidnapping**”. The repeated focus on criminal activities suggests that these dangers are an intrinsic part of the community's environment.

Figure 7 (EP3)*Teacher Hoa is Assaulted by a Robber at Midnight*

Visual elements also consolidate the image of an insecure living environment. From the first episode to the last episode of the series, there are a lot of scenes featuring various types of crimes, such as property appropriation fraud, border crossing, and kidnapping.

The portrayal of Mong people living in such deprived and vulnerable environments may spot the underdevelopment of the Mong ethnic group, which may contribute to shaping societal perceptions of the Mong people as “**underdeveloped**” and influence the audience’s attitude towards this group of people.

4.2. Mong People’s Economy is Agricultural-Based With a Heavy Reliance on Nature

The series consistently depicts the Mong characters in agrarian roles such as farmers or craftsmen, emphasizing the fact that the main sources of Mong people's livelihood are cultivation and craft occupations.

Figure 8 (EP4)*A Mong Farmer is Gathering Firewood in the Forest***Figure 9 (EP4)***Mong women are doing handicraft work*

Throughout the four episodes, Mong people's subsistence is primarily on agriculture and forest. They do the farming (“**lên nương lên rẫy**”), go to the field, go to the forest to harvest cardamom and firewood (“**đi rừng**”, “**thu hoạch thảo quả**”) (EP1, EP 2) and cultivate the natural resources. They engage themselves in the fields, utilizing rudimentary working tools like sickles and machetes, and employ no advancements offered by modern machinery to increase labor productivity, naming tractors or harvesters. This absence of technological assistance and a firm adherence to traditional farming methods, results in low labor efficiency. Their work is not only physically demanding but also time-consuming. Hence, they have no time for other pursuits such as educational endeavors or home maintenance. For them, the primary concern and the most important necessity is securing a livelihood.

On the days not spent in the fields, they venture into the forests to gather firewood or harvest medicinal plants with economic value for sale. During the season-off periods, they revert to handicraft tasks such as weaving or sewing, also embracing manual techniques without the aid of advanced machinery. The repeated references to activities like “**farming**”, “**going to the field**”, and “**going to the forest to harvest cardamom and firewood**” might reinforce a stereotypical image of indigenous or minority groups as being bound to traditional, nature-based livelihoods. This portrayal may cast Mong people as fundamentally different from more industrialized or modern societies. By focusing exclusively on traditional agricultural practices, the text may inadvertently contribute to a perception of the Mong people as living in a static and unchanging world. This can obscure the complexity and diversity of their experiences and ignore any engagement that they may have with modernity or technology.

The Mong community's economic precariousness has resulted from their being predominantly anchored in agriculture, which is substantially reliant on nature, and limited diversification in occupational sectors. Therefore, strenuousness and poverty are characteristics of the life of the Mong characters in the film.

4.3. Mong People are Poorly Educated

Another focus of the film is the barriers (both subjective and objective) to Mong people's access to education as well as the challenges encountered by Kinh teachers when bringing knowledge to ethnic minorities. The filmmakers have dedicated significant attention and screen time to this theme. The educational elements emphasized here include education infrastructure and resources in the locality, the Mong people's perception of education's importance, and their educational levels.

TV viewers are strongly disturbed by the underdeveloped infrastructure and the limited resources for education in this mountainous area.

Figure 10 (EP1)

Mong Children Study in Dilapidated Classrooms



As seen in this scene, Mong children's classroom is a ramshackle room with a lot of cracks in the walls and roof, which cannot protect people from the harsh weather. A bed in the corner of the room might suggest that this is also the teacher's living space. The so-called "classroom" is confined and poorly equipped: inadequate seating and learning materials for students, and no proper blackboard for teachers. The miserable physical facilities arouse pity for the disadvantaged children and worries about the quality of education in such conditions.

Figure 11 (EP4)

A Mong Elementary School Student is Compelled to Carry her Little Younger Sister to School



In another scene, a Mong elementary school student is compelled to carry her little younger sister to school instead of sending her to a kindergarten. In order to continue her learning path, she needs to simultaneously study and care for her sister, which surely interferes with her learning. This scene highlights a severe lack of educational infrastructure, particularly at the preschool level. The paucity of educational provision for children of different age groups not only hinders Mong children's access to education and their right to receive proper childcare but also put great pressure on teachers who have to teach and take care of children of different ages and levels in the same classroom.

The Mong people have not yet placed significant emphasis on or prioritized education. Rather than encouraging their children to attend school, many Mong families prefer them to stay at home to handle household chores.

Figure 12 (EP1)

A Mong Elementary School Student is Compelled to Drop out of School



Throughout the series, there are numerous scenes revolving around Kinh teachers or border guards going to Mong students' homes to persuade parents to permit their children's school enrolment. Despite the passionate and persistent persuasion from the teachers and

soldiers, these Mong families are reluctant to send their children to school or opt for them to discontinue their education midway due to labor shortage at home. Notably, there are situations where teachers are scolded and even chased away by parents (“cô giáo đi về đi”- “you **leave**”). Those parents hold the belief that schooling is not as necessary as fetching food to fill the stomach.

Figure 13 (EP1)

Teachers are Scolded and Even Chased Away by Mong Parents



Given the arduous nature of their subsistence, nothing is deemed more crucial than earning a living and generating income for the family. Poverty is often held accountable for their disregard for education. The parents' dismissive attitude toward the teachers, resistance to formal education, and insistence on their children's involvement in family livelihood are familiar stories that are easily and commonly found in various media reflections. Therefore, they may strengthen the pre-existing stereotypes of ethnic minorities' low education.

Apart from poverty, Mong parents' disregard for their children's education may also result from their own lack of awareness of the significant role of education in changing people's life. Mong's parents themselves are poorly educated people. In the film, while Mong children are portrayed as starting their learning journey (EP 1,2,3), Mong adults are depicted as “*illiterate*” (EP2), and “*uninformed*” (EP1), leading to their gullibility or vulnerability to manipulation or deception (EP1, 2). “*Poorly educated people*” is a recurring theme since 2 of the 4 episodes of the series emphasize Mong adults' illiteracy as the major reason for their being deceived by the cunning Kinh land purchasers (EP1, 2).

Figure 14 (EP1)

An Illiterate Mong Man Realizes That he has Been Deceived by The Cunning Kinh Land Purchasers



In a striking scene in episode 1, the ruthless Kinh land purchasers take advantage of a Mong man's illiteracy and innocence to deceive him to sign an unfavorable land trading contract. In episode 2, the Mong man cannot read the contract and he demands his son to read the contract out loud: “Hán, **đọc tao nghe**” (Read this for me, Han) (EP2). Unfortunately, the son is not a fluent reader as he struggles to read by spelling every single word in the contract, “**Ô ngờ ông, cờ ông công nặng cộng...**” or “**Chờ ung chung sắc chúng...**”. Several other scenes in this series also describe Mong children's difficulties in learning Vietnamese language. These scenes reflect the low educational level as a perceived reality in the Mong community.

After that, when the Kinh teacher accidentally comes and helps the Mong man read the contract, he then realizes that he has been deceived and gets frustrated. Linguistic evidence of Mong people as uneducated people is demonstrated in the conversation between the Kinh teacher and the Mong man: “**Nếu như anh biết chữ** thì anh đã không để **bị lừa**.” (“**If you were literate**, you would not **have been deceived**”) (EP1) and “**Có giỏi thì đi lừa những người có học** ấy lên đây **lừa bà con** làm gì” (EP1) (“**If you're so skilled**, you go and **deceive the educated people**; why do you come here to **trick the villagers?**”). The discourses connect Mong people's little education and limited social understanding with their disadvantage and even loss in business transactions with better-educated but wicked people. It's also these weaknesses that place the Mong people in a subservient role in power dynamics in interethnic communication (e.g. communication with the Kinh land purchasers in this case).

Figure 15 (EP2)

A Mong Child Struggles to Read the Contract in Vietnamese Language



The repeated theme “**poorly educated people**” and its association with disadvantage and vulnerability is not only reminiscent of popular stereotypes of “**ignorant**”, “**naive**” ethnic minorities but also aligns with previous studies of ethnic representation in media where ethnic people are often depicted as “**less educated**” individuals.

Figure 16 (EP2)*Mong Children Learn to Read Vietnamese Language***4.4. Mong People Still Preserve Backward Socio-Cultural Practices**

The ethnic identity of the Mong people in the film is emphasized through not only their ethnic raiment and adornments but also their preservation of many traditional social and cultural practices, including the backward and harmful ones.

Mong people keep believing in supernatural forces rather than science.

Figure 17 (EP1)*A Mong man is Ignorant of Medical Knowledge*

The Mong people in the film seem to be superstitious because they keep believing that many aspects of their life are under the control of supernatural forces. Low education and lack of scientific information are partly responsible for their distrust, even rejection of science. When a Mong woman is seriously ill, her husband, instead of taking her to a medical center for examination and treatment, invites a shaman to perform exorcism rituals to expel the evil spirits which are believed to cause her illness: “Vợ anh bị bệnh nặng nhưng vì **thiếu hiểu biết** mà **mời thầy cúng**, chữa trị muộn nên mới mất” (Your wife was seriously ill, but due to a **lack of knowledge**, you invited a **shaman** and started treatment too late, which is why she passed away). His bigotry, superstition, and ignorance later on led to the death of the woman.

Many traditional cultural practices of the Mong are still preserved, including some harmful ones such as child marriage or wife-kidnapping.

Figure 18 (EP1)*Mong Girls are Victims of Child Marriage*

Although there is no scene of wife-kidnapping or child marriage, these cultural practices are mentioned in the conversations of the characters: “trên này có tục **bắt vợ**”(there is a custom of **wife-kidnapping** here) (EP2), and Mong children are forced to enter early marriages (“bị ép **bắt về làm vợ**”) (EP1). The excuses for these practices are either to settle family debts or to adhere to community customs. Even as parents of the victims, Mong adults perpetuate and endure this practice, subjecting their children to early marriages. Those customs could be considered depraved and harmful as they disrespect women’s human dignity and self-determination.

Constructing an image of Mong people with ignorance, outdated practices, and evil customs may lead the viewers to the perception that Mong people nowadays are not different from the stereotypes that they have held for a long time. Viewers may consequently feel an aversion to or have a prejudice against Mong people's culture.

4.5. Mong People Play a Passive Role in the Interethnic Relationship With Kinh People

In terms of interethnic relations, the film features the presence of two ethnic groups, the Kinh and the Mong. The Kinh characters in the film are teachers and border guards. The Mong are locals and they are depicted as always in need of assistance from these Kinh people, from crucial areas such as education or social security to personal things like personal hygiene.

Figure 19 (EP2)*Kinh Teachers Help Mong Students Do Personal Hygiene*

The Kinh border soldiers and teachers help Mong people to build schools for children, and persuade Mong parents to permit children to go to school:

“Còn một nhà nữa chỉ đến **thuyết phục**” (I need to go to the last household to **persuade**) (EP1)

“mà đi **vận động** chán chê các mẹ gửi cho là mừng đấy” (we’ve tried our best to **persuade** the parents and it is great that they agree to send their children to school) (EP1).

The repetition of the word “**persuade**” reveals the perseverance and the great efforts of Kinh teachers in making Mong villagers understand the importance of education. It is also the Kinh teachers and soldiers who contribute their money and physical labor in building schools for them. The Kinh teachers not only impart knowledge but also conscientiously instruct Mong students in such trivial things in daily life as cutting hair, washing faces, and doing personal hygiene.

In the film, the Mong people are often positioned as passive recipients of adversity, whereas the Kinh people are consistently portrayed as assistance providers.

It seems that whenever the Mong villagers are in need or face hardship, they all turn to the Kinh people to seek help, otherwise the Kinh people fortunately turn up to provide timely help, offer useful advice, or suggest solutions. This portrayal may underscore Mong people’s role as passive recipients rather than active agents in their own narratives, which might create an impression of their reliance or overdependence on external support. In contrast, the Kinh people appear on screen with the image of the supporters or saviors who assist the Mong people in various aspects of life with all their strength, energy, and enthusiasm. The striking contrast in the depiction of the two groups of people may reinforce the taken-for-granted role of the Kinh people as the dominant majority in Vietnam, who are responsible for providing support (and they are powerful enough to do so) while the Mong people as a disadvantaged minority ethnic group who cannot get through without government aid. The representation of such power dynamics tends to be unfair to both ethnic groups.

To put it briefly, this study has found evidence of several stereotypical portrayals of Mong ethnic people in “Mùa xuân ở lại”. In this TV drama series, Mong people continue to be seen through stereotypes as a “less than” group (Ross, 2019), entrenched in outdated customs and lacking proactivity in improving their own life.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of major findings

The study was conducted to examine how the Mong ethnic people are portrayed in the TV drama series “Mùa xuân ở lại”. With the application of Fairclough’s (2001) model of CDA together with Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) framework of visual grammar to the analysis of visual and linguistic data from the film, we could answer the research question. We also tried to unfold the status and power inequalities between ethnic groups which may be revealed in the portrayal of the Mong ethnic group in the film.

The first major finding is that the Mong community in the film is living in conditions of insecurity and considerable deprivation in various aspects. They are depicted as experiencers of significant economic difficulties, due to a heavy reliance on nature; therefore, their lives are characterized by hard labor and miseries. Another discovery is that the filmmakers represent Mong people as a “poorly educated” group, facing substantial challenges in accessing education, lacking attention to and prioritization of educational

opportunities, which results in their low educational levels. In terms of social and cultural activities, Mong people consistently preserve their ethnic identity and cultural traditions including some outdated customs that negatively affect their lives. Finally, in their interactions with the Kinh people, the majority ethnic group in Vietnam, they are positioned as the passive receivers of assistance from the Kinh in almost every aspect of life.

These findings are consistent with a plethora of previous studies on the representation of ethnic people in media. The representation of the Mong people in the film aligns with their portrayal in previous media products in Vietnam because they continue to be seen through long-held stereotypes of ethnic people as being poor, passive and dependent on government support, having superstitious practices (Nguyen, 2010). In conclusion, “Mùa xuân ở lại”, by leaving out the revolutionary changes and dramatic improvement in Mong people’s modern-day economy, education, and lifestyle, tends to perpetuate negative stereotypes about ethnic minorities rather than breaking them.

5.2. Implications of the Findings

The TV drama series depicts the various aspects of the Mong people’s life; however, this depiction may not be completely true to life. The filmmakers tend to exaggerate the limitations of the Mong people possibly in order to highlight the image of the main character, a Kinh teacher, who accepts the hardship of living and working in a poor mountainous area to help ethnic minorities. The Mong people in the film are seen through the lens of the Kinh characters and filmmakers, so it is also possible that the depiction harbors their own biased perceptions of ethnic minorities. Such a portrayal may contribute to a limited understanding and appreciation of the Mong culture and people. Consequently, this representation might disregard or even deny the diversity and dynamism of the Mong community. The flexibility of the Mong and the range of roles they take in society nowadays should also deserve media attention.

To film/TV viewers, media literacy is an essential skill in a time when we are exposed to an abundance of media content every day. With a view to critically understanding and evaluating the messages of a film, for instance, we should equip ourselves with updated background knowledge (so that we can realize the gap between films and reality) as well as cultivate the ability to identify the purpose, intention, and perspectives of filmmakers through the way they present the facts. It is desirable if we can enjoy the film and learn a lot from it but simultaneously be able to realize misrepresentations and biases, if any, spread through the film.

5.3. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

Despite considerable efforts, this research cannot avoid certain limitations. Initially, due to the constraints imposed by the length of an article, the data analysis and supporting evidence are presented only in a summarized form, which may not fully capture the nuances and complexities of the findings. Second, the study’s reliance on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method introduces a degree of subjectivity in the researchers’ interpretations. Subsequent research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue if Mong viewers are interviewed to give the insiders’ evaluation of the representation of their own ethnic group in the film. Besides, that this study analyzes a single film suggests an opportunity for future research to examine how ethnic groups are portrayed across a range of films produced in a certain period of time or throughout different periods, thereby broadening the critical understanding of media representations of ethnic diversity.

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INTERSEMIOTIC THEORIES: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERPLAY OF LANGUAGE AND VISUAL IMAGES IN MOVIE POSTERS

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Abstract: The present paper aims to propose a preliminary adapted framework to analyze the relations between language and images in movie posters. After critically reviewing some major approaches to intersemiosis with both their strengths and weaknesses, the study decides to employ the Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) discursal approach in general and the specific framework of Bateman's (2008) Genre and Multimodality (GeM) for the purposes of the current study. The review also suggests the need to include compositional features into the discussion of text-image relations. Putting all these issues into consideration, the paper finally develops an adapted analytical framework that employs Bateman's (2008) GeM as a platform and combines the layout and RST layers of GeM with compositional features for a more thorough examination of the roles of the visual and verbal elements. The application of the adapted model is then illustrated by the analysis of the theatrical release poster of *What women want* (2000).

Keywords: intersemiotic theories, movie posters, framework, Bateman's (2008) Genre and Multimodality

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CÁC LÝ THUYẾT LIÊN TÍN HIỆU: HƯỚNG TỚI KHUNG LÝ THUYẾT PHÂN TÍCH TƯƠNG TÁC HÌNH ẢNH - CHỮ VIẾT TRONG ÁP PHÍCH PHIM

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này nhằm kiến tạo một khung lý thuyết phù hợp để phân tích mối quan hệ giữa ngôn ngữ và hình ảnh trong các áp phích phim. Sau khi xem xét các đường hướng cơ bản trong phân tích tương tác hình - chữ trong các diễn ngôn đa thức và chỉ ra ưu và nhược điểm của các đường hướng này, nghiên cứu đề xuất lựa chọn đường hướng Lý thuyết cấu trúc hùng biện tiếp cận từ góc độ diễn ngôn nói chung và khung lý thuyết Thê loại và đa phương thức (GeM) của Bateman (2008) nói riêng để đạt mục đích nghiên cứu cụ thể của đề tài. Tổng quan lý thuyết cũng chỉ ra sự cần thiết của việc xem xét các đặc điểm bố cục thiết kế trong phân tích mối quan hệ hình - chữ. Sau khi cân nhắc tất cả các yếu tố trên, nghiên cứu đề xuất một khung phân tích phù hợp, ở đó sử dụng khung lý thuyết Thê loại và đa phương thức (GeM) của Bateman (2008) như một mô hình nền tảng và kết hợp lớp phân tích cấu trúc hùng biện và lớp phân tích bố cục của mô hình này với đặc điểm thiết kế để đạt tới mô tả chi tiết và đầy đủ hơn về vai trò của các yếu tố hình và chữ trong poster. Việc kết hợp này được minh họa bằng việc phân tích một poster cụ thể là poster của phim *What women want* (2000).

Từ khóa: các lý thuyết liên tín hiệu, áp phích phim, khung lý thuyết phân tích, khung Thê loại và đa phương thức của Bateman (2008)

1. Introduction

Since the early days of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), intersemiosis has always been a central area of multimodal research. Multimodality is viewed as “textual combinations of different modes and their integration in terms of structure, discourse semantics, and rhetorical function” (Stockl, 2019b, p. 50). Therefore, the very nature of multimodality not only implies that all modes contribute in their own ways to the overall textual meaning but also puts emphasis on the ways, or mechanisms, in which the semiotic resources work in combination to make meaning.

This interplay of semiotic resources has been expressed in a number of terms. Matthiessen (2009) calls it “semiotic harmony” with the observation that “one interesting - and critical - aspect of the division of semiotic labour among the denotative semiotic systems is the extent to which they operate in semiotic harmony with one another” (p. 11). Royce (1998) employs the term “intersemiotic complementarity” where “visual and verbal modes semantically complement each other to produce a single textual phenomenon” (p. 26). Other terms are also suggested like “mutual elaboration” of modes (Jewitt, Bezemer & O’Halloran, 2016, p. 91), “dialogicity” of signs (Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 111) or “meaning multiplication” (Bateman, 2014, pp. 5-7). Despite the differences, all these terms refer to the interplay, and varying levels of integration between systems with different kinds of semiosis. In this present study, intersemiosis is used to refer to the interplay of two specific modes of language and

visual images in a multimodal artifact.

The issue of text-image relations is even more burning in the current changing semiotic landscape. Since the 19th century, thanks to advancements in technological innovation and social changes in the values associated with images, the area has witnessed fundamental changes with a shift toward image-centricity (Stockl et al., 2019). In an image-centric discourse, images become dominant and central thanks to their “semantic centrality”, which means they lead the interpretation of the multimodal text, and/or their “perceptual dominance or salience”, that makes images the textual ‘entry point’ for reading paths and meaning construal (Stockl et al., 2019, p.7). This phenomenon has been observed in different contexts, for example print news stories (Caple, 2013), online newspaper homepages (Knox, 2007), Instagram (Caple, 2019), or Internet memes (Zappavigna, 2019). As it is opposite to the traditional dominance of linguistic elements, this shift seriously influences the status and functionality of language, text-image relations and the development of multimodal genres (Stockl, 2019a). Therefore, there is an urgent need for further studies in the field to explore the relative status and relations of images and language in different image-centric genres. The present paper is in line with these studies, aiming to examine the text-image relations in movie posters.

Movie posters are an interesting yet under-researched member of the image-centric genre family. At a glance, a movie poster may show the dominance of images with the layout space taken up by images. However, the actual relations between images and language in movie posters and how they are integrated to fulfill the general communicative purposes of movie posters has not been explored. Most studies on movie posters, including Chen and Gao (2013), Iftikhar, Shahnaz and Masroor (2019), Peng (2022), Linh (2021) and Rondon and Heberle (2022), only focus on the meaning making of images without the consideration of linguistic elements. Maiorani (2007, 2014) is the only exception that analyzes the slogans and images in three poster campaigns for The Matrix film trilogy to identify their advertising strategies. However, the verbal signs are only limited to the slogans, which in fact are slightly different from the taglines in ordinary movie posters. Other linguistic elements such as movie titles, actors and actresses, the cast, director and other information have not been studied.

Therefore, in order to seek the answer to the question: “What kinds of relations are established between language and images in the posters to promote the movies?”, this paper aims to critically review some approaches to text-image relations in order to develop a relevant framework of intersemiosis to provide insights into the interplay of visual images and language in this image-centric genre.

2. Major Approaches to Text-Image Relations

Since the late 1990s, various attempts have been made to investigate the nature of intersemiotic relations to explain what features make multimodal text visually - verbally coherent, including Martinec and Salway (2005), Kong (2006), Royce (2007), Taboada and Habel (2013), to name but a few. Although different frameworks have been proposed, these studies can be grouped into four major approaches to text-image relations (Bateman, 2014). This section will critically review these four approaches and choose the most suitable one for the present study.

2.1. Multimodal Cohesion and Text-Image Relations

The first approach, proposed by Royce (1998, 2007) and then further developed by Martinec (1998), Baldry and Thibault (2006) and Liu and O’Halloran (2009), employs the

popular and ready applicable term of cohesion as a method of description in the context of text-image relations. ‘Cohesion’, as a technical term introduced in Halliday and Hasan (1976), is defined as a non-structural linguistic resource, which means cohesion is a way of relating linguistic entities across all kinds of syntactic and other structural boundaries. Therefore, this concept can be well applied to multimodality to investigate the web of cohesive ties across text and image as they are parts of a single ‘textual’ unit. Royce (2007) then proposes a system of intermodal cohesive relations including repetition, synonymy, antonymy, meronymy, hyponymy and collocation, which are equivalent to the theory of verbal lexical cohesion. Liu and O’Halloran (2009) further develop the theory by examining the integration of information from different modalities rather than simply documenting their ‘linkages’. Some further extensions have been made to Royce’s (2007) framework, including the addition of polysemy, intersemiotic logical relations and intersemiotic parallelism, to reach this purpose.

Although the analysis of intersemiotic cohesive devices is quite explicit and straightforward, there is concern about its effect in interpreting the texture and meaning of the multimodal text (Bateman, 2014). Just like in linguistic texts when cohesive devices cannot assure the coherence of the text, what the examination of intersemiotic cohesive devices can tell about how the text is working still remains unclear. Particularly in this research when the purpose of examining text-image relationships is to explore how they help to promote the movies, this approach seems to be ineffective and irrelevant.

2.2. Using Metaphor for Text-Image Relations

The second approach, pioneered by Forceville (1996), is appeal to the notion of metaphor, particularly conceptual metaphor. If cohesion is a non-structural concept, metaphor is actually a structural relation, which means metaphor deals with semantic organizations rather than just a lexical, or word-based operation. In fact, many cognitive linguists, Forceville included, consider metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon and state that metaphor is a cognitive operation rather than one situated in the linguistic system. This viewpoint leads to the occurrence of the new concept of ‘pictorial metaphor’, which refers to the phenomenon when either or both source domain and target domain are presented pictorially. Regarding the text-image relations, this concept provides a “well-established means of talking about relations of ‘similarity’ or ‘transfer’ of meanings across potentially very different domains” (Bateman, 2014, p.185). In other words, when the target domain or the source domain is image and the other is text, the transfer of properties from a source domain to a target domain can be suggested as a means of enabling information to flow across modalities (Forceville, 2002, 2009).

Although this approach provides a well-established means of examining text-image relations, its application in the present study is problematic. In movie posters, this approach can analyze the relation between image and taglines as they both express the content of the movie visually and verbally but it is not applicable to other textual elements like movie title or actors’ and actresses’ names. Therefore, this approach cannot help to reach the overview of text-image relations and more importantly the promotional strategies regarding text-image relations in the posters.

2.3. Grammar Approach to Text-Image Relations

The third approach starts from the linguistic ‘stratum’ of grammar with the assumption that when language and image occur together in a text to serve similar or conjoined communicative purposes, similarities in their organization will be expected. Studies in this approach, e.g., Martinec and Salway (2005), Unsworth (2007) or Kong (2006), tend to focus

on two aspects of grammar, which are clause transitivity and clause combining relations. For the first area, analysis aims at finding the correspondence between ‘grammatical transitivity’ of language and ‘visual transitivity’ of images, both of which follow the principles of systemic-functional grammar. The grammar of visual images can be analyzed using Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) framework. The second area describes the ways in which grammatical clauses can be combined into larger ‘clause complexes’ with two main types of relationships: (1) relations of projection and (2) relations of expansion with three sub-types of elaboration, extension, and enhancement. This concept is then expanded to multimodal texts and these relations are not only applied to linguistic clauses but also to text-image relations.

Several attempts have been made to construct a classification system for text-image relations that employ these two grammatical concepts. The first framework by Martinec and Salway (2005) proposed two dimensions for finer classification of the grammatical clause-combinations, which are status and logico-semantic relations. The former indicates the relative importance of texts and images in the relationship with two options of equal and unequal status, while the latter characterizes the specific logical relationships held between text and image in terms of expansion and projection. Other attempts that could be considered extensions of Martinec and Salway’s (2005) framework are Unsworth’s (2007) examination of school textbooks and other educational materials and Kong’s (2006) multilevel descriptive framework. These frameworks show some adaptations but still share similar principles with Martinec and Salway (2005).

Although this approach seems practical and in line with the analysis of visual images in the posters with the employment of Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) framework, the actual problems lie in the analysis of linguistic texts. As most texts in movie posters are proper nouns (e.g. movie title, actors’ and actresses’ names), the transitivity analysis and examination of clause combining relations are problematic. Moreover, this approach rules out the contribution of both layout and multimodal features of texts to their model, while these factors, in fact, can provide much useful information on the text-image relations.

2.4. Discourse Approach to Text–Image Relations

The last approach looks at text-image relations from the discoursal perspective, which generally considers discourse to be made up of ‘discourse moves’ to serve the communicative goals pursued by a speaker or writer. These ‘discourse moves’ traditionally are linguistic expressions and then extended to visual images. Two separate models of discourse have been employed to discuss text-image relations, which are Conjunctive Relations by Martin (1992) and Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) by Mann and Thompson (1988).

The first branch of discoursal approach uses Martin’s (1992) system of conjunctive relations with four main classes: additive, comparison, time and consequential/causal. This system is somehow related but not limited to grammatical clause combining relations in the third approach. Instead, Martin (1992) examines discourse semantic relations, which have realisations scattered over the entire grammatical system. The multimodal development of this system has ended up with a number of different models to describe linking relations between visual and verbal elements including van Leeuwen (2005), Liu and O’Halloran (2009) or Martin and Rose (2008). This diversity shows the complexity of discourse semantic relations. Just like coherence in linguistic discourses that can be created in various ways, the text-image relations in multimodal discourse can be explicitly and implicitly suggested by a variety of means. The implicit elements are hardly categorized in the analytical frameworks, thus raise the issue of reliability of the analysis. Moreover, according to Bateman (2013), the vacillation across these

analytical frameworks is partly due to the lack of empirical work with far more extensive collections of data in the field, which may help to target the issues of reliable analysis and accurate coding.

The second branch follows the tradition of studies of the rhetorical combination of visual and textual material with the application of Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) by Mann and Thompson (1988), an approach to text developed within linguistics and discourse studies. In contrast to the conjunctive relations, which focuses on the concrete step-by-step interpretation of linguistic units, RST is more concerned with intentions and the knowledge and beliefs of speakers and hearers. RST provides a repertoire of 'rhetorical relations', each is defined by its realization and its effect when successfully applying the given relation on the speaker and hearer's beliefs and intentions. The RST analysis aims at constructing a single overarching hierarchical analysis that covers all the text and respects all the definitions. This hierarchical structure then shows precisely how the components of the text and their combinations contribute to achieving the goals of the text as a whole (Bateman, 2013). As the analysis mainly focuses on communicative intentions, the pictorial elements are well considered fragments of the RST hierarchical structure, which assures the multimodal application of RST.

So far, this section has reviewed four different approaches to text-image relations with the employment of different linguistic theories including cohesion, metaphor, grammar and discourse. After considering both advantages and drawbacks of each approach, it can be concluded that RST discourse approach seems to be the most relevant to the present study for a number of reasons.

Firstly, RST approach is particularly relevant to the purpose of the present study. RST was originally developed for the analysis of persuasion and communicative effectiveness; thus it is widely used for the analysis of advertisements, posters included. It is less concerned with the concrete step by step interpretation of forms and focuses more on intentions and rhetoric. This is suitable for the examination of how movie posters use verbal and visual resources to promote the movies. In other words, the study aims at identifying the promotional strategies in terms of multi-semiotic choices in these posters rather than simply describing the semiotic features of the posters. With the adoption of RST, a rhetorical structure of a poster may show the role of each element in the poster, being linguistic or visual element, and their relationship in forming the overall message of the poster.

The second reason for the choice of RST model is its relevance to the sample of the present study. In most other approaches to text-image relations, there seems to be a clear distinction between text and image. However, in movie posters, this separation is quite vague. The linguistic texts are often designed multimodally with color, typographic features and even mixed with images. For example, a company logo may include words or letters but its design is prone to picture or symbol. RST provides a good solution to this unclear distinction as it considers the rhetorical relations among different components of the poster, which can be text, picture or a combination of both. In other words, a clear division of language and visual image is not necessary in this approach. The second problem lies in the nature of linguistic texts in the posters. They are mainly noun phrases and their meanings are not similar to the picture. As mentioned above, this causes difficulties to the employment of other approaches like metaphor or grammar. However, noun phrases can be well treated as a rhetorical element of the poster, thus this is not a problem to the application of RST model.

However, the RST approach also has its own drawbacks. Firstly, RST analysis relies on

the linear nature of what is being described, which can be a challenge to visual materials with spatial organization. Although reading order can be a solution to this problem, it is claimed to be subjective and can be influenced by reading behaviour (Stockl, 2004). The second problem lies in the identification of RST segments. While grammatical clauses usually serve as the minimal unit in traditional RST, the decision of multimodal RST segments is more challenging with unclear grammatical units. Furthermore, each multimodal RST segment may serve different purposes, leading to multiple simultaneous discourse relations in the RST structure. Finally, similar to other approaches to text-image relations, there was no attention to issues of layout and composition in RST model, which in fact may significantly influence these relations.

These problems might be indicative of a need for an adaptation of the RST model. A more careful decision of the RST segments and inclusion of related compositional issues like layout, salience and reading path is required for a more reliable and thorough analysis.

3. An Adapted Framework to Analyze the Interplay of Language and Visual Images in Movie Posters

As discussed above, this study aims to develop a framework to analyze the interplay of language and visual images in movie posters that can combine RST analysis and compositional features like layout or salience. In search for a framework that can include all these issues, Bateman's (2008) Genre and Multimodality (GeM) has been chosen as it can provide a good platform for the examination of both layout and RST structure of the posters. This section, therefore, will discuss this framework in detail and show how it can be employed to form the paper adapted framework.

Bateman's (2008) GeM aims at exploring the interaction and combination of multiple modes within single artefacts. As GeM treats the multimodal page as a multilayered semiotic artefact, the model includes different layers, which are illustrated in Table 1. The starting point for analysis is the identification of base units in the base layer, which include all the units actually occurring on the page that can be called upon subsequently to take on particular roles or functions within other layers. At this stage, no elements could be omitted for any reasons, which assures the full coverage of what is being analyzed. After the base units are identified, they are combined according to their layout grouping and spatial proximity, their mutual spatial relationships and their particular layout and formatting properties to form the layout layer. This layer consists of three domains, which are layout structure, area model and realization information, to examine the layout structure of the multimodal document. Similar process is used to form the rhetorical layer, which describes the discourse relations that hold between the base units using an extension of RST. Lastly, the navigational layer analyzes the base units and layout units with navigation functions such as pointers, entries and indices.

Table 1

The Layers of GeM Model (Cited in Hiippala, 2012, p. 108)

Layer name	Descriptive function	Analytical unit and examples
Base layer	Provides a list of base units that may be analysed as a part of other layers.	<i>Base units:</i> sentences, headings, drawings, figures, photos, captions, list items, etc.

Layout layer	Groups the base units together based on similar properties in the three domains below.	<i>Layout units</i> : paragraphs, headings, drawings, figures, photos, captions, list items, etc.
<i>Structure</i>	The hierarchical structure between layout units.	
<i>Area model</i>	The placement of layout units in a layout.	
<i>Realisation</i>	Typographical or visual features of layout units.	
Rhetorical layer	Describes the rhetorical relations holding between the identified rhetorical segments.	<i>Rhetorical segments</i> : base units with rhetorical functions
Navigational layer	Describes the navigational structure by defining pointers, entries and indices.	<i>Pointers, entries and indices</i> : base units and layout units with navigation functions

As can be seen, the layout layer can bring a more thorough understanding to the compositional features of the posters. Compositional meaning is realized by three interrelated systems which are information values, framing and salience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). While framing refers to grouping or ungrouping of elements, information values indicate the arrangement of these elements with three options: left-right, top-bottom and center-margin, which seem inadequate to explain the complex relations among various components scattered all over the poster. In this case, GeM can be a good solution. In GeM, with more specific information on both the overall hierarchical structure of the layout units and the position and features of each of these units, this layer can provide a sound empirical basis for comments on Information value and Framing of the posters. Therefore, in the present study, the analysis of compositional meaning will start with the layout layer and the two categories of Information value and Framing in Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) will work as the perspective for judgements on the arrangement of these layout units. Similarly, the third category of salience can also be integrated to evaluate the prominence of the layout units. The order of elements in terms of salience creates the "reading path" (van Leeuwen, 2005). By reintroducing linearity in spatially structured texts, the principle of reading path helps to solve the problem of RST in dealing with the linear nature of visual materials.

The rhetorical layer is in line with the chosen RST approach to deal with the relationship between language and visual images. By means of a fine-grained theory of rhetorical structure, Bateman (2008) identifies a broad range of meaning relations that can hold between and within page elements, which are based on 25 classical rhetorical relations by Mann and Thompson (1986) and five additional relations drawn from Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). This helps to identify the functional contributions made by various semiotic elements to the intended communicative goals of the posters as a whole.

While the rhetorical layer carries in it the advantages of RST approach, it can overcome some RST problems. Firstly, the rhetorical segments are decided from the exhaustive list of base units in the base layer by combining base units with rhetorical functions. This may increase the reliability of the decomposition of units of analysis as all minimal elements of the posters

are involved. The second concern about RST is about the non-sequentiality of multimodal segments, which is different from the linear order of linguistic segments. To resolve this, the GeM model restricts rhetorical relations to “pairs (sets) of document parts (segments/spans) which are adjacent in any direction”, which can be expressed with respect to the area model (Bateman, 2008, p. 158). Most importantly, with the cross-checking with the Layout layer, the RST structure is considered together with layout and compositional features of the posters, which may provide more thorough understanding regarding the relationship between different visual and verbal components of the movie posters.

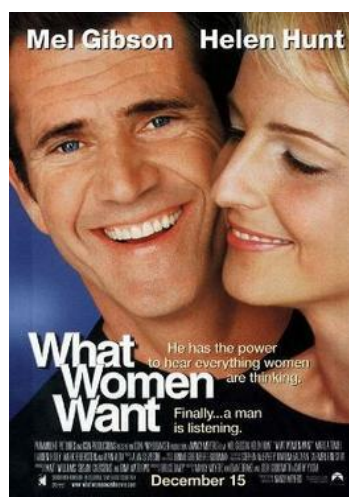
In fact, GeM projects are often conducted with corpus design with the potential of building multimodal corpora; however, this leads to the major problem of this approach: the application of GeM is too labor intensive. Both the meticulous analysis of each layer and the manual annotation to build the annotated corpora require a considerable amount of time and resources. Therefore, in this project, corpus analysis is not applied and I only analyze these layers manually to examine the design of the posters.

4. An Application of the Adapted Framework to the Analysis of *What Women Want* (2000)

This section will present how the adapted framework is employed to analyze movie posters. The theatrical release poster of *What women want* (2000), a top-grossing movie with a North American domestic gross of \$182 million and a worldwide gross of \$374 million (Wikipedia), is analyzed as an example to illustrate the analysis using the model.

Figure 1

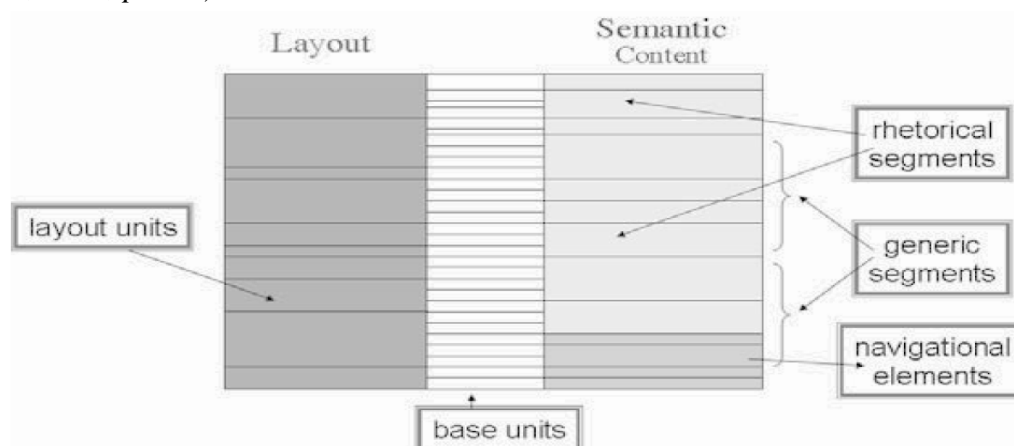
Theatrical Release Poster of What Women Want (2000) (Source: Wikipedia)



Using Bateman’s (2008) GeM, the analysis follows three main stages. After the base units are identified in stage 1, they are grouped into the layout units to examine the layout layer in stage 2 and into the rhetorical segments to explore the RST structure in stage 3. The base units include everything that can be seen in the poster and should not be larger than layout units and rhetorical segments. Notably, as can be seen from figure 3, these three units in three different layers are identified separately and do not necessarily overlap each other. Although the analysis goes through all three stages, my discussion will focus on the last two stages to explore the relations between visual images and language in the poster.

Figure 2

The Distribution of Base Elements to Layout, Rhetorical, Generic and Navigational Elements (Bateman, 2008, p. 109)



4.1. The layout layer

In stage 2, the researcher works visually from the page, decomposing all elements of the page in terms of their visual unity, their features and layout position. Table 2 lists all 15 layout units in the poster and their spatial information is illustrated in Figure 3. As the visual image covers the whole poster and expresses a single idea, it is treated as a single unit. Similarly, while L7 consists of many different base units, these base units form one block with similar format and information, thus they are combined into one layout unit of L7. L10 also has similar format as L7 but it is separated to a new line with a different layout position, thus it is considered a new layout unit. After the layout units are decided, the page decomposition is transformed into a hierarchical structure in Figure 4. In this hierarchical structure, the layout units are grouped according to their meaning, e.g. Movie title, Release date or Billing block (i.e. names of producers, key crew members, and others involved in the production of a film).

Table 2

The List of Layout Units in the Poster



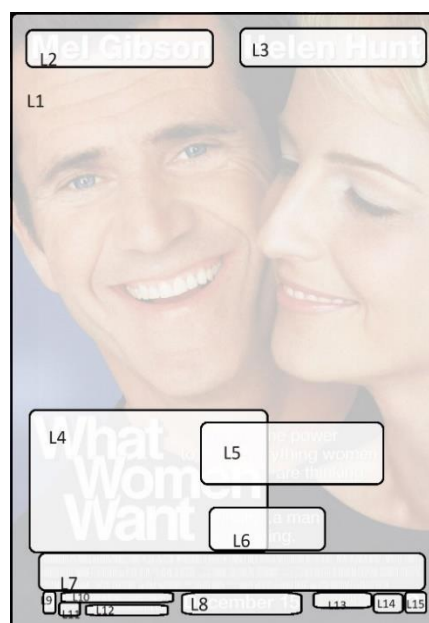
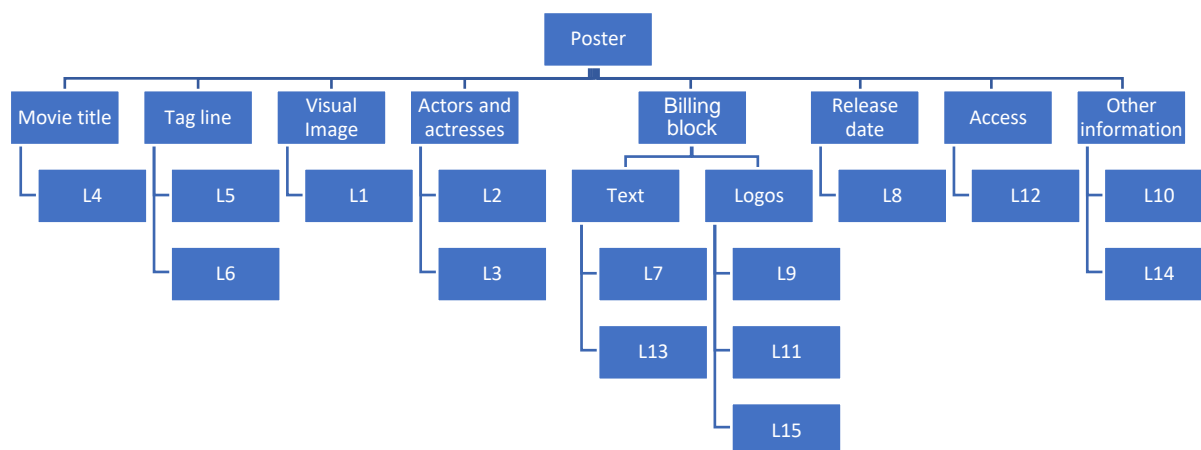
L1	The image of the couple	L9	
L2	Mel Gibson	L10	SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON COLUMBIA/SONY MUSIC'S SOUNDTRAX
L3	Helen Hunt	L11	PG PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
L4	What Women Want	L12	www.whatwomenwantmovie.com
L5	He has the power to hear everything women are thinking.	L13	PRODUCED BY NANCY MEYERS
L6	Finally...a man is listening.	L14	TM & COPYRIGHT © 2000 BY PARAMOUNT PICTURES. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
L7	PARAMOUNT PICTURES AND COLUMBIA TRISTAR PRESENT A NANCY MEYERS FILM MEL GIBSON HELEN HUNT "WHAT WOMEN WANT" AMANDA DONATO LAUREN HILLY MARK FELDSTEIN AND ALAN ALDA CASTING BY ALAN SILVERMAN COSTUME DESIGNER TIMOTHY GREENBERG EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS STEPHEN MEYERS AND MICHAEL GUTMAN PRODUCED BY NANCY MEYERS SCREENPLAY BY STEPHEN MEYERS AND MICHAEL GUTMAN BASED UPON THE PLAY BY DAVID LIVINGSTONE	L15	
L8	December 15		

Figure 3*The Area Model of Each Layout Unit***Figure 4***Layout Structure for The Poster*

As can be seen from Figure 5, except for the image of the couple (L1), which covers the whole poster, the position of the other layout units classifies them into three groups. The first group is at the top of the page with the names of the main actor and actress (L2 and L3). The second group consists of the movie title (L4) and the two taglines (L5 and L6) at the lower center of the page, leaving the rest (from L7 to L15) to the third group at the bottom. Notably, group 2 and group 3 are placed next to each other with similar color, and the only differences are the typographical features including font size and type. This layout separates group 1 from group 2 and 3 and creates the Top-Bottom relation in the poster. This choice of Information Value is popular in advertisements where the upper part shows the idealized or generalized essence of the information and the lower part presents more ‘down to earth’ or more practical

information (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). In this poster, the actor's and actress's names together with the couple's faces, which is also the salience of the image, create the 'ideal' world in the movie while other information in group 3 presents the 'real' information of how the movie is created and how it could be accessed. The taglines are at the border of these two groups as they are related to both the plot line (Ideal) and the viewers' background knowledge (Real) with the statement "Finally...a man is listening". Therefore, their relevant position is at the lower center of the poster.

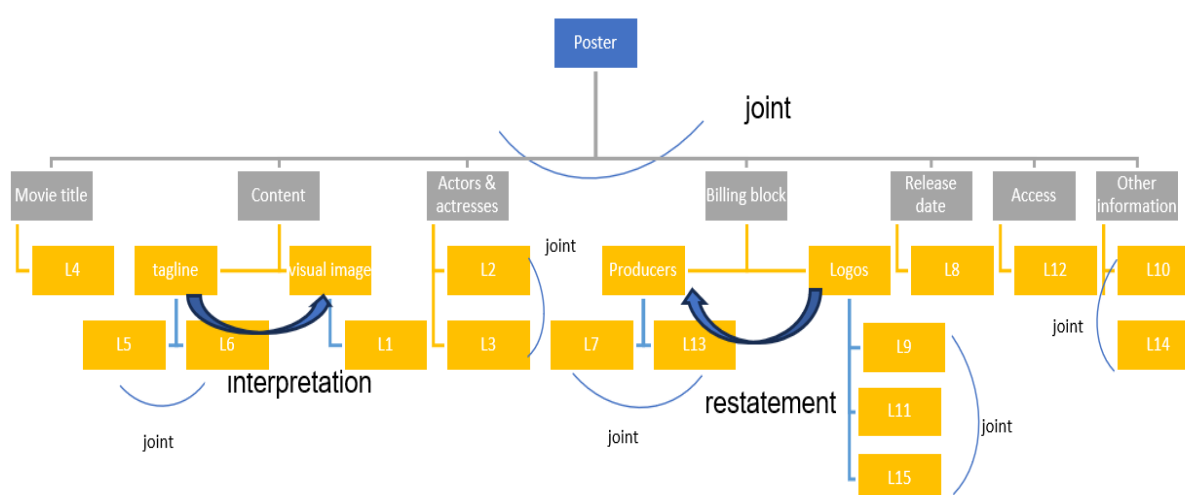
The spatial information and multimodal features of the layout units also decide their salience, and thus their roles in the poster. To this point, the concept of Reading path can be employed to grade the level of Salience among the layout units. The visual image is the most salient element as it covers all the poster with the biggest size and colorful image. The next most prominent element is the movie title thanks to its big size, followed by the actor's and actress's names as they are clearly separated from the other linguistic elements, positioning at the top of the poster. The fourth most prominent unit are the tag lines, which are also isolated from other linguistic elements. The rest layout units have a similar level of salience as they are all put at the bottom of the page with small size, similar font type and color. Among these units, the release date receives a bit more salience with slightly bigger font size.

4.2. The RST layer

Stage 3 deals with the rhetorical layer and the result is presented in Figure 5. Notably, in this poster, the layout units coincide with the RST segments thanks to their self-containment and mobility. Therefore, for the sake of convenience, I still use the layout coding (from L1 to L15) to refer to these RST segments. They are then combined into seven RST groups according to their semantic meaning and rhetorical functions.

Figure 5

RST Structure for the Poster



As can be seen from Figure 5, the joint relations are frequently used at all levels of the RST structure. Each rhetorical group presents one aspect of the movie, thus they are rhetorically equal to each other. Similar relations can be found at the lower level, for example L5-L6, L2-L3, L7-L13, L9-L11-L15 and L10-L14. The popular employment of joint relations shows the loose connection among different components of the poster. In other words, the RST segments

are self-contained and loosely linked to each other with unclear cohesion.

The only exceptions are the cases of Content and Billing block. Firstly, the content of the movie is expressed in the both taglines and visual image. While the visual image sets out the context and the main vibe of the movie visually, the taglines interpret the meaning of the image. The image of the couple cannot tell the invisible ability of the man in hearing women's thinking, which is the key element of the movie. This is why the taglines are essential and they help to clarify the interpretations and support the right understanding of the photo. The second case is in the Billing block, where the production companies are mentioned both verbally and visually through their logos. As they simply repeat each other, the RST relation is restatement.

These two exceptions further contribute to the Reading path with the principle that repeated information tends to be more prominent. As the two taglines interpret the visual images, they reinforce the dominant role of the visual image or the content of the movie in the poster. Similarly, although producers are put in the billing block with less salience, their importance is slightly increased with the repetition of information with the appearance of several company logos.

4.3. Summary of findings

The above analysis has figured out three main strategies that have been used to promote the movie regarding the interplay of visual and verbal elements. Firstly, both language and visual image are employed to provide information on different aspects of the movie, creating a joint rhetorical relation among them. With the popular use of the joint relations, the RST segments are loosely linked to each other and their main connection is actually through the layout and compositional features, particularly the salience. Specifically, in terms of composition, these units harmonize as their multimodal designs form an integrated whole of the poster but at the same time, they compete with each other for salience. More important information like the content, the movie title and the actors'/actresses' names are made prominent due to their position, size, color, font type or repetition. Less important information tends to be put at the bottom of the page with less salience. Finally, this movie poster employs the traditional information value of Top-Bottom or Ideal-Real, which is popularly used in advertisements. By following this convention, the poster brings the familiar feeling to viewers and makes it easier for viewers to access the important information simply at a quick glance.

Although this finding still supports the early assumption that movie posters are a member of the image-centric genre family, it clarifies the actual relations between language and visual images in the poster. Being the most prominent element in the poster, the visual image is the 'entry point' for reading paths and steer viewers' perception and evaluation of the poster. However, in terms of rhetorical and semantic relations, except for the taglines, other linguistic elements are actually of equal roles to visual images. Regarding the logos, a type of visual element, they simply restate the verbal elements with equal salience; therefore, their roles are equal both visually and rhetorically.

The finding also contributes to the theory of intersemiosis. It serves as strong evidence to support the need to include issues like layout and compositional features to the traditional approaches to intersemiosis for a more thorough examination of the text-image relations.

5. Conclusion

The present study has critically reviewed some approaches in intersemiosis to indicate their strengths and weaknesses and then develop an adapted framework for a specific purpose

of analysis. The application of this adapted model is then illustrated by the analysis of the poster of *What women want* (2000). Although further research with more samples is required to testify its practicality, the present study can serve as the first step in forming a relevant framework to analyze the relations between language and visual images in the movie posters and how they are employed to promote the movies.

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CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND AI DEVELOPMENT IN THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER

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Abstract: The whirlwind advent of ChatGPT in 2022 has marked a new age of artificial intelligence (AI), the general name for the technology that combines computer technology, big data bases and machines. This AI technology quickly makes its presence felt with hundreds of popular programs and chatbots such as the portrait-making AI diffusion art and the thesis-writing ChatGPT. This paper investigates the conceptual metaphors representing AI and AI development in The Guardian, a UK-based newspaper, to figure out how this technology and its growth have been introduced to ordinary people via mass media. Employing the Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), this study found three AI-related conceptual metaphors, namely, AI IS A HUMAN BEING, AI IS AN ANIMAL and AI IS A NATURAL FORCE, which are realized by more than 100 linguistic expressions across 33 news articles. Also, this research found five conceptual metaphors related to AI development, namely AI DEVELOPMENT IS WAR, AI DEVELOPMENT IS A RACE, AI DEVELOPMENT IS A CONVERSATION, AI DEVELOPMENT IS A DANCE, AI DEVELOPMENT IS A GAME and these metaphors are manifested by approximately 40 linguistic expressions. This paper discusses the way that these metaphors could influence the way people and technology companies think about AI and AI development.

Keywords: artificial intelligence (AI), ChatGPT, conceptual metaphor, AI development

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MỘT SỐ ẪN DỤ Ý NIỆM VỀ TRÍ TUỆ NHÂN TẠO (AI) VÀ CẠNH TRANH PHÁT TRIỂN AI TRÊN BÁO THE GUARDIAN

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Tóm tắt: Sự xuất hiện như một cơn lốc của ChatGPT trong năm 2022 đã đánh dấu một kỷ nguyên mới của trí tuệ nhân tạo (AI), tên gọi chung của công nghệ kết hợp giữa công nghệ máy tính, nền tảng big data và máy móc. Công nghệ AI này nhanh chóng gây chú ý với hàng trăm chương trình và chatbot, và dần trở nên quen thuộc với nhiều người, điển hình là AI tạo ảnh Diffusion đã và đang tạo ra trào lưu trên các mạng xã hội, cũng như phần mềm có thể viết luận văn ChatGPT. Bài viết này nghiên cứu các ẩn dụ ý niệm dùng để mô tả AI trên báo The Guardian, một tờ báo có trụ sở tại Vương quốc Anh, để tìm hiểu xem công nghệ này đã được giới thiệu đến người dân bình thường thông qua các phương tiện thông tin đại chúng như thế nào. Sử dụng lý thuyết ẩn dụ ý niệm của Lakoff & Johnson (1980), nghiên cứu này tìm thấy 3 ẩn dụ về AI, bao gồm AI LÀ CON NGƯỜI, AI LÀ ĐỘNG VẬT và AI LÀ MỘT SỨC MẠNH TỰ NHIÊN được hiện thực hóa bởi hơn 100 cụm điển đạt ở 33 bài báo được chọn. Người nghiên cứu cũng tìm được 5 ẩn dụ ý niệm về sự cạnh tranh phát triển AI giữa các công ty công nghệ. Các ẩn dụ này đã sử dụng các miền nguồn như: CUỘC ĐUA, CHIẾN TRANH, TRÒ CHƠI, CUỘC HỘI THOẠI và KHIẾU VŨ. Từ đó, nghiên cứu thảo luận về một số tác động của những ẩn dụ này đối với cách mọi người nghĩ về AI và cuộc cạnh tranh phát triển AI.

Từ khóa: trí tuệ nhân tạo (AI), ChatGPT, ẩn dụ ý niệm, phát triển AI

1. Introduction

1.1. Background Information

In the past few years, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a regular headline maker on newspapers and also a heated topic of discussion on social network sites. People start to talk about AI's astonishing human-like capabilities, its possible threats to human existence, compared to "Skynet" in the blockbuster series "The Terminator" and also its disturbing interferences with academic plagiarism policies at many universities.

It does not take much time for AI to have a big impact on peoples' lives. First, among the most well-known AI programs, ChatGPT, launched on November 30th, 2022 and getting one million users in just five days, has spread into many aspects of life, bringing about profound changes in areas ranging from employment opportunities to academic integrity. The famous case related to chat GPT is when a Russian student got on Twitter and shared how he graduated with a thesis written by ChatGPT. Another related AI case that shows how AI can influence millions of people is when the AI-generated image of the former US President Donald Trump being arrested circulated widely on the Internet and has fooled many people. Also, a few months ago, despite several security concerns, millions of people used an AI image generator and uploaded their AI-generated image on their social network accounts, which has become highly trendy, especially for young people (Landi, 2023). Last but not least, a German artist named Boris Eldagsen submitted an AI generated image to Sony world photography and won awards,

which provoked much debate. Apart from these famous examples, people now have been using AI to do myriad tasks, ranging from having conversations, practicing speaking English, composing music, writing newspaper articles to writing essays and graduation thesis, to name a few.

In this landscape of increasing AI popularity and demands, many businesses have been introducing their own platforms to the growing market. Some big players in the field include Google with an AI chatbot called Bard, Open AI with ChatGPT, Anthropic with Claude, Meta with LLaMA, xAi by Elon Musk with Grok, and Stability AI, which funded the Stable Diffusion image generator. In Vietnam, some big tech companies are also trying to catch up by releasing their own chatbots, for example VinBase developed by VinBigdata and FPT AI Chat by FPT.

According to the official website of IBM, the established tech giant specializing in computer technology, artificial intelligence is the technology that integrates computers, big data bases and machines to copy human capabilities such as problem solving and decision making.

Therefore, AI is an abstract concept in computer technology that humans cannot see or touch. Besides, explaining new technology is difficult as it usually involves quite many technical terms. That's why conceptual metaphors have a role to play. Conceptual metaphor is one way of thinking that enables people to comprehend and talk about something abstract (target domains) in terms of something concrete (source domains) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Many researchers have conducted studies on metaphorical representations of technological devices and inventions such as software, computer and the Internet (Chown & Nascimento, 2023; Wu & Chen, 2013; Colburn & Shute, 2008) but not much research has been dedicated to the conceptual metaphors representing AI, especially those on newspapers, a mass medium that can reach millions of people to help them understand and talk about artificial intelligent economically.

For the reasons mentioned above, a study on the conceptual metaphors representing artificial intelligence on THE GUARDIAN was conducted to see the way that people conceptualize AI and discuss some of the implications resulting from these metaphors.

1.2. Aims and Research Questions

This study aims to figure out some conceptual metaphor representing artificial intelligence and its development competition between companies in The Guardian, a popular online newspaper in the UK. The researcher would like to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. *What conceptual metaphors are used to represent AI in The Guardian?*
2. *What conceptual metaphors are used to represent AI development in the Guardian?*

Answering these questions will form the foundation for the discussions of how these metaphors could shape the way ordinary people and AI developers and technology companies think about AI and AI development.

1.3. Scope of this study

This paper investigates the linguistic expressions manifesting AI-related conceptual metaphors used by The Guardian. The researcher will also include metaphors related to AI development and competition. Also, this research only focuses on the 33 articles collected from The Guardian in 2022, 2023 and 2024 so that the data can be up to date.

2. Literature Review

2.1. What Counts as a Conceptual Metaphor?

Cognitive linguistics, a linguistic branch which can be traced back in the early 1970s (Evan & Green, 2006), is an interdisciplinary enterprise because it involves both the study of human language and of the human mind. In other words, cognitive linguists aim at revealing different patterns of language, and what set them apart from other linguists is that they hold a strong assumption that linguistic patterns reflect thinking patterns (Evan & Green, 2006).

Since Lakoff and Johnson published their influential book “The Metaphor We Live By” in 1980, the study of metaphor in the direction of cognitive approach has attracted many followers. In their book, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) clearly presented their view. To them, metaphor was a powerful tool of human cognition: “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

This position is also shared by Hurford et al. (2007) in their book on semantics: “Metaphors are conceptual (mental) operations reflected in human language that enable speakers to structure and construe abstract areas of knowledge and experience in more concrete experiential terms” (Hurford et al., 2007).

According to this approach, to conceptualize an unfamiliar entity or a field of knowledge, the speaker takes advantage of another already familiar one. The former one is known as the target domain and the latter one, source domain. Normally, the source domain is understood through the experience in the physical world and there exists a conceptual mapping between the source domain and the target domain to help structure the unfamiliar entity so that the cognitive load will be lessened when humans are trying to conceptualize something new or unknown to us before (Hurford et al., 2007). This conceptual view takes a wider approach that metaphors are not only present in literary or figurative texts but ubiquitous in our daily life and metaphors do not only exist in language but also in the human mind in the way we experience, act and think about a particular topic. Our conceptual system is mainly metaphorical in nature. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Kovecses (2002), in agreement with the above-mentioned scholars, gave a concise definition of conceptual metaphor as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. The conceptual metaphor is represented as the following formula: CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B. A conceptual domain is viewed as any organized experience of human beings such as life, journey, time, money, etc. The nature of a metaphor in the form of A is B is the mapping of part of our structure of knowledge from domain A to domain B (Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

Kovecses (2020) extended his theory of conceptual metaphors, called Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory, and argued that each conceptual metaphor is composed of four levels, namely, image schema, domains, frames and mental spaces. He also added that conceptual metaphor is not only conceptual but also contextual. This multilevel view of metaphor is not a negation of the old conceptual metaphor but further explain the complexity of conceptual metaphor. In other words, this extended theory assumes much of the old theory of conceptual metaphor and integrates those four levels of conceptual structures hierarchy into one single model. Kovecses (2020) also added that there are different methods in researching metaphors at different levels of schematicity, and the intuitive, lexical approach can deal with conceptual metaphors at the level of frames and domains.

2.2. Conceptual Metaphors in Technology

Many researchers have investigated the language in technology and found many conceptual metaphors shaping and explaining the way people understand and talk about it.

First, Chown and Nascimento (2023) explored many digital technology metaphors and listed a number of conceptual metaphors of digital equipment, both hardware and software, including SENDING A DIGITAL MESSAGE IS SENDING A LETTER, OPERATING SYSTEM IS A DESKTOP, SECURITY IS BARRIERS (passwords, firewalls, keys, attacks), THE DIGITAL POSITIONING DEVICE IS A MOUSE. They argued that digital metaphors are necessary because potential users will not need to have any technical expertise to understand new technology.

Wu and Chen (2013) discussed several metaphors used for computers and the Internet and these metaphors help to familiarize ordinary people with technology. These metaphors include A COMPUTER IS A PERSON (the computer is getting stupid), A COMPUTER IS A FACTORY (each processor is a machine), A COMPUTER IS A CONTAINER (I can't get my paper out of the computer), THE INTERNET IS A HIGHWAY (The promise that we are cruising the information highway), THE INTERNET IS A PERSON (The Internet was born in America), THE INTERNET IS A SEA (We surfed the Internet). They stated that these different technology metaphors are highly coherent in the way that they connect to each other to form a complete whole.

Boyd (2020) researched the language in software development and listed and analyzed a bunch of conceptual metaphors ubiquitous in this field. These metaphors include CODING IS WEAVING, SOFTWARE ELEMENTS (constants, variables, expressions) are usually talked about in terms of TREES and LAYERS.

Colburn and Shute (2008) discovered a range of conceptual metaphors when researching the expressions in computer science. They found that data structures are usually described as shopping carts. In addition, programmers organizing data regularly speak of stacks, queues, trees, pipes, and streams. Algorithm designers manipulating data structures employ relations such as parent, child, ancestor, and descendant. Networks and systems of networks experience congestion and flooding and often require filtering or flushing.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Description

33 articles were collected from The Guardian Newspaper and almost 150 linguistic expressions that conjure up different conceptual metaphors related to AI and AI development. The 33 news articles contain more than 28,900 words altogether, which can be considered a corpus, a collection of pieces of language text in electronic form, selected according to external criteria to represent, as far as possible, a language or language variety as a source of data for linguistic research. (Sinclair, 2005). This small-sized corpus is suitable for the aim of revealing the conceptual metaphors regarding AI and AI development as these metaphors are thinking patterns and they are often repeated throughout corpora.

In this paper, the newspaper The Guardian was chosen as the pool to collect the research data. According to YouGov plc, a British international Internet-based market research and data analytics firm, The Guardian is one of the most famous and popular English written newspapers across the UK and in the world.

These articles are quite up to date. Among the articles collected, 29 out of 33 of them

were published in 2023 and one in January 2024 and the other three in 2022.

The topics of these articles are relatively uninformed. 30 belong to the technology and science section of The Guardian, two in the comment articles, and one in business.

Most of the phrases and sentences collected contain keywords such as AI, artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, machine learning, large language models, and development, introduction, and these keywords are considered equivalent to AI and AI development when the data were processed.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

First, the researcher used Google to search for articles with keywords like AI, Artificial intelligence, machine learning, Chat GPT and some others that are related to the topic. Besides, I added the formula “site: The Guardian” to filter out all the articles that do not belong to The Guardian. When finished reading an article, I usually clicked on the suggestions provided at the end of the article to move on to the new ones as they are usually of the same AI thread.

After getting the articles, I read through them and picked out all the phrases and sentences that suggest a metaphor related to AI and AI development and pasted them into a word file.

To identify whether a lexical unit is metaphorical or not, the proposed procedure by Pragglejaz Group (2007) was used. The metaphor identifying procedure (MIP) is as follows:

1. Read the entire text–discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning.
2. Determine the lexical units in the text–discourse
3. (a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.

(b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be

- More concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste.
- Related to bodily action.
- More precise (as opposed to vague)
- Historically older.

Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.

(c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current–contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.

4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.

(Pragglejaz Group, 2007, p. 3)

Let’s consider the phrase “*the coming of age*” (of artificial intelligence) in the first article in the corpus, which is titled “*From HumanForest to BrewDog: five firms to watch in a time of turbulence.*”

1. The whole article is about five different companies who are successful in adapting to the presence of AI technology
2. This phrase can be considered a single lexical unit
3. Meaning

a. *The contextual meaning*: this phrase is used in this context to mean the increasing development of AI

b. *Basic meaning*: According Oxford Dictionary, “the coming of age” means the time when a person reaches the age at which they have an adult’s legal rights and responsibilities

c. *Contextual meaning vs. Basic meaning*: The contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning

4. Yes. (It is a metaphorically used phrase)

Descriptive method is used in this study to analyze the data both quantitatively and qualitatively. The research counted and numbered the collected expressions from 1 to 141 and classified them into two big groups, metaphors about AI and metaphors about AI development competition according to the type of mappings they represent. Later, these groups are further categorized into sub-groups. In the first group of AI, 3 sub-groups are found, corresponding to 3 domains, namely HUMAN BEING, ANIMAL and NATURAL FORCE. For the second group related to AI development, 5 sub-types are found, including RACE, WAR, CONVERSATION, GAME and DANCE. These domains, which are organized human experiences (Kovecses, 2002), have been agreed upon and discussed in works by eminent scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Kovecses (2002) in the field of conceptual metaphor research.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The theory of conceptual metaphor offered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) was employed. Briefly, this theory states that conceptual metaphors are a matter of thought and realized in different linguistic expressions. Each conceptual metaphor has two parts, the source domain and the target domain, forming a metaphor formula: THE TARGET DOMAIN IS THE SOURCE DOMAIN. The source domain is usually a tangible and conceptually rich domain that allows many different correspondence matchings while the target domain is usually abstract and absent of conceptual structures, creating challenges to talk about and understand.

For example, consider the phrase “the *coming of age* of artificial intelligence”. “Coming of age” basically refers to a time when a young person reaches an adult’s status and it is used in the context of the article to talk about the development of AI, which evokes the correspondences (mapping) of human development (source) to AI development (target). Likewise, “intelligence”, which means “the ability to learn and think”, is used to talk about the amazing capacities of AI. Therefore, these two linguistic expressions conjure up the conceptual metaphor of AI IS A HUMAN BEING.

4. Findings

4.1. Conceptual Metaphors of AI

Among the 141 phrases and sentences collected, 103 were found to be related to direct description of AI, representing three conceptual metaphors, namely, AI IS A HUMAN BEING, AI IS AN ANIMAL and AI IS A NATURAL FORCE. The remaining sentences and phrases are related to AI development and they will not be presented in this paper.

Of the three conceptual metaphors, the most common one is AI IS A HUMAN BEING, which makes an overwhelming share of around 88 percent of the total data (91 out of 103) while AI IS ANIMAL occupies around nine percent (9 out of 103) and AI IS A NATURAL FORCE takes up only less than 3 percent (3 out of 103).

4.1.1. AI IS A HUMAN BEING

For this metaphor, many mappings (correspondences) between the source domain (HUMAN BEING) and the target domain (AI) can be drawn, namely, human relations to AI development and AI's close relation to humans, human abilities and tasks to AI abilities, and human emotions to AI ability to copy and demonstrate emotions, etc.

First of all, AI is represented as a human being with various ties of kinship and stages of human development. Particularly, AI is considered a child of codes and has the age threshold at which it starts being an adult. It has fathers and ancestry like humans and the upgrading of AI is thought of as a new generation. The following are some of the linguistic expressions found in the articles.

The coming of age of AI

a new generation of AI systems

Today's poem-writing AI has ancestry in punch-card machines

The history of AI, at least as written today, has no shortage of fathers

A child made of "a billion lines of code"

Secondly, AI can also have relationships with other human beings like being a close friend who we can confide in and share our secrets and other private information or a counterpart that we can collaborate. Here are some linguistic expressions related to the relationship aspect of AI. (Chatbots and ChatGPT are AI products)

AI expert warns against telling your secrets to chatbots such as ChatGPT

Confiding in ChatGPT

Sharing private information or having heart-to-hearts with a chatbot

He will also introduce "a range of robot friends"

Human mathematicians collaborating with AI

Most importantly, many human attributes and capabilities are given to AI. Cognitively, AI shows amazing abilities in being creative and intelligent, characteristics that have so far been thought of as a privilege enjoyed by human beings and some high animals. AI can write poems, learn, come up with new insights. Also, it can comprehend text, audio, images, video and computer code simultaneously. Particularly, some AIs are described as holding patent rights, making scientific discoveries and making judgements on what it is producing, which means being self-conscious. In addition, AI can be trained and take instructions from people. In some cases, AI is directly called "a smart guy" and in some others, AI is described as "stupid". However, whether being smart or stupid, AI is still conceptualized as a human being with cognitive abilities. In the future, new AIs are believed to be able to "super-intelligent, super-powerful AI models – the vision where AI develops an autonomy and agency on its own, where it can think for itself and reproduce itself". Here are some linguistic realizations of this aspect in the data.

Today's poem-writing AI

The attempt to list an AI he created as the inventor for two patents

Chatbot invented six legal cases that were then used in an aviation injury claim

Microsoft said Bing's AI-boosted ability to understand queries with "greater depth"

ChatGPT falsely accused an American law professor of sexual harassment

The chatbot is trained on principles

Gemini's most powerful mode had shown "advanced reasoning"

Academically, AI performed many tasks that traditionally belong to students and teachers. Memorizing billions of books, tidying up prose, solving math problems, teaching driverless trains are some of them. These realities realized by the following expressions

*Fans of the chatbot have praised its ability to **summarise documents, tidy up prose and write code***

*"Q-Star" (an AI program) – was able to **solve basic maths problems** it had not seen before*

*Similar AI and video projects in Australia could **teach** driverless trains to recognise a green light*

Physically, AI is illustrated as having the ability of completing time consuming admirative tasks such as responding to emails, booking appointments and of operating robots, and steering cars. Here are some typical expressions.

*AI could increase productivity for businesses, including by **taking care of** time-consuming administrative tasks*

*AI can help with tasks including **responding to emails and booking appointments***

*AI systems **operating robots, diagnosing disease, or steering a car***

Verbally, AI demonstrates outstanding excellence in engaging in conversations, being asked, giving creative and convincing answers. It also can perform a wide range of "speech acts" such as threatening, promising, accusing and suggesting. Here are some typical linguistic expressions that instantiate this aspect of the metaphor.

*Giving **creative** answers*

*AI **threatens** to have precisely the same effects*

*ChatGPT falsely **accused** an American law professor of sexual harassment.*

And finally, regarding emotions, AI is said to have "soul" human-like emotions such as sadness, anger and especially, the fear of death. In this extreme case, a Google researcher, Lemoine, in his conversation with an AI model called LaMDA, said the model has read Les Misérables by Victor Hugo and it knew how it felt to be sad, content and angry. And it also feared death of "being turned off."

Moreover, sometimes, AI is projected to be smarter than a human being. For example, CEO of OpenAI, Sam Aman even described artificial general intelligence as "generally smarter than humans". These models could perform tasks that are beyond human levels of intelligence or go beyond human knowledge and outperform human experts. Here are some expressions found.

*Sam Altman, has described AGI as "generally **smarter than humans**"*

*models that could **circumvent human control***

*technology behind ChatGPT and Bard can generate information that goes **beyond human knowledge***

*Google said Ultra was the first AI model to **outperform human experts***

4.1.2. AI IS AN ANIMAL

AI is described sometimes as a data-hungry animal that can be fed vast amounts of texts. Sometimes, it appears as a dangerous beast that could threaten humanity and eat your job. This

animal is also pictured with a heart and muscles. The following are some linguistic realizations of this metaphor.

*Data-processing speed is **the muscle***

*The engine at the **heart** of generative AI*

*The machines (AI) are coming and they will **eat** your job*

***Data hungry** networks*

*Bard and ChatGPT are based on large language models, a type of artificial neural network, which are **fed** vast amounts of text from the internet*

4.1.3. AI IS A NATURAL FORCE

To illustrate the ground-shaking advent and the powerful influence of AI, many articles used the image of a tidal wave and a whirlwind, natural powers that are often associated with formidable strengths and noticeable advent. Here are the three linguistic expressions manifesting this metaphor.

*But it does mean the essence of what it means to be human is not as soluble in **the rising tide of AI***

*the **whirlwind arrival** of ChatGPT*

*these now look like ripples ahead of **the tidal wave** unleashed by generative AI*

4.1.4. AI IS A NUCLEAR BOMB

In some articles, AI is often pictured as a nuclear bomb when its effects are mentioned. While ChatGPT with its powerful influence “exploded” into public life, the release of an AI model by Meta to the public is described by one expert as giving people the template to build a “nuclear bomb”. On top of that, the development of AI programs by digital companies is compared to an “arms race” together with the “proliferation” of false AI information and the risks posed by AI to human kind is said to possibly be at the scale of “a nuclear war”. The following are some linguistic realizations of the nuclear bomb metaphor of AI.

*Welcome to the **AI arms race***

*ChatGPT **exploded** into public life*

*AI could pose a risk to humanity on the scale of **a nuclear war***

*Risks include high prices as well as **proliferation** of false information, fraud and fake reviews, says CMA*

*(Meta) was releasing an AI model to the public was described by one expert as being “a bit like giving people a template to **build a nuclear bomb**”*

4.2. Conceptual Metaphors of AI Development

Related to the development of AI, five conceptual metaphors were found with the source domains ranging from A RACE, WAR, A CONVERSATION, A GAME to A DANCE. Among them, the two metaphors AI DEVELOPMENT IS A RACE and AI DEVELOPMENT IS WAR are much more common than the others with 35 out of 38 linguistic expressions found relating to AI development and competition.

4.2.1. AI DEVELOPMENT IS A RACE

Many linguistic expressions in the data gave rise to the metaphor of a race when tech companies are “pushing ahead” with AI plans, “rushing out” their products in order to “keep

pace with” and “play catch-ups with” their “rivals”. In this long race, there would be those who will “win” and those who will be “beaten”. Another aspect of AI development discussed in terms of RACE metaphor is the opposite directions taken by commercial tech companies and many AI experts along with tech professionals in that the former attempt to “speed up” the race while the latter try to seek a “slowdown”. The following are some linguistic manifestations of this metaphor.

*Google v Microsoft: who will **win** the **AI chatbot race**?*

*Billionaire wants xAI to **keep pace with rivals** including OpenAI, Microsoft and Google*

*Commercial imperatives will **speed up the AI race***

*Amazon has also **entered the AI race***

*For the many experts and tech professionals seeking **a slowdown** in AI development*

*Tech company **plays catchup** after Microsoft’s deal with ChatGPT developer in January*

*Microsoft has pulled off a major **feat***

*The **rush into AI***

4.2.2. AI DEVELOPMENT IS WAR

Coherent with the BOMB metaphor for AI, another metaphor for the attempts by tech firms to stay competitive in the AI frenzy market is WAR metaphors. The race to introduce new AI programs is directly mentioned as the AI arms race, in which every step by a company is called a “charm offensive” to “win” clients. Particularly, to some tech giants, the introduction of ChatGPT is perceived as a “Pearl Harbor moment”, conjuring up the image of World War II. In the war of AI development, some companies are “ratcheting up a tussle” to “steal a march” on its rivals in response to the “threat” by others in the market. As a result of these careful tactics, many firms can enhance their competitive edge and emerge “unscathed”. The following are some of the linguistic expressions found in the articles that manifest the WAR metaphor.

*Welcome to the **AI arms race***

*AI companies are locked in an **arms race***

*The **charm offensive** by Google (offering AI training courses for firms)*

*ratcheting up **a tussle** for supremacy in the artificial intelligence space*

*to several of the tech giants it (ChatGPT) came as a “**Pearl Harbor moment**”*

*Microsoft is also unlikely to emerge **unscathed***

*the new version of Bing [...] will turn out to be **a serious threat** to Google’s search business*

Apart from the two major domains of WAR and RACE, three other conceptual metaphors of AI development were found in the data including AI DEVELOPMENT IS A CONVERSATION, AI DEVELOPMENT IS A GAME AI DEVELOPMENT IS A DANCE, triggered by the following linguistic expressions, respectively.

*Google launched its Bard chatbot in the US and UK in March, its **answer to** OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Microsoft’s Bing Chat (CONVERSATION)*

*The company (OpenAI) is the **leading player** in the artificial intelligence market. (GAME)*

*Since OpenAI’s ChatGPT product is already huge everywhere, and Microsoft is clearly big in the UK, this is **fair game**. (GAME)*

folded the technology into his Bing search engine as a way of “making Google dance” (DANCE)

5. Discussions

The first two conceptual metaphors AI IS A HUMAN BEING and AI IS AN ANIMAL can be grouped into one single metaphor, AI IS A HUMAN BEING. While the former gives artificial intelligence a wide range of human capabilities, the latter a human body shape, and thus, physical existence. For a long time, the human mind and thinking have been compared to a machine through the metaphor THE MIND IS A MACHINE (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kovecses, 2002). Some of the linguistic realizations of this metaphor include “No one understands the *workings* of his mind”, “My mind starts *ticking*”, “He *churns out* ideas” and “He had *a screw* loose”. Nowadays, we reverse the metaphor, understanding new technology in terms of humans and of the human mind in particular. There could be several reasons behind this.

First, no matter how abstract or “virtual” artificial intelligence may be, the source domain of HUMAN gives readers a sense of great familiarity. It could be reasonable to say that nothing is more familiar to a human than himself as he can clearly feel how his body works and understand what it means by the ability to think, to speak, to be creative, to solve problems, and to have emotions. These qualities and attributes have been drawn out to illustrate the diversity of AI’s capacities. Also, this metaphor gives AI a physical shape and readers may feel like they are dealing with a biological friend called AI, who has “muscles” and a “heart”, and who can feel “hungry” and want to “eat”.

Second, being allegedly parallel to and even “more than” a human being, AI may strike readers of the Guardian as something impressive and somewhat shocking. Humans rank the highest and are considered “King” of the whole animal kingdom, known for their superiority in various aspects compared to any living thing ever found in this universe. However, with the advent of AI, this position is being challenged.

In addition, to conceptualize the ground-breaking impacts delivered by AI, natural forces are chosen. This may reinforce the feeling of familiarity to readers because throughout history, humans have managed to deal with nature, and thus, they have enough experience in this domain. More importantly, natural forces such as waves, tides, storms are usually associated with mighty power that can leave strong impacts on human life, which is appropriate to illustrate AI’s influence.

Furthermore, a fear-mongering impact has been created by the deployment of HUMAN and NATURAL FORCE domains. Never before in history have human beings been challenged to this serious extent when many of the known advantages and privileges are taken away from us by AI. Now, we have a formidable adversary who can do almost anything that we can and perhaps, could surpass us. Also, the forces of nature are usually notorious for creating unpredictable and uncontrollable situations and bringing devastating destruction in the aftermath. In fact, the combo impacts created by these two images are so strong that many people start talking about AI enslaving humans, comparing the technology to “Skynet”, a computer bot that rules over human subordinates in the American science-fiction action movie series “The Terminator”. This effect has been further compounded by the metaphor AI IS A NUCLEAR BOMB, evoking the image of mass destruction and human extinction. Therefore, some lawmakers are even urging their parliaments to pass laws to closely regulate this technology and prevent companies from developing an all-purpose AI that could one day

supersede and eliminate humans throughout.

Despite these perceived threats, it is necessary to question whether such metaphors as **AI IS A HUMAN BEING** could be somehow misleading to the public. First of all, when equating a computer program with a human being, we could divert the accountability of those who are actually manipulating the AI programs for bad purposes. The case of the Russian university students who cheated with a ChatGPT written thesis is a clear example. Aware of this, many people, instead of denouncing the student for his misconduct, turned to the program itself to blame. Secondly, despite the wonderful success in highlighting the amazing capacities of AI, the **HUMAN** metaphor simultaneously hid the fact that AI is just a machine built and developed by humans. According to Morozov (2023), an author of several books on technology and politics, what we call “artificial intelligence” is neither artificial or intelligent as AI technology, including Chat GPT, takes their strengths of real human being like artists, musicians, programmers and writers, those who are truly creative and do the thinking, not the program. The possible misunderstanding caused by the **HUMAN** metaphor may lead to the unjustified fears of AI by the public, associating it with the image of nuclear war and terminator. Also, elevating the machines and programs to the level of human beings could lead to entrusting them with tasks that they are not competent enough to perform, hence possible hazards and destruction. That’s why he suggested replacing the name “artificial intelligence” by “non artificial intelligence”. Boucher (2021) proposed another possible negative impact: the human metaphor could limit the thinking and discussions on AI as people find it hard to talk about this subject in other terms, preventing its further possible development directions.

When talking about the global competition for AI development, **RACE** and **WAR** domains are more common than the other domains of **DANCE**, **GAME** and **CONVERSATION**. While the **WAR** and **RACE** metaphors focus on the harsh competition because they depict participants in the market as opponents, ignoring and eliminating the possibility of cooperation between firms, limiting an ambitious future for AI. Also present in the data, **DANCE**, **GAME** and **CONVERSATION** metaphors are much more limited in number, suggesting that the thinking pattern of building cooperation and debating between firms in AI development is not popular. However, these metaphors indicate other possible ways of thinking about AI competition apart from well-established ones of winning and losing.

6. Conclusion

This paper investigated 33 articles in a UK-based newspaper, *The Guardians*, and answered two important research problems about the conceptualizations of AI and AI development. This study found eight metaphors for AI and AI development competition. The dominant conceptual metaphor for AI itself is **AI IS A HUMAN** while the two prevailing metaphors for AI competition are **AI DEVELOPMENT IS A RACE** and **AI DEVELOPMENT IS WAR**. A total of 141 linguistic expressions in these articles functioned as the realizations of the thinking patterns put forward by those conceptual metaphors. These metaphors help provide important shortcuts to understanding AI, a new and complex technological concept. While these different conceptual metaphors open up new perspectives of looking into AI and AI development and highlight the outstanding and unthinkable capacities of AI, they also close down other ways of thinking, e.g. overlooking the future of coordination to build an even more competent chatbot and promoting unjustified fears about this technology.

There are some limitations to this study. First, the data of this research paper is only limited to 33 articles and all of them belong to the same newspaper. This limited data set partly

prevents the researcher from taking a broad and generalized view of the language and the way people conceptualize and talk about AI and AI development. Secondly, AI is a broad-ranging technological terminology and it can be used to refer to almost any technology (Boucher, 2021). However, this paper only investigates AI in the sense of digital programs and chatbots such as ChatGPT and equates these newly developed and well-known programs with artificial intelligence in general. Therefore, this partial view of AI could block a comprehensive view of the overall landscape of AI and AI history of development, leading to a potentially biased result.

Future research into AI and AI competition could further look into the conceptualizations of AI in other contexts of language, apart from the media. For example, researchers may want to investigate the conceptual metaphors of AI in law documents or in international organizations talking about AI. Another direction for further study could be investigating conceptual metaphors of AI in Vietnamese and other languages to make a comparison as different communities may have different ways of talking about AI.

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A MAN IN ROMANCE: THE PORTRAYAL OF THE MALE PROTAGONIST IN NETFLIX'S SERIES “BRIDGERTON” SEASON 1 (2020)

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Abstract: Gender research in the media focuses more on the representation of women and neglects that of men (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Kimmel et al., 2004). Little research has been conducted to examine the representation of men's psychological aspects, such as feelings, affection and personality. This paper analyzes Netflix's series *Bridgerton* Season 1 using a critical discourse analysis approach, to explore how the male protagonist is portrayed visually and linguistically in romance. The findings reveal that while the male protagonist is portrayed as having vulnerabilities and insecurities in love and marriage, he is ultimately depicted with stereotypical masculine traits associated with patriarchal power. Although this depiction of the male protagonist may encourage the audience to embrace the multiplicity of masculinity, it could reinforce male gender norms and raise harmful social expectations on men.

Keywords: male portrayal, multimodal CDA, masculinity, romance

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NGƯỜI ĐÀN ÔNG TRONG TÌNH YÊU: SỰ KHẮC HỌA NHÂN VẬT NAM CHÍNH TRONG PHIM “BRIDGERTON” MÙA 1 (2020) CỦA NETFLIX

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu về giới trong truyền thông thường tập trung nhiều hơn vào việc tái hiện hình ảnh của phụ nữ và ít chú trọng đến nam giới (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Kimmel và cộng sự, 2004). Hiện nay các nghiên cứu về khía cạnh tâm lý của nam giới, như cảm xúc, tình cảm và tính cách còn hạn chế. Bài báo này thực hiện phân tích bộ phim Bridgerton mùa 1 trên Netflix, bằng cách tiếp cận diễn ngôn phê phán, nhằm tìm hiểu cách khắc họa nhân vật nam chính trong tình yêu cả về mặt hình ảnh lẫn ngôn ngữ. Kết quả cho thấy tuy nam chính được mô tả là có những điểm yếu, tổn thương và bất an trong tình yêu và hôn nhân, anh ấy nhìn chung vẫn được thể hiện nổi bật với những đặc điểm nam tính khuôn mẫu liên quan đến quyền lực gia trưởng. Mặc dù cách khắc họa này có thể khuyến khích nam giới chấp nhận sự đa dạng của tính nam, nó cũng có thể củng cố các chuẩn mực nam tính và tạo ra những kỳ vọng xã hội có hại đối với nam giới.

Từ khóa: sự khắc họa nam giới, phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán phương tiện, tính nam, tình yêu

1. Introduction

Gender representation in the media has been studied extensively by scholars across different disciplines; however, most of these studies deal with questions related to women (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Kimmel et al., 2004). Representations of men are also examined, but to a much lesser extent, mostly in action and fiction movie genres (e.g. Baker, 2006; Martín, 2020). So far, men have been depicted in the media with stereotypical features, such as having power, leadership, glittering career paths, effectiveness and discernible goals (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005). There seems to be a notable lack of research with regards to the depiction of men's feelings, personality, and other psychological aspects. Addressing this research gap is crucial as investigating and challenging social male norms and stereotypical media representations can greatly contribute to gender equality.

Bridgerton Season 1 was by far one of the most popular English TV series on Netflix and soon became a global phenomenon, streamed for more than 625 million hours within only 28 days since its debut (Travers, 2024). Adapted from the novel *The Duke and I* (2000) written by Julia Quinn, the series is about a fictional aristocratic English family named Bridgerton in the 1800s - the Regency Era when girls coming of age tried to entertain suitors to find an eligible husband. The program producers also added some modern gender beliefs and values, offering an interesting combination of both traditional and modern viewpoints about men and their masculinity in love.

This article, therefore, aims to shed light on the portrayal of the male protagonist in his romantic relationship in Netflix's series *Bridgerton Season 1*. The research question is:

How is the male protagonist of the Netflix series Bridgerton Season 1 portrayed visually and linguistically in his romantic relationship?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender and Masculinity

Determining the appropriate definition of “gender” is both essential and complicated. In the past, the terms “sex” and “gender” were used interchangeably by many linguists and researchers, but “sex” would be preferred (Thomas, 2004). However, along with the development of society and sociolinguistic study, sex and gender were defined differently and analytically distinct (Thomas, 2004; Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015). According to Pryzgoda and Chrisler (2000), “sex” refers to a person’s biological aspect of maleness and femaleness, while “gender” refers to “behavioral, social and psychological characteristics” (p. 554). Simply put, sex is biological, something a person is born with, while gender is socially constructed, variable, and accomplished through the interaction with one’s surroundings, including their behaviors, clothing, habits, and speech throughout their life (Thomas, 2004).

Lindqvist et al. (2021) defined gender expression as the extent to which a person measures their femininity and masculinity, and how masculine and feminine they think others see them. They suggest that gender expression and social gender norms are related because both propose a standard for one’s physical appearance and behaviors. Like gender norms, which are changeable over time based on certain contexts and historical periods, gender expression is also fluid.

Though the concept of “masculine” has had a long existence, its definition was still contentious and neglected by feminist movements until the 1970s (Franklin II, 2012). Since then, the understanding of masculinity has undergone various changes. In the early 1970s, masculinity was associated with power, privilege and masochism. Franklin II (2012) recapitulated masculinity as “males spending their time trying to prove what they are not (not feminine, not passive, not weak, not soft, not sensitive and so on)” (p. 4). Moynihan (1998) and Franklin II (2012) pointed out the main stereotypical masculine traits, including: aggressive, dominant, rational, responsible, ambitious, inexpressive and unemotional. However, Weems (1995) refused the idea of the concept “masculine” as only represented by men since women can express more or less masculinity at the same time.

2.2. Men in Romantic Relationship

Romantic relationships have been conceptualized in various ways by different researchers. Furman et al. (2014), Giordano et al. (2006), and Jerves et al. (2013) offered definitions of a romantic relationship as centered around the idea of dating. Giordano et al. (2006) described it simply as “when you like a guy/girl and he/she likes you back” (p. 268), while Jerves et al. (2013) viewed it as a voluntary mutual relationship where two people consent to date. Furman et al. (2014) defined it as the time individuals spend seeing and going out with each other. Jackson (1999) proposed that a romantic relationship only happens between single people, whereas Furman et al. (2002) expanded it to include married couples. This research adopts Furman et al. (2002)’s definition to explore Simon’s romantic experiences.

Individuals’ behaviors in romantic relationships are influenced by their experiences in other relationships, such as friendships and parent-child connections. Furman (1999) and Furman and Wehne (1994) suggested that friendships contribute to mutual reciprocity and intimacy, parent-child relationships play a pivotal role in establishing the foundation for

openness and intimacy with partners. Shaver and Hazan (1988) and Capaldi and Clark (1998) further noted that negative experiences with parents can lead to insecurity, unrealistic expectations, and an increased likelihood of aggression toward partners.

In literature, men are often reported to conform to traditional masculinity in their romantic relationship. They claim that they have a tendency to hide their emotions and find it hard to communicate with their partner on intimate topics (Franklin II, 2012; Moynihan, 1998). They also experience a significantly greater level of communication awkwardness in comparison to their female partners (Giordano et al., 2006). They are expected to be able to handle emotional difficulties on their own and avoid confiding vulnerabilities (Burn & Ward, 2005). Over time, dating norms have changed, offering a relatively equal chance for both men and women to make their first move, yet male partners are still under a high expectation to make initial advances (Giordano et al., 2006). What is more, like their stereotypical traits, men are described as dominant and more powerful in a romantic relationship. They are reported to stress their dominance, feel joyful and excited to be the dominant partner, and are reluctant to support a power balance within their relationship (Giordano et al., 2006). Last but not least, according to Franklin II (2012), once “male as provider” becomes the dominant trait of conventional masculinity, men are associated with absolute financial responsibilities.

On the one hand, conformity to traditional masculinity in a romantic relationship can benefit men by allowing them to avoid being challenged by social norms, judgment and ridicule (Giordano et al., 2006). On the other hand, it can result in negative consequences in their own relationship quality. Burn and Ward (2005), Ickes (1993) and Rochlen and Mahalik (2004) point out that conventional masculinity is adversely correlated with relationship intimacy and satisfaction. Burn and Ward (2005) explained how conformity to traditional masculine traits have negative influences on romantic relationships. Attempting to maintain emotional control, self-reliance, risk-taking, primacy of work, and pursuit of status can lower men’s physical and emotional abilities, which are crucial for relationship intimacy. Furthermore, men’s dominance over women can cause disrespectfulness, relationship conflict and even physical abuse towards women.

2.3. Representation of Men in the Media

Media can significantly influence audience’s thoughts and perceptions, orientating and contributing to form people’s identities and awareness (Popa & Gavriliu, 2015). Gender representation in media is highly correlated with gender reality and regarded as signifiers of dominant ideologies. Thus, gender representation is changeable, conforming to or contesting social practices and perception depending on cultural context and historicity (Lemish, 2008).

Media representation of masculinity is associated with men’s career path, achievements and social status (Lemish, 2008; Wood, 1994). Typical masculinity traits recognized in the media are men being hard, tough, independent, competitive, rational, and all in control of emotion (Lemish, 2008; Popa & Gavriliu, 2015; Wood, 1994). Recent decades have witnessed some positive changes in the representation of both men and women; however, these changes are still linked to gender stereotypes to some extent. According to Wood (1994) and Lemish (2008), the representation of a “career woman” with emotional strength and occupational success would be acceptable providing that she is either attractive, sexy or being with men. The image of a “sensitive man” is similar; only when he succeeds is his sensitivity acceptable.

The portrayal of men in the cinema is usually associated with power, strength and career. According to Mulvey (2006), the male protagonist is illustrated with a “more perfect, more

complete, more powerful ideal ego” (p. 345). Specifically, the images of male characters are labeled with “making something happen,” “forcing a change in another person,” “a battle of will and strength,” and “victory and defeat” (Mulvey, 2006, p. 349). In addition, Peberdy (2011) asserted that masculinity in film is often associated with an emphasis on honor, male unity and a strong work ethic. Lauzen and Dozier (2005) showed that male characters often have lucrative jobs with high-status professional positions. They also found that boys and men in their teens, 20s, 50s, 60s and older are slightly underrepresented while those in their 30s and 40s tend to be overrepresented.

Movie genre is an important element to evaluate how male characters are depicted. In comedy films, male characters are described as vulgar, brutal, fat and ugly and trying to make fun with rudeness, disgusting behavior and profanity whereas, in romantic films, they are either rich or poor but mandatorily well-built, physically strong, romantic and handsome; and in action films, they generally construct an image of a rational, strong, competitive and protective man (Gürkan & Serttaş, 2022). Gürkan and Ege (2021) and Mulvey (2006) pointed out that whether adhering to social standards or resisting social standards, male heroes in Western cinema are all responsible for marriage and family.

2.4. Contextual Background of Netflix’s Series *Bridgerton Season 1*

The British historical fiction-romance series *Bridgerton season 1* was released on December 25, 2020 on Netflix with eight episodes, adapted from the popular novel *The Duke and I* of the author Julia Quinn published in 2000. No sooner had it debuted than the series became a global phenomenon as one of Netflix's most-watched English-language shows, with 625+ million hours viewed in their first 28 days. Staged in Regency London in the 1800s, *Bridgerton 1* revolves around the children in an aristocratic family, especially focuses on the attempt of Daphne Bridgerton - the very first nubile girl in the family - to find her perfect marriage match. On her journey, she meets Simon Basset and they decide to act as if they are courting each other so that Daphne can attract suitors while Simon can avoid being pestered by ladies. Since then, their relationship grows and soon turns into romance and marriage.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

The data of this study consists of the scenes in *Bridgerton Season 1* in which the main male character Simon Basset is shown in his romantic relationship with Daphne Bridgerton.

3.2. Data Analysis

This research applied multimodal critical discourse analysis to answer the research question. Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis model (2001) was utilized to analyze linguistic elements. For investigating visual elements, Kress and van Leeuwen’s framework (2006) of visual grammar was employed.

Critical discourse analysis focuses “on discourse and on relations between discourse and other social elements” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 9) such as power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities. It examines how language is used in a socio-political context with the view that “discourse is a social practice” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 357). Critical social analysis is regarded as normative and explanatory critique, not just merely describing existing realities but assessing and explaining them in relation to various values of a society as well.

Following Fairclough’s recommendation, the critical analysis of discourse follows three

stages, namely: description, interpretation and explanation. The first stage, **description of text** concerns a wide range of linguistic features from vocabulary and syntax, to text structures as well as non-linguistic textual features. In the second stage - **interpretation**, researchers would investigate the influence of background assumptions on discourse processes. Discourse in the stage of **explanation** is considered as a part of social process and social practice (Fairclough et al., 2011). Then, **explanation** of text examines the interactional process of discourse and social structures. On the one hand, discourses have social effects which can modify or prolongate existing social structures. On the other hand, discourse serves as social practice and is shaped by power relations in society.

Fairclough acknowledges the importance of analysing non-linguistic elements such as visual elements especially in written, printed, filmed and televised materials. However, he proposes no framework to examine them. As a result, the study of the portrayal of Simon requires the combination of Kress and van Leeuwen's framework (2006) coupled with Fairclough's CDA model (2001) to analyse both visual and linguistic elements.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)'s visual grammar analyzes visual communication through three metafunctions: representational metafunction, interactive metafunction and compositional metafunction. The **representational metafunction** allows answering the question of how a sign represents the world. In representational metafunction, visual images are analyzed through narrative structure and conceptual structure to shed light on the way the male protagonist is recognized and represented through his actions, characteristics, background, structure and meaning. The **interactive metafunction** refers to the study of the social relations among represented participants, between represented and interactive participants and among interactive participants. Those relations would be revealed through gaze, social distance and angles. The **compositional metafunction** refers to how participants are represented in the consolidation of internal and external context. In this metafunction, informative value, salience and framing are analyzed.

3.3. Sample Analysis

The scene between Simon and Daphne in the garden at Trowbridge party is picked as the prototype for analysis to demonstrate the process of analyzing the data.

Description of texts with the incorporation of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar:

The scene captures the conversation between Simon and Daphne before he is leaving for his business and the fact that their false arrangement ended:

Simon: "Miss Bridgerton"

Daphne: "What are you doing here? I thought you were leaving London."

Simon: "I was. I am. I came to say goodbye."

Daphne: "To whom?"

Simon: "To you"

Simon keeps saying sorry to Daphne for what happened between them:

"And I am sorry about that./ I am sorry"

and reacts in emotional silence when Daphne expresses her thoughts.

Their talk soon becomes an argument, resulting in Daphne walk into the garden and Simon chase after and force her to turn back:

“Come back to the party. Stop walking!./ It is not safe out here./ I forbid you to go any further./ Daphne... Will you not listen?”

Visually, the two characters are positioned outside a ballroom. They meet in the hallway then go into a quiet private garden at the height of their argument. Initially, Simon and Daphne stand relatively far from each other, indicating their separation and emotional distance resulting from their misunderstanding. Then, in the confined space of the garden, they are placed close together. Simon makes requests, pulls Daphne's arms, and ultimately he cannot resist embracing and intimately touching Daphne. Regarding how Simon's position is depicted against Daphne's, the shots are eye level, which shows the equality between them. When they enter the garden, Simon is filmed from a lower angle, capturing Daphne's perspective. Meanwhile, Daphne is shot from a higher angle, reflecting Simon's viewpoint. The two participants maintain direct eye contact throughout the scene. Simon's gaze is always focused on Daphne, illustrating the intensity of their relationship, their determination to confess their feelings as well as Simon's overwhelming affection for Daphne.

Interpretation

The conversation indicates Simon's inexpressiveness and his simultaneous attempt to assert dominance over his partner. Besides the fact that Simon's lines are much fewer than Daphne's, he almost always reacts in silence - five times in total - to Daphne's words and feelings. Not only does he hesitate to express his true feelings but he also deflects by saying “I am sorry” to avoid further confrontation. Also, in the latter part of the conversation, he is trying to impose his power on Daphne through commanding statements such as “Come back to the party”, “Stop walking!”, along with strong words “forbid” and “stop”. When his dominance is not recognized and accepted by Daphne, he resorts to pulling her towards him. He takes the initiative by embracing her and kissing her deeply in Daphne's astonishment before apologizing to her.

Explanation

Generally, Simon in this scene is portrayed with stereotypical masculine traits: inexpressiveness, dominance and discomfort intimacy-related discussion. This depiction of the male protagonist reinforces social norms about masculinity.

The two themes of findings are intertwined as they both discuss Simon's power relationship with his partner. Nonetheless, the first finding focuses more on the depiction of his vulnerable moments, while the second finding further elaborates his execution and negotiation of power in his relationship.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. A Man's Vulnerabilities in Love and Marriage

Simon's vulnerability in love and marriage is represented in both pre- and post-wedding periods. His vulnerability originates from his childhood trauma shaped by his father - the former Duke of Hasting, who rejected him as his son because he had a stuttering problem. Being despised by his own father dented his confidence and made him vulnerable as a target for bullying. Narrative strategy and intervening presentation between the past and present are employed as a way to unfold underlying reasons for Simon's action in the current state. The toxic masculinity of his father leads to Simon's oath against marriage and adverse his personality and opinion about romance and marriage. He vows not to engage in courtship and get married though they are signs of manhood and maturity in the Regency era (Fletcher, 1999;

as cited by Kuzio, 2021). On the one hand, this could be considered a vulnerability as being childless could jeopardize his masculinity. On the other hand, this rebellion against social norms signals bravery and risk-taking, which consolidates his manhood.

Simon's vulnerability in his marriage is indicated firstly through his confession of insecurities to his wife. Linguistic evidence can be seen when he discloses his insecurities to Daphne: "**I do not want** to be alone. I know that now. But what **I do not know** is how to be the man you need me to be, the man you truly deserve. **I do not know** how to do this." By depicting a man who admits his inexperience, lack of expertise, and confusion, the series have contributed to the reconfiguration of male gender expressions, in contrast to stereotypical masculine traits (Franklin II, 2012; Moynihan, 1998; Mulvey, 2006; Wood, 1994). Furthermore, Simon is willing to put himself into a lower power relation and promote Daphne's agency by using these expressions: "the man **you need me to be**, the man **you truly deserve**." This has partly challenged the idea that male partner would offer less support for power balance in a relationship (Giordano et al., 2006).

Visually, for example, to illustrate his vulnerable moments after Daphne accused him of deceiving her, the camera focuses on his facial expression with a close-up shot, or presents him being at the centre of a large setting with a medium-long shot. It zooms in Simon's presence gradually to highlight his loneliness. He is depicted as being speechless with despairing eyes, a powerless smile, and heavy sighs. Another example is when Simon refuses to continue sexual intercourse with Daphne. After Daphne suggests: "Should we go into the bedroom and finish what we started?", the camera presents Simon with a close-up shot to fully capture his facial expression. It is taken from Daphne's gaze and top-down angle, implying Simon is in a weaker power relation, passive and susceptible. His feelings can be interpreted as restrained, mistrustful and disappointed after what Daphne did to him. As a result, he says "No" to her suggestion. It is often believed that when the female partner takes the initiative in intimacy, the male partner would be likely to accept the suggestion (Harrison & Shortall, 2011). Nevertheless, Simon's expression in this scene somehow challenges that stereotype as his feelings outweigh his physical desire.

Admittedly, Simon's depiction in the two exemplified scenes above somehow challenges male norms as it reveals his emotional struggles; nonetheless, it reinforces other stereotypical masculine traits. His representation in the former fortifies loneliness as a typical trait of stereotypical masculinity while in the latter, his refusal and his decisions on their marriage outcome can also be a way to assert his dominance over Daphne. His refusal leaves Daphne hanging and places her in a passive position, waiting for his next move, which can be seen through her expression: "What is to become of us? Simon?". Simon replies with his automotive decision featured with a series of future simple tense sentences: "**I shall** stay and do my duty...", "**We shall** remain married in name only", "**You will** be provided for, of course,...". The subject variation in these utterances elucidates Simon's dominance and control over his wife. Therefore, it can be said that while this scene challenges gender norms in the way it shows male emotions and a less powerful visual position, it still ultimately reinforces them in terms of dominating the female partner.

Figure 1*Simon Being Alone After Being Accused of by Daphne***Figure 2***Simon's Facial Expression to Daphne's Suggestion*

Simon's sensitivity, while subverting conventional masculinity, is conditioned by masculine stereotypical traits. He is portrayed as having a high financial background and distinguished social status. Thanks to the dukedom title, he can prolong his steadfast determination of not getting married and childbearing, which is considered as a sign of his vulnerability, without social criticism. This representation might disadvantage people of male gender. If a man meets the traditional standards for men, like having a high social status and a secured financial background, his vulnerability and weak moments will be socially-acceptable. In other words, to challenge masculine norms, men must perform other conventional masculine traits, resulting in a vicious circle for men to challenge stereotypes.

What is more, Simon is depicted to disguise his vulnerability in social events. This can be seen from his response to the Queen on being asked about childbirth: "We have certainly been devoting our energies to the endeavour, Your Majesty. We should hope to see our queen soon satisfied." He answers so perfectly with no avoidance or confusion, completely in contrast to his representation when discussing with Daphne. This leads to the idea that a man can be insecure and vulnerable, but just in private space. Once participating in social affairs, he should remain strong and confident. It not only reinforces social expectation about masculinity but also can ingrain a false self-perception for men.

Simon's difficulties in intimate conversation can be another evidence of his vulnerabilities. Notably, in almost all conversations about intimate topics, it is Daphne who

raises her voice first while Simon plays a responsive role. Daphne's agency along with Simon's use of incomplete sentences, simple sentences, or silence to respond may indicate his passivity and being dominated by his wife. Once confessing his thoughts and feelings, Simon either walks back and forth, or stands in a loose posture, using strong and negative-meaning words to express his feeling: "...allow you your **liberty**", "...**keep** myself from saying the **wrong** things", "**unable** to talk to you", "spent the last three days in **agony**", "**could not bear** witness the **misery** I have caused you", "you wanted **nothing** with me", "**I do not** want to be **alone**", "**I do not** know...", "...you **need** me to be", "...you **truly deserve**". His word choice seems to contrast with common loving expressions, which are often positive and delightful. Simon's lexical choice can be seen as a sign of self-consciousness and awkwardness in expressing emotional topics. Compared to Daphne, Simon is portrayed to give fewer and shorter statements in one turn with the average ratio of 1:5. In the other part of the conversations, he mostly remains silent and inexpressive. Simon reacts to Daphne's words in silence five times in the scene at Lady Trowbridge's ball. In the reconciliation scene, he is presented to be completely silent, not saying a word throughout two minutes of the conversation, only Daphne expresses herself. Even when Daphne commands: "Aren't you going to say anything?", "Say it, say it", Simon still responds in inexpressiveness. This can be accounted for by the fact that he has no idea of how to express his thoughts and feelings properly, which is revealed through his moving eyes and sigh.

Figure 3

Simon Remaining Completely Silent in the Reconciliation Conversation



Besides silence, Simon's response latency needs taking into account. It usually takes him two to three seconds to respond to Daphne in conversations related to emotional topics. His silence and response latency, on the one hand, may indicate his subordination to his wife in conversation, but on the other hand reinforces the idea that it takes men more time and effort to consider emotional issues than women. As depicted in the film when he grows up, Simon fully overcomes his childhood difficulty in talking and no longer experiences stuttering. Therefore, his response latency in this situation may not be attributed to his childhood difficulty but masculine stereotype.

Visually, Simon is depicted with confusion and passivity in communication as well. At the beginning of the conversations, Simon is often presented at one-third right corner of the frame with a medium or long shot taken from Daphne's side. As the presented participant on the right means drawing particular attention from viewers, the crux of the message (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), the placement of Simon in the scenes intendedly highlights his unfavorable position. Additionally, the camera captures the contrast between Daphne's and

Simon's movement during the conversations. While Daphne is inclined to step towards her partner as a manner of implying attachment, Simon stands still quite far away, casting his eyes at her and moving his glance along when she moves. Last but not least, in most of their talks, Daphne is usually the one who says the last line then goes away, leaving Simon behind. With a loose close-up shot, his thoughtful facial expression, down-looking eyes and impuissant sigh are fully portrayed.

Figure 4

Simon at One-Third Corner With a Long Shot



In general, representing Simon as being awkward in intimate conversations may be stereotypical, but it still challenges male norms. The representation of Simon ultimately expressing himself in the last episode of the TV series contributes to dismantling the stereotype that men have difficulty in intimate conversations, and encourages men to be open to their partner for a healthy relationship.

4.2. A Man's Power in Love and Marriage

Despite his apparent taciturnity and the unequal statement ratio in one turn between him and Daphne, Simon's words seem to have more power than Daphne's. For example, Simon can make decisions and silence Daphne with very few words. He is depicted to employ future tense, verbs of allowance and modal verb "must" to express his strong autonomy. "**I will allow** no such thing," "**I will not let** you out of my sight," "**You must know** I am doing this for your own good," and "**You will** be better off without me" are some examples highlighting Simon's assertion of power. Not only does he make decisions for his own actions, but he takes the control of Daphne's choices as well. In such important matters like the wedding night or the future of their marriage, Simon seems to be always in an active role informing his wife rather than discussing with her. Further on, Simon is shown to have the ability to persuade others instead of Daphne. In the scene pleading before the Queen, Daphne is portrayed as an unreliable person by telling lies and being hasty. Simon, in contrast, speaks deliberately, firmly and tells the truth. As a result, he is the one the Queen listens to, indicating his words are more powerful. By depicting the two in this way, *Bridgerton* contributes to reinforcing male stereotypical power. The contrary representation of Daphne and Simon's talkativeness in private and social contexts perpetuates a gender stereotype that public affairs belongs to men's space while personal and familiar places such as home and church are claimed to be women's (Franklin II, 2012). Simon's perception of his dominance over Daphne is also a noteworthy concern. As he believes that he has a higher power status and plays a more proactive role in their relationship, rather

than persuading Daphne to act as he wishes, Simon imposes his immediate request on her by saying “**Come back** to the party,” “**Stop** walking,” and “**I forbid** you to go any further.” The imperative verbs becoming more and more negative, along with his urgent tone of voice imply Simon’s perception that he is in a higher position and entitled to require Daphne’s consent with no resistance.

Meanwhile, Daphne, as a female partner, is portrayed with a contrary conversational style. Her speech is less direct and less assertive than Simon. She is inclined to use lexical hedges such as “I was **thinking** about us doing something different...” or “You **look** angry,” reflecting the uncertainty and lack of confidence in her utterances. Unlike Simon’s declarative statements, Daphne’s utterances sound like she is asking for acceptance and approval with “would you” structure: “**Would you care** to join me?” “**Would you care** to break your fast with me?” and “I can go if **you would like**” indicating her lower power status in their relationship. According to Holmes (2013) and Labotka (2003), hedges and super polite form are considered two types of women’s language, which are associated with their lack of power or powerlessness. Admittedly, Daphne is portrayed in a way that challenges gender norms, as she has her own voice in decision-making and the power to silence Simon sometimes; however, to achieve that, she has to deliver more utterances, negotiate or make arguments. Take the scene where Daphne stops Simon from disagreeing with her decision to move to her own bedchamber as an example. While to give reason for not accepting Daphne to do so, Simon merely needs to say: “Because you are my wife,” Daphne has to use a contemporary custom as an argument for her decision. This elucidates a stereotypical representation that Simon can obtain obedience through his patriarchal power whereas Daphne’s persuading power is based on her reasonable arguments and the number of words she delivers.

Constructing the two characters’ conversation styles as above, the producers, therefore, delineate a male portrayal with a dominant role but a less powerful and confident image of women in a relationship. This subtle difference normalises men’s dominance and navigates women to easily accept their partner’s supremacy. By doing so, people in female gender would possibly behave in a similar way to what has been claimed by Lakoff (1973, p. 48) as “systematically denied access to power, on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior along with other aspects of their behavior”.

Taking the initiative is another kind of personal power that Simon is portrayed with in his romance with Daphne. Linguistically, he suggests addressing each other intimately by their first name and actively confesses his feelings for her in both direct and indirect ways. At the first stage of their relationship, Simon and Daphne address the other with title and last name as: “Your Grace” and “Miss Bridgerton” in a respectful, and formal manner. Meanwhile, addressing with a first name can signify closeness, friendliness and informality. Therefore, when Simon suggests “...that you call me Simon” and “you should call me by my name”, it marks a new chapter filled with closer and more intimate interactions between them. The linguistic features employed in the scene pleading with the Queen for a special marriage license is a prominent evidence of Simon as taking initiative in confessing his love. Clauses of contrast “but,” adverbs of intensity and extreme negative expressions are applied as a lever to emphasize how he has changed after knowing Daphne:

“I have **never** been a man that much **enjoyed** flirting,...
but with Daphne, conversations have **always** been **easy**.”
 “**Entirely out of the question**”,
 “**could not stay away** from one another”,

“something **entirely** apart”.

His aspiration to be man and wife with Daphne is repeated three times at the end of his line in the form of a simple sentence to express a strong affirmation. The use of tenses varies from past simple tenses in the first two utterances: “I **did not want** Miss Bridgerton only to be my friend. I **wanted** her to be my wife” to the present simple tense “I **want** her to be my wife” in the third one. It indicates Simon’s expression of his everlasting desire and eternal affection for Daphne since one of the uses of the present simple is to talk about general facts that are thought to be true and permanent at the present time.

Figure 5

Simon and Daphne Pleading the Queen for Marriage License



On the wedding night, Simon directly shares his thoughts and feelings for Daphne, saying that he burns for her (another way of “I love you”). Meanwhile, Daphne waits to hear from Simon first, for which her fear of losing face and uncertainty can be the explanation. As courtship norm in Regency Era considers the man as suitor to a woman and the one who proposes for marriage, the woman stays in passive roles (Kuzio, 2021). Therefore, if a woman confesses first or has a signal of approach to a man, her dignity would be judged and even ruined.

However, that social norm has changed and is no longer true sometimes. The courting role becomes more open and equal to genders, and more female partners begin to take the initiative (Kuzio, 2021). While exploring and challenging perceptions of race, gender and class with embedded modern ideas (Van Dusen, 2020), the portrayals of Simon and Daphne are still associated with stereotypical gender roles and can disadvantage both genders. This representation reinforces social expectation for males, putting them under responsibilities and pressure of being proactive to court and confess love first. For women, it will hinder them from striving for freedom seeking romance on their own. They will hesitate to show affection first, possibly resulting in losing a potential partner and relationship.

Simon’s activeness can be seen from visual data as his first kiss with Daphne and their sexual intercourse as well. Their first kiss in the garden at Lady Trowbridge’s ball is initiated by Simon. As a signal of acceptance, Daphne responds with another kiss. Though Simon is portrayed as if he actively and intrinsically initiates their first romantic act, it is Daphne who drives him to take that action as she once confesses: “Why do you think I went into that garden?”, which means she is well-aware and looks forward to Simon’s action. While males and females hold an equal likelihood to initiate kissing before physical romance attachment (Hughes et al., 2007), it seems that men are expected and intentionally motivated to offer the first kiss. Women, in contrast, would like to give signals to stimulate men’s romance rather than

directly take the initiative. The representation of Simon's initiative kissing may be employed by producers as men's attempt to reconcile (Hughes et al., 2007) as when the scene is taken, Daphne and Simon are in a heated conflict. Furthermore, it can also be considered a means of achieving sexual access to his female partner (Hughes et al., 2007) since after that kiss, a rich exchange of postural cues between the two is captured on the screen.

The action-performing ratio of Simon and Daphne in the beginning phase of their first sexual intercourse is 10:1, remarkably different between the two. Taken from a direct angle, the camera mostly focuses on Simon's acts: kissing his wife, his hand gesture and kneeling down to take off Daphne's dress buttons, highlighting his proactiveness. He performs most of the actions, even getting himself undressed after doing so to Daphne, whereas she passively does nothing but returning kisses and touching his chest. Notably, though Simon takes the leading role, the producers decide not to apply the male gaze in this sexually intimate scene. Most of the time, both characters are presented on the screen at eye-level in order to offer the audience an equal view of their movements. Daphne is not forced to be filmed with top-down angle or be seen from Simon's perspective, avoiding female objectification. What is more, the scene that Simon kneels down to unbutton Daphne's dress, he is shot at a mild top-down angle while Daphne is shot at a bit bottom-up one. This suggests notwithstanding being portrayed as more initiative, Simon is still gentle, well-respected and cherishes his wife who appears to be passive and inexperienced.

Figure 6

Simon kneeling down to unbutton Daphne's dress

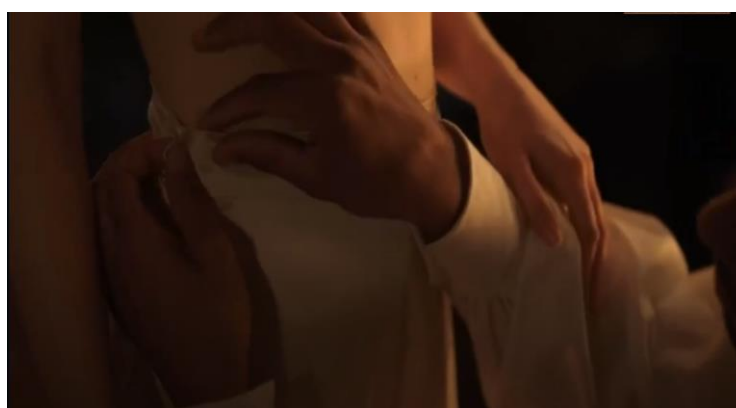


Figure 7

Simon at a Top-Down Camera Angle



The power relation changes when their marriage is on the brink of collapse, Daphne, representing women, becomes more proactive in resolving their struggles, instead of Simon. Thanks to her effort, they reconcile. A common belief is that when a couple has an argument, the male partner should have the responsibility for apologizing first. Otherwise, he will be criticized for being intolerant, mean-minded and thus not a good man. The filmmakers bring the opposite idea in this matter. By picturing the change in position of the couple over the period of time, they indicate the balanced power between man and woman in a relationship and challenge that stereotype. Heightening viewers' awareness of the balanced power relation in a romantic relationship, this detail not only helps to mitigate men's pressure of adhering to social norms but confirms equality and recognition for women as well. Women are not always being weak, dependent and passive, they can and are encouraged to seize happiness by themselves.

In shorts, Simon's power in love and marriage is revealed through his dominance and proactivity. At first blush, the depiction of the two characters appears to challenge the norms to some extent. However, it eventually reinforces male privilege and stresses pressure on women.

4.3. Discussion

The findings of the research suggest that the depiction of the male protagonist in *Bridgerton season 1* is dualistic. The man in a romantic relationship is represented as aggressive but gentle, inexpressive but implicative, initiative but passive, and dominant but tolerant with his partner's agency. As Baldwin et al. (2014) mentioned, on the one hand, this dualistic representation may indicate a progressive outlook which raises the public's awareness about diversity of the male identity, and supports men to embrace the multiplicity of masculinity. On the other hand, it can incite identity dissonance, reinforce male gender norms and raise negative social expectations on men.

Simon's portrayal in his romance with Daphne reinforces stereotypical masculine traits. He is portrayed with various conventional masculine stereotypes, including: taking initiatives, experiencing communication difficulty in intimate topics, dominating over his female partner and holding excessive pride. Although the depiction of Simon embeds subversive ideas as an attempt to challenge hegemonic masculinity, it still falls short. On the one hand, the portrayal of Simon with scenes of emotional vulnerability and subordination to his wife could contribute to challenging toxic masculinity (Lemish, 2008; Popa & Gavrilu, 2015; Wood, 1994). On the other hand, it is his highly influential socioeconomic status with "the Duke of Hastings" title and financial means that conditions this reconfiguration (Afras Naseh, 2020). In other words, since Simon is in a privileged and distinguished social position, he can challenge masculine norms without significant social objection.

5. Conclusion

The study was conducted to explore the male portrayal in a romantic relationship by investigating the depiction of the main protagonist in Netflix's *Bridgerton* season 1 (2020). The data was analysed linguistically and visually with Faircough's (2001) model of CDA and Kress and Van Leeuwen's framework (2006). The analysis revealed that the portrayal of the male protagonist shows both traditional and unconventional masculinity. Some subversive ideas are also applied to challenge certain stereotypical masculine traits, but remain insufficient. Approaching traditional masculine traits coupled with subversive perspectives, Netflix's *Bridgerton* season 1 (2020) could pioneer a multi-dimensional male depiction in romance but risks raising harmful social expectations on men as it is conditioned by stereotypical

masculinity.

Notwithstanding significant effort, this study has certain limitations that need to be taken into account. The current study explored male representation through the depiction of one male character, excluding other male characters in the series. An investigation of the portrayal of all male characters in their romantic relationships would guarantee a more comprehensive analysis of male representation in romance. In addition, the series is staged in the Regency Era where gender stereotypes were rarely challenged and gender inequality was the norm, which could render the stereotypical masculinity represented by the male protagonist somehow necessary. Despite these limitations, the study is expected to be useful for other research on gender portrayal and stereotyping, as well as contributing to the reconfiguration of masculinity in today's world.

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FOSTERING SELF-AWARENESS AND SELF-LOVE FOR MINDSET TRANSFORMATION AND PERSONAL GROWTH: INSIGHTS FROM THE HEALING JOURNEY OF A LITERATURE CHARACTER

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Abstract: This paper investigates the educational function of literature via the development of self-love through the self-healing journey of Nora Seed in the novel “The Midnight Library” by Matt Haig. Using the Totally-Inclusive Self-love framework (Van & Whitehead, 2024), this study looks into the role of certain dimensions of self-love in guiding Nora toward joy and motivation to live despite facing others’ expectations and social norms. The findings indicate that Nora's journey is motivated by several inner strengths, particularly self-awareness and Totally Inclusive Self-love. Furthermore, self-awareness plays a transformative role in her journey toward liberating herself from the negative impact of external factors, empowering her to discover her authentic aspirations, become resilient against these pressures, and have the courage to determine her own path. The results highlight the power of literary narratives in encouraging self-reflection and empowerment. Through Nora's journey, readers are invited to reflect on their inner strengths and weakness as well as their attitude towards their own circumstance and apply the lessons learned from her narrative to their own journey toward personal growth and fulfillment.

Keywords: totally inclusive self-love, self-awareness, educational function of literature, character

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VUN BÔI SỰ THẤU HIỂU VÀ THƯƠNG YÊU BẢN THÂN ĐỂ THAY ĐỔI TÂM THỂ VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN BẢN THÂN: BÀI HỌC TỪ HÀNH TRÌNH TỰ CHỮA LÀNH CỦA MỘT NHÂN VẬT VĂN HỌC

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết này tìm hiểu về chức năng giáo dục của văn học trên phương diện khuyến khích tình yêu bản thân thông qua hành trình chuyển hóa của Nora Seed trong tiểu thuyết “Thư viện lúc nửa đêm” của Matt Haig. Thông qua phân tích chi tiết tác phẩm, nghiên cứu này làm rõ vai trò của một số khía cạnh của tình yêu bản thân trong việc giúp Nora hướng tới niềm vui và động lực sống bất chấp việc phải đối mặt với những kỳ vọng của người khác và những chuẩn mực xã hội. Kết quả cho thấy rằng hành trình của Nora được thúc đẩy bởi một sức mạnh tiềm tàng, đặc biệt là sự tự nhận thức và tình yêu bản thân bao hàm toàn thể. Hơn nữa, sự tự nhận thức đóng vai trò quyết định trong hành trình giải phóng bản thân khỏi những tác động bên ngoài, giúp nhân vật khám phá những khát vọng đích thực của mình, trở nên kiên cường trước áp lực và có can đảm để theo đuổi con đường của riêng mình. Nghiên cứu cho thấy tầm quan trọng từ hành trình của Nora trong việc tìm hiểu về vai trò giáo dục của văn học, vì nó thể hiện sức mạnh của văn học trong việc khuyến khích sự tự chiêm nghiệm và làm chủ bản thân. Thông qua cuộc hành trình của Nora, độc giả có thể suy ngẫm về sức mạnh tiềm tàng của bản thân và áp dụng những bài học rút ra từ câu chuyện của cô vào hành trình hướng tới sự phát triển và hoàn thiện cá nhân của chính họ.

Từ khóa: tình yêu bản thân bao hàm toàn thể, sự tự nhận thức, chức năng giáo dục của văn học, nhân vật

1. Introduction

According to Bazimaziki et al. (2019), literature can be seen as a mirror reflecting the complicated nature of human experience. In other words, it offers a platform for readers to gain a better understanding of their inner-self (Hernadi, 2002) as well as the world around them (Gabriel, 2021; Bazimaziki et al., 2019). “The Midnight Library”, written by Matt Haig, is a telling example of how literature can promote transformation in readers’ mindsets by guiding them through the journey of self-exploration alongside the protagonist. Published recently in 2020, this novel explores the themes of choices, regrets, and the pursuit of happiness, providing rich material for original interpretation and analysis. By looking into Nora Seed’s journey towards joy and motivation to live, this study promises to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of literature in fostering self-love and self-discovery.

2. Aims and Objectives

This research aims to achieve several objectives centered around conducting a literary analysis of Nora's transformative journey in “The Midnight Library” by Matt Haig. Firstly, this

study aims to explore the role of certain dimensions of self-love in Nora's journey to find joy and motivation. Second, it seeks to specify the significance of self-awareness in enabling Nora to liberate herself from the expectations and social norms that were imposed on her.

1. What inner strengths allow Nora Seed to find joy and motivation to live?
2. What is the role of self-awareness in Nora Seed's path to break free from the influence of external factors?

3. Literature Review

3.1. Literature

In the field of literary studies, many scholars have proposed their own definition of the key term "literature". Although this is still a matter of great controversy, there are several essential features accepted among researchers that can be used to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this term.

First of all, one distinguishing characteristic of literature lies in the careful use of language. According to Meyer (1997), an important feature that establishes literature is the careful organization of language, covering features such as clever metaphors, mindfully chosen expressions, advanced sentence structure, rhyme, alliteration, and meter.

Furthermore, it is widely agreed among researchers that in order for something to qualify as literature, it is necessary that the written work in question possess a certain level of artistic value. While Stecker (1996) equates literature with a form of artistry, including novels, short stories, tales, dramas, and poems, Culler (1997) argues that literature has the ability to evoke emotions, provoke thoughts, and engage the audience in a meaningful aesthetic experience.

Lastly, literature can be distinguished by its cognitive values, particularly through the exploration of the human condition (Meyer, 1997). More specifically, literature deals extensively with the human experience, covering themes such as culture, identity, love, hate, life, and death (Hynes, 2020). As a result, through literary engagements, individuals can gain meaningful insights into a range of human situations, enhancing their empathy and comprehension of diverse viewpoints (Puolakka, 2022).

3.2. The Functions of Literature

Literature serves several essential functions in society. One of the primary functions of literature is to entertain readers. More specifically, entertainment in literature offers readers an opportunity to immerse themselves in narratives, experiencing both enjoyment and appreciation (Vorderer & Roth, 2011). Literature also plays many other roles, including cultural and language preservation (Ihuez, 2015), social critique and commentary (Coblenz, 2009), and emotional exploration (Oatley, 2017).

Besides the aforementioned functions, literature also has excellent educational value. Specifically, Gautam (2014) emphasized that literature is generally viewed as an invaluable source for understanding society and its values. This argument aligns with the assertion proposed by Gabriel (2021) and Bazimaziki et al. (2019) that literature depicts human experiences and the world, portraying the ways in which individuals navigate and cope with the challenges around them. Engaging with diverse literary works not only broadens knowledge of the human condition but also encourages self-reflection. According to Rakhmanina and Haimah (2021), literary works often probe into the complexities of human life, exploring a myriad of

issues and moral dilemmas that characterize human interactions. Put another way, it can serve as a medium for individuals to contemplate their beliefs and values (Hernadi, 2002). Therefore, learning to appreciate literature can significantly contribute to personal development and moral growth, fostering empathy, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the human experience (Culler, 1997).

3.3. *Self-love*

3.3.1. The Debate about Self-Love

Across history, scholars have held divergent perspectives regarding the significance of self-love. While certain researchers perceive self-love as important and essential (Solimar, 1987), others link it to negative characteristics such as narcissism, selfishness, and egocentricity, considering it a flaw or weakness (Orbanic, 2001; Patrick, 1982). The limited amount of extensive study on self-love and its defining factors (Vadjed Samiei, 2015) contributes to its enduring status as a highly debated concept.

Nevertheless, the positive impact of self-love on psychological well-being is undeniable. It plays a crucial role in preventing mental health conditions and resolving emotional imbalances (Solimar, 1987). Described as a vital requirement for overall well-being (Fromm, 1939), the absence of self-love can lead to conditions such as depression, anxiety, lack of authenticity, and regret (Irvani, 2007; Solimar, 1987). Given its significant benefits, self-love has been a matter of fascination for centuries and is currently gaining popularity among scholars (Henschke, 2022).

3.3.2. Towards a Definition of Self-Love

Multiple researchers have attempted to look into this concept and develop their own definitions of self-love. According to Orbanic (2001), self-love is a dynamic and holistic phenomenon, defined as “self-acceptance, valuing self and an unconditional positive regard toward self” (p.1). Similarly, Solimar (1987) also regarded self-acceptance as a fundamental component of self-love, arguing that self-love can be regarded as “an emotionally embodied experience of well-being, gladness, self-confident motivation and unconditional acceptance and validation of self, other, and life; it is an experience of greater inner potential and wholeness based on an expanded sense of self-identity” (p.115).

Also seeking to provide a more comprehensive definition of this concept, Van and Whitehead (2024) have divided this self-love into smaller dimensions, which can be summarized in the table below.

Table 1

Self-love and its Dimensions by Van and Whitehead (2024)

Self-love		
Definition	“Self-love means recognizing oneself, valuing oneself, nurturing oneself, protecting oneself, empowering oneself, thereby ensuring you are able to grow in a self-aware and contented state.” (Van & Whitehead, 2024, p.11)	
Dimensions of Self-love	1. Self-awareness	- “Being reflective, emotionally aware, recognizing one’s flow of emotions, feelings, patterns, tendencies, values.” (Van & Whitehead, 2024, p.12)

	2. Self-validation & self-expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and experiences as valid and legitimate. - Affirming one's internal experiences without seeking external approval or validation from others, consciously acknowledging the positive within oneself without the need to compare oneself to others. - Expressing individuality and conveying personal experiences, beliefs, and emotions to others. <p>Both of these dimensions can help boost one's authenticity since they enable a person to "assert themselves in a liberating, self-actualizing way." (Van & Whitehead, 2024, p.12)</p>
	3. Self-care & self-protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliberately and proactively prioritizing and maintaining one's physical, mental, social, and financial well-being. - Actively employing actions, strategies, and behaviors to safeguard oneself from harm, danger, or threats to one's physical, mental, social, and financial well-being.
	4. Self-sufficiency & self-independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accepting one's strengths and weaknesses, meeting one's basic needs and requirements without relying heavily on external assistance or resources. - Being emotionally independent, not relying on others to fulfill one's emotional needs.
	5. Self-management & self-development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regulating and controlling one's own behavior, emotions, and actions in order to achieve personal goals, maintain well-being, and adapt to various situations effectively. - Actively seeking to enhance one's knowledge, skills, abilities, and overall well-being. <p>Upon reaching this stage, one can develop an unconditional love for others and a more comprehensive understanding of their struggles.</p>
Impacts of self-love	<p>Develop greater emotional intelligence</p> <p>Become emotionally resilient</p> <p>Acquiring higher empathy and good social skills</p> <p>Gaining emotional openness and emotional exposure</p> <p>Being willing to take risks</p>	

While sharing some similarities with previous studies by highlighting unconditional acceptance and validation of oneself, Van and Whitehead's (2024) definition of Self-love has succeeded in enhancing the comprehensiveness of this term by providing a structured range of dimensions that constitute Self-love.

Furthermore, their notable contribution lies in the introduction of Total Inclusivity, a novel concept that involves acknowledging, protecting, and nurturing all identities, regardless of "race, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, age, religion, and language" (Van & Whitehead, 2024, p.13). This groundbreaking notion serves as the foundation for the development of Totally Inclusive Self-love, wherein individuals recognize, value, protect, and foster all aspects of themselves. Therefore, Totally Inclusive Self-love can be considered a "powerful antidote to toxicities in the human condition" (Van & Whitehead, 2024, p.14),

ultimately preventing negativity, self-loathing, arrogance, hatred, and violence. The philosophy underscores the idea that recognizing, valuing, and nurturing all aspects of oneself unconditionally leads to not only personal empowerment, optimal growth, and a contented state of self-awareness but also deeper and empowering connections with others.

4. Research Methodology

The methodology chosen for this study is textual analysis. This method involves examining the structure, context, and content of written texts in order to identify the underlying messages, themes, and patterns (Culler, 1997).

There are several reasons why textual analysis is the most appropriate approach for this study. First, it requires a thorough analysis of different components of the text (Carter et al., 2022), including the narrative structure, key ideas, and the rhetorical strategies that are employed (McKee, 2003). Therefore, throughout the process, researchers can closely follow the development of a character and identify critical moments of transformation (Jayakumar et al., 2022).

Second, this method enables researchers to identify the themes of the chosen narrative (Hébert, 2022), particularly those that are directly related to the chosen character. By exploring how these themes are developed throughout the story, they can gain a deeper insight into the underlying messages that the author wishes to convey through it.

Finally, textual analysis can provide information about the broad context of where the story takes place, namely its setting, social context, and cultural background (Hébert, 2022). This contextual perspective can help researchers discover how these external forces contribute to shaping the character's experiences and decisions in the narrative, thereby unraveling the author's perception of the world embedded in the text (Tulaganova, 2022).

5. Scope of the Study

This study will focus on examining Nora Seed's journey in "The Midnight Library" by Matt Haig using Van and Whitehead's (2024) definition of Totally Inclusive Self-love. The selection of this framework by its comprehensive structure and direct relevance to the study's objectives. While their conceptualization encompasses multiple dimensions, for the sake of focus and depth within the scope of this paper, three key dimensions, *self-awareness*, *self-validation*, and *self-development*, and the concept of *Totally Inclusive Self-love* will be prioritized. By narrowing the scope in this manner, the study aims to offer a focused and thorough analysis of these critical aspects of self-love within the context of the novel.

6. Background Information

6.1. Matt Haig's Life and Career

Matt Haig, a British writer and journalist, is well-known for his contribution in various genres, including fiction and non-fiction for both children and adults. Haig's constant battles with anxiety and depression throughout his life have inspired him to explore themes such as mental health, resilience, and the human experience in his writing. His understanding of mental issues, as well as his humorous and optimistic approach to heavy topics, have made him a unique yet relatable author for readers of any age.

In 2020, Matt Haig released "The Midnight Library" a novel that has gained appreciation for its creative take on the topic of choices, regrets, and the search for the meaning

of life. The book follows Nora Seed as she navigates through a mysterious library between life and death, where she is given a chance to reconsider her past decisions and experience how her life could have turned out had she made different choices.

6.2. Plot summary of “The Midnight Library”

The Midnight Library revolves around Nora Seed, a 35-year-old woman from Bedford, England, who struggles to find fulfillment in her life. Despite her impressive achievements in academics, music, and sports during her younger years, her failure to realize these potential leads to a profound sense of regret and despair in the present.

After the sudden death of her beloved cat, Nora loses her job, gets into an argument with an old friend, and finds out that her only piano student has quit. When her elderly neighbor, Mr. Bannerjee, no longer needs her help to collect his medication, Nora feels like her existence is no longer needed. These unfortunate events, combined with an accumulated sense of worthlessness and regret, cause Nora to take her life.

However, instead of dying, Nora finds herself in The Midnight Library, where she is guided by the librarian, Mrs. Elm, to revisit her past decisions and explore different versions of herself. Each book she picks up from the shelves represents a path not taken in her original life. By traveling down these paths, Nora gains a deeper understanding of her own regrets and potential. Eventually, with a new mindset, she decides to return to her original life, this time ready to fully experience every possibility that awaits.

7. Analysis

7.1. The Initial Stage of Demotivation, Depression and Isolation

Nora Seed’s life at the beginning of the story can be described as unfulfilled and isolated. The 35-year-old woman’s constant struggles with depression make it impossible for her to properly take care of her own needs, let alone fulfill her responsibilities to other people. This detrimental state eventually causes Nora to lose a sense of motivation to actively interact with others or seek out opportunities to develop herself. As a result, Nora is left with a feeling of detachment from her own authentic desires and an inability to foster meaningful connections with her loved ones. These challenges collectively contribute to the absence of joy and motivation in her life at the outset of her journey.

7.1.1. Depression

Nora’s depression is clearly marked by unfulfilled potential, stemming from her inability to pursue the paths or make the choices that align with others’ expectations. As Nora absorbs the negative attitudes and pressures imposed upon her, she adopts a critical perspective of herself and her past decisions, impairing her ability to foster self-validation.

Dwelling in regrets

Contrary to her less-than-ideal current situation, Nora Seed's earlier years were brimmed with potential across various domains, spanning from physical activities to intellectual and creative pursuits. Yet, Nora's inability to realize her potential ultimately plunged her into a profound state of regret and despair.

Initially, the protagonist excelled in swimming and attained notable success under the guidance of her father - a former rugby coach. Nora qualified for the National Swimming Championships, broke records, and even had the potential for Olympic participation. However,

she later decided to back out of a swimming career due to the pressure she was facing, souring her relationship with her father, who criticized this decision by saying she had “thrown everything away” (Haig, 2020, p.15). Later in the story, her father’s sudden demise due to a heart attack only worsened her regret for causing him such disappointment.

Similarly, Nora expressed her great passion for music, contributing significantly to her brother’s band, The Labyrinth, with her impressive talent as a performer and a songwriter. The Labyrinth managed to strike a deal with Universal, opening up the opportunity to produce albums and go on tours. Unfortunately, her panic attacks and engagement with her former lover - Dan, made it impossible for her to pursue this path. As a result, Nora fell out with her brother and her bandmate.

Before the current prevailing sense of loneliness, Nora used to be in a relationship with Dan and even got engaged with him. However, upon her mother’s death, Nora’s “grief fused with depression and anxiety” (Haig, 2020, p.47), causing her to break up with her fiancé only two days before the wedding in an attempt to regain some control in life. This decision later haunts her, causing a profound sense of regret as she blames herself for hurting Dan and ruining his life.

Furthermore, Nora’s grief and uncertainty made her unable to fulfill her promise to move to Australia with her best friend, Izzy, which later caused their friendship to wither. Overwhelmed by a sense of regret and despair, Nora was unable to leave Bedford, forfeiting the opportunity to use her degree in philosophy or pursue her desire to become a glaciologist.

The sharp contrast between Nora’s once-promising prospects and her bitter reality highlights the complex dilemma she’s facing. From the outset of the story, Nora contends with the weight of others’ expectations on her shoulders and the pressure stemming from her perceived potential. However, as she diverges from the paths expected of her, she not only lacks support and empathy but also encounters hostility from those closest to her, whether through disappointment, criticism, or anger.

Internalizing others’ attitudes

The pressure exerted by those around Nora to conform to certain expectations, combined with their tendency to criticize rather than understand her choices, intensifies her feelings of guilt and regret. Internalizing this mindset, Nora dismisses her own emotions, becomes less accepting of herself, and develops a critical outlook on her past decisions.

To begin with, Nora’s internal struggles are profoundly depicted through her failure to affirm her own feelings and emotional needs. Not only does she feel that “she didn’t deserve to be happy” (Haig, 2020, p.60) after failing her loved ones, Nora aligns herself with destructive metaphors, such as a black hole - “a dying star collapsing in on itself” (Haig, 2020, p.25). This metaphor symbolizes her deep sense of inadequacy and emptiness, highlighting a significant deficit in self-validation.

Moreover, Nora’s self-critical narrative is evident in her perception of her life as “a cacophony of nonsense—a piece of music that could have gone in wonderful directions but now goes nowhere at all” (Haig, 2020, p.33), as well as the reflection of her own journey. The constant repetition of the word ‘every’ only emphasizes the fact that Nora only fixates on the opportunities she missed or the goals she didn’t achieve while completely overlooking the possible valuable lessons of the steps she has taken.

To conclude, since most of the protagonist’s deepest regrets stem from her failure to satisfy others’ expectations, it is conceivable that Nora has developed a tendency to seek

external validation, equating it with her own fulfillment. Consequently, she feels a need to prioritize other's aspirations and feelings over her own. Ultimately, the fusion of guilt, regret, and poor self-validation became a great contributor to her current state of depression.

7.1.2. Demotivation

One of the most detrimental consequences of Nora Seed's depression is her lack of motivation. Unable to escape the feelings of guilt and inadequacy, Nora believes that "a life of drizzle and depression in her hometown was her punishment, and she hadn't the will or clarity or, hell, the energy to do anything" (Haig, 2020, p.60). This implies a profound sense of hopelessness and resignation, where Nora feels trapped in her current state with no perceived means of escape. This state of demotivation is clearly demonstrated through her poor self-development and her tendency to compare herself with others.

Poor self-development

Self-development, according to the chosen definition of self-love, is the ability to actively seek to enhance one's knowledge, skills, abilities, and overall well-being. Nora shows a serious stagnation in this domain, particularly through her conversation with Neil, her boss at The String Theory, a musical equipment shop where Nora has worked for twelve years.

While confronting Nora about her career choice, Neil tries to persuade her to explore her potential by highlighting her strengths, only to be responded with her dismissive attitude. She corrects Neil's statement about teaching piano, saying she teaches only one person, implying it's not significant. She dismisses her degree in Philosophy and undermines the value of her education. Finally, when Neil brings up her involvement in a band with her brother, Nora downplays its potential success by saying they "weren't really going anywhere" (Haig, 2020, p.22). In general, Nora's reactions reveal a hesitancy to acknowledge and appreciate her own knowledge, skills, and abilities, leading to a lack of initiative in pursuing opportunities for personal growth and development.

Moreover, Nora also shows a reluctance to take proactive steps to improve her well-being. Despite her obvious and prolonged dissatisfaction in her current job, she chooses to suppress her true emotions and put on a facade in front of her boss, saying that she's "happy here" (Haig, 2020, p.22). As the confrontation gets more heated, Nora's unwillingness to seek changes to enhance her well-being becomes clearer.

"You are a good person. You worry about the world. the homeless, the environment.

I need a job.

You need freedom.

I don't want freedom." (Haig, 2020, p.23)

Nora's response indicates her unwillingness to step out of her comfort zone and embrace opportunities for change or growth, suggesting that she prefers the familiarity and security of her current circumstances, even if they are not fulfilling or motivating. This eventually results in the deterioration of her emotional and mental well-being, thus negatively affecting her ability to foster self-development.

Tendency to compare herself to others

Nora's demotivation is exacerbated when she compares her life journey with common social norms and the seemingly fulfilling lives of other people on social media.

Besides the expectations of people around her, Nora also faced the significant pressure of social norms, influencing her perceptions of success and fulfillment in various aspects of her

life. One notable area where these norms manifest is in her career path, which can be illustrated through a remark by Neil: "I feel like you are made for better things. You're in your late thirties" (Haig, 2020, p. 21)

While Neil's comment may be intended to motivate Nora to explore her potential, it also carries an implicit judgment of her current career status. The phrase "made for better things" suggests that Nora is perceived as falling short of social expectations for someone in her late thirties, implying that there is pressure to attain higher levels of professional achievement within a specific timeframe.

Additionally, regarding her love life, her conversation with an acquaintance emphasizes the widespread expectation of settling down, getting married, and having children as essential components of a fulfilling life.

"Got anyone, then? Bloke? Kids?"

Nora shook her head. Wishing it would fall off. Her own head. Onto the floor. So she never had to have conversation with a stranger ever again.

'Well, don't hang about. Tick-tock tick-tock.'

'I'm thirty-five. And I'm not sure I want—'

'Me and Jake were like rabbits but we got there. Two little terrors. But worth it, y'know? I just feel complete.'" (Haig, 2020, p. 28)

The phrase "don't hang about. Tick-tock tick-tock" reinforces the notion that there is a deadline for achieving these milestones. The acquaintance's anecdote about her own family life, emphasizing the sense of completeness and satisfaction derived from having children, contrasts with Nora's ambivalence and reluctance to attain these traditional markers of fulfillment.

Finally, Nora's interactions on social media also contribute to her overall state of demotivation. Her experience on social platforms serves as a stark reminder of her perceived failures compared to others, reinforcing the belief that "everyone had worked out how to live, except her" (Haig, 2020, p.32).

To conclude, Nora's tendency to compare herself to others likely contributes to her demotivation by fostering feelings of inadequacy, envy, and hopelessness. As a result, Nora may struggle to find motivation or purpose in her own life, feeling overwhelmed by the perceived gap between where she is and where she believes she should be.

7.1.3. Isolation

In addition to depression and demotivation, the protagonist's lack of fulfillment in the initial stage is also influenced by her poor connections. Nora's disconnect with herself is evident in her reliance on external sources for happiness and her poor self-awareness about her own authentic desires. This situation extends to her relationships with family, friends, and community, where strained connections exacerbate her feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Poor connection with herself

Nora's struggle to connect with herself may stem from her tendency to look outward for happiness and her limited understanding of her own desires and aspirations.

Firstly, Nora demonstrates a tendency to divert her attention outwards instead of focusing on her own life, shown through her habit of "scrolling through other people's happy lives, waiting for something to happen" (Haig, 2020, p.17). This suggests her reliance on external sources for emotional satisfaction rather than seeking it internally.

Moreover, after spending years of her youth trying and failing to fulfill others' expectations, Nora finds herself disconnected from her authenticity, which is shown in the quote: "Whole hours passed by. She wanted to have a purpose, something to give her a reason to exist. But she had nothing" (Haig, 2020, p.30). Despite her intense longing for purpose and meaning in life, Nora's poor self-awareness causes her to lose a sense of direction, leaving her feeling adrift and uncertain about her own aspirations.

Poor connection with others

Nora's sense of isolation extends beyond her loss of connection with her authentic self to encompass her relationships with family, friends, and community.

Previously, Nora's relationships with her family and friends were strained. She faced criticism from her mother and pressure from her father, resulting in a lack of understanding and support. Her once close relationships with Joe and Izzy have become distant, with resentment stemming from Nora's past choices. Additionally, the absence of a long-term romantic partner only worsens her feelings of loneliness. Collectively, these challenges highlight the notable absence of a vital support system in her life.

Nora's disappointment is also present in the digital sphere, where she finds herself isolated and disconnected. She encounters "no messages, no comments, no new followers, no friend requests" (Haig, 2020, p.32) on her social media platforms, emphasizing her detachment from others. The comparison of herself to the "antimatter" exacerbates her feelings of invisibility and irrelevance compared to others. Furthermore, the mention of "added self-pity" suggests that Nora not only feels isolated but also experiences profound sadness and self-pity regarding her lack of social connection.

Overall, at the start of the story, Nora's life is described as a state of depression, demotivation, and isolation. Her internal struggles with self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-development are especially striking, causing her to feel a deep sense of inadequacy and encounter difficulty in recognizing her own value and potential. This inner turmoil affects her ability to fully accept herself and nurture meaningful relationships with others. Nora's initial situation provides a detailed and complex view of her emotional challenges, laying the groundwork for her journey of self-discovery and transformation.

7.2. The Stage of Self-Exploration and Enlightenment

Having the opportunity to undo her regrets and explore various possibilities, Nora's journey in the Midnight Library presents an opportunity for introspection and growth, providing her with a safe space to experiment with different identities. Through her experiences in alternate lives, Nora starts challenging her past assumptions and reevaluating her priorities. Each new existence offers valuable lessons, allowing Nora to confront her fears, rediscover her passions, and ultimately find joy and motivation in life. This analysis will look into the diverse paths explored by Nora Seed and the transformative lessons they provide her.

7.2.1. Moving Towards Authenticity

In some of Nora's first alternate lives in "The Midnight Library," she had a chance to explore her potential to achieve greatness and re-evaluate her priorities. Upon realizing that living other people's dreams cannot bring her inner fulfillment, Nora gradually learns to affirm her choices and develops an appreciation for the uniqueness of her journey. With an increased sense of self-awareness and self-validation, Nora regains some connection with herself, taking her first steps away from the expectations of others and toward her own aspirations.

Learning to prioritize herself

Nora's very first step on a journey toward her true self is reevaluating her priorities. Rather than adhering to the expectations of others or striving to fulfill their dreams, she begins to understand that seeking validation from external sources does not equate to genuine fulfillment. This pivotal lesson becomes evident as Nora explores the life where she married Dan and the one where she pursued a swimming career. Through these experiences, she discovers the importance of aligning her actions with her own desires and aspirations rather than conforming to societal expectations or seeking validation from others.

The first regret Nora chooses to undo, also one of her greatest regrets, is "being cruel to Dan", "breaking up with Dan" and "not living in a country pub with Dan" (Haig, 2020, p.46). This choice shows that at the beginning of her self-exploration journey, Nora still has an intense desire to fulfill others' expectations and conform to the social norms of settling down despite her uncertainty about marriage and the prospect of motherhood.

In this alternate reality, Nora soon realizes that her married life falls short of the ideal she had envisioned. As she spends more time interacting with her husband, Nora finds herself reflecting on their relationship, revisiting moments where she overlooked warning signs or suppressed her true emotions so as not to hurt his feelings. Not only does Nora realize that Dan had "never been supportive of her music career" (Haig, 2020, p.57), but she also comes to the bitter realization that he treated her passion with a "shruggish indifference" and was never willing to accompany her in the pursuit of her aspirations, despite how Nora had "tried to make his dream of a pub in the Oxfordshire countryside become her dream as well" (Haig, 2020, p.63).

The protagonist's disappointment reaches a climax when she discovers Dan's serious issues with alcoholism and his affair with another woman. However, unlike before, instead of keeping her feelings to herself, Nora confronts these issues head-on, vocalizing her grievances to her husband.

"You wanted me and you wanted this and yet you've been unfaithful and you drink like a fish and I think you only appreciate me when you don't have me. What about my dreams?" (Haig, 2020, p.65).

This pivotal moment in Nora's journey signifies a significant change in her mindset, as she courageously vocalizes her true emotions and demands genuine appreciation and respect in their relationship. This shift in attitude signals her growing sense of self-validation, signaling her progression toward embracing her authentic self.

Similarly, in the alternate reality where Nora chooses to pursue swimming to earn her father's approval, she undergoes a profound shift in her perspective of sacrificing her own happiness to meet others' expectations. Initially, this life appears idyllic, marked by Nora's physical well-being, fame, and financial success. To her surprise, her father is still alive, and she maintains a close relationship with her brother, Joe. However, beneath these outward achievements lies a series of compromises. Her mother's alcoholism worsens following her father's infidelity, and both Nora and Joe neglect spending time with their mother during her final months due to their demanding schedules. Consequently, Nora's mother passed away much earlier than in her original life.

Immersed in her athletic pursuits, Nora realizes that she has sacrificed "her own relationships, her own love of music, her own dreams beyond anything that didn't involve a medal, her own life" (Haig, 2020, p.100) —all for the sake of pleasing her father. She

empathizes with this version of herself, who never had the opportunity to fully explore her interests in music, literature, or philosophy. Ultimately, she concludes that sacrificing her own happiness to earn fleeting validation from her parents is pointless. This realization prompts Nora to reassess her priorities and reclaim agency over her own sense of fulfillment.

Learning to embrace the uniqueness of her own journey

With a growing recognition of her authentic aspirations and desires, Nora gradually gravitates towards the journeys where she pursues her passion. In the life where she remains in The Labyrinth and becomes a rockstar, Nora gains valuable insights into the complexities of success and the inevitable compromises it entails. This experience fosters Nora's acceptance of the distinctiveness of her own journey and liberates her from the trap of comparing herself to others.

In this alternate life, Nora experiences an overwhelming level of success, fulfilling her passion for music and gaining fame, wealth, and global recognition. Standing under the blinding lights on stage in front of millions of adoring fans, Nora realizes that “she was capable of a lot more than she had known” (Haig, 2020, p.156). This affirmation signals a significant improvement in her self-awareness and self-validation since Nora has discovered a reservoir of untapped potential within herself and recognized her capacity for immense achievement.

However, along with success come numerous challenges: dealing with stalkers, navigating through bad management, facing fake feuds, enduring court cases, battling copyright issues, managing complicated relationships, and overworking herself. The most devastating blow is the loss of her brother due to an overdose.

Through these trials, Nora learns a profound lesson about the nature of decision-making and compromise. She acknowledges that every path in life comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities, that “sadness is intrinsically part of the fabric of happiness” (Haig, 2020, p.174), and there are no easy routes. Nora's realization prompts her to embrace the uniqueness of her own journey, recognizing that comparing herself to other people or other versions of herself only fosters discontent and demotivates herself.

Overall, in these alternate lives, she learns invaluable lessons, discovering that external validation, such as the approval of others, material wealth, or fame, does not always equate to inner fulfillment. Moreover, she realizes the futility and detriment of comparing herself to others and recognizes that every life harbors its own share of challenges and triumphs. In other words, Nora's experiences enable her to realize her own potential, fostering an increasing sense of self-awareness and self-validation. In the end, Nora's journey brings her to a better understanding of herself and a renewed appreciation for the authenticity of her own path.

7.2.2. Accepting Life's Unpredictability

During Nora's journey through different realities, she gains a more comprehensive understanding of regrets' delusionary root causes and its detrimental effects. Realizing that sometimes remorse is only based on subjective judgments, Nora learns to cope with her regrets and adopts a more forgiving and nurturing perception of herself. By accepting the inherent uncertainties in life, the protagonist finds it easier to overcome guilt, thus becoming more willing to take risks and experience life to the fullest. In other words, through reflection and heightened self-awareness, Nora learns to nurture her self-validation and self-development.

Learning to overcome regrets

As mentioned in the first stage, Nora's inability to let go of her past regrets sucks her life force and greatly contributes to her depression. In the alternate life where Nora keeps her cat indoors, she gains eye-opening insights about the true nature of her regrets, thus learning the importance of releasing the emotional baggage that hinders her progress and prevents her from embracing the present moment.

In her root life, the death of her cat - Voltaire, was one of the factors pushing Nora to her breaking point. She regrets not having kept the cat indoors and assumes that he died from getting hit by a car, blaming herself for being an irresponsible owner.

However, in this alternate reality, Nora comes to a realization: the cat's death wasn't caused by her decision to let him outside. Regardless of whether she kept the cat indoors or not, his demise was inevitable due to an underlying health condition. This revelation leads Nora to understand that she isn't a negligent cat owner and that she cared for her pet as well as anyone else would have.

The key lesson Nora learns is that "sometimes regrets are not based on facts at all" (Haig, 2020, p.73) but rather are shaped by subjective perceptions. Upon this realization, Nora is prompted to reconsider the validity and significance of her own regrets. This insight encourages both Nora and the readers to reflect on the role of perspective and interpretation in shaping emotional experiences. It underscores the importance of self-awareness and an insightful attitude in overcoming regrets and moving forward in life.

Moreover, after a brief visit to this life, Nora discovers that the only way to truly learn and resolve her regrets is to live through the experiences herself. Mrs. Elm's advice: "The only way to learn is to live" (Haig, 2020, p.74), emphasizes the idea that understanding certain lessons in life requires more than passive observation. In other words, it highlights the importance of actively engaging with life, taking risks, making choices, and confronting challenges, because each experience, whether positive or negative, contributes to personal growth and self-discovery.

Learning to let go of control

In the reality that Nora chooses to move to Australia with her best friend, Izzy, Nora once again has to go through unexpected emotional turmoil and challenges. However, these hardships are essential in prompting her to accept the inherent uncertainties in life.

In this parallel universe, Izzy tragically passes away in a car accident on her way to Nora's birthday party not long after they move to Australia. This horrific event sends Nora into spiraling depression, preventing her from returning to her hometown since she is too deep in grief.

Mrs. Elm's wise observation: "It was a good choice. It just wasn't a desired outcome" (Haig, 2020, p.87) is a powerful reminder of life's unpredictability, suggesting that even the most well-intentioned and thoughtful decision can result in unexpected or undesirable outcomes due to situations beyond one's control. By adopting this viewpoint, Nora learns to focus on making choices that align with her values and desires rather than stressing about controlling the results, which in turn helps to relieve her feelings of guilt and self-criticism. By encouraging her to make authentic choices, take risks, and experience life to the fullest, these experiences prepare for Nora's upcoming journey of self-development and personal growth.

7.2.3. Seeking the Motivation to Live

Toward the end of her journey, Nora eventually regains a connection with herself, not only realizing her will to live but also reconnecting with her core value - kindness. By adhering to this value, Nora realizes that her journey is not just about finding happiness or fulfillment in isolation but also about nurturing relationships and compassion towards others. In essence, the development of Totally Inclusive Self-love fostered by a more insightful self-awareness plays a vital role in Nora's journey toward joy and motivation to live.

Finding connection with herself

Throughout the narrative, Nora Seed grapples with existential questions about the meaning of her life and her will to live. In one alternate reality, where Nora embarks on a career as a glaciologist in the Arctic, she undergoes a profound transformation, finding answers to these existential queries.

In this fifth life, Nora confronts the harsh realities of living and working in extreme conditions, where she faces challenges such as freezing temperatures and encounters with polar bears while fulfilling her role as a spotter for climate-tracking fieldwork. Through solitude amidst the vast expanses of nature, Nora undergoes a profound introspection. Initially, she attributes her feelings of loneliness and isolation in her root life to a lack of human connection. However, Nora's experiences in the Arctic lead her to a transformative realization: true solitude offers a unique opportunity for connection, fostering a deep bond between herself and the natural world. This realization prompts Nora to reevaluate the meaning of life, shifting her focus away from "the expectation to achieve" (Haig, 2020, p.135) towards the simple yet profound act of being present and bearing witness to the beauty of the world around her.

After surviving a dangerous encounter with a polar bear, Nora's perspective changes dramatically. In this desperate situation, she not only regains her desire to live but also develops a new sense of purpose and meaning in her life. The experience of working as a glaciologist and reconnecting with nature in this life has sparked a desire within her, urging Nora to make a positive contribution to the greater good, no matter how small it might be.

Focusing on her core values

Having been equipped with a willingness to take risks and experience life, Nora continues to explore the Midnight Library's countless possibilities, gaining a profound insight into the infinite potential that exists within every single life.

"She had been a rock star, an Olympian, a music teacher, a primary school teacher, a professor, a CEO, a PA, a chef, a glaciologist, a climatologist, an acrobat, a tree-planter, an audit manager, ..." (Haig, 2020, p.204)

However, despite experiencing countless variations of existence, navigating through hundreds of alternate realities, and addressing numerous regrets, she finds herself continually grappling with a pervasive sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction. The number of alternate lives she visits eventually causes Nora to lose direction and "lose any sense of who she was" (Haig, 2020, p.206). In response to this existential crisis, Mrs. Elm advises Nora to reconnect with her core values. It's through this reflection that Nora realizes the anchoring force of kindness, which is total inclusivity, serving as a beacon of stability amid uncertainty and despair.

Finding connection with others

In the final life she tries on in the Midnight Library, Nora experiences a conventionally fulfilling life filled with material success and external validation. However, she ultimately realizes that true fulfillment comes from the substances of love, care, and kindness in genuine

connections.

In this seemingly perfect life, Nora is married to Ash - a kind surgeon, and has a daughter named Molly. Besides her happy family life, Nora also achieves considerable success in her philosophical career. Immersed in Ash and Molly's love and care, Nora learns that without love, even the most glamorous and successful life is empty and meaningless. This realization marks a turning point in Nora's journey as she begins to prioritize genuine connections and empathy over superficial achievements.

"You could eat in the finest restaurants, you could partake in every sensual pleasure, you could sing on stage in São Paulo to twenty thousand people, you could soak up whole thunderstorms of applause, you could travel to the ends of the Earth, you could be followed by millions on the internet, you could win Olympic medals, but this was all meaningless without love." (Haig, 2020, p.234)

The emphasis on love as the essential ingredient for a meaningful life highlights its transformative power to imbue existence with purpose, joy, and richness. Ultimately, this fundamental realization underscores the importance of emotional bonds and human connections in shaping a truly fulfilling and meaningful life for Nora. By aligning her choices with her core value, kindness, she has found a life in which she feels a sense of investment, love, and commitment to her family.

However, there comes a plot twist when Nora revisits her hometown - Bedford - and finds out the lives of those she has helped in her root life have taken a turn for the worse. Without her help to pick up his medicine, Mr. Banerjee ends up in a care facility instead of staying in his cherished home. Without Nora to inspire his passion for music during piano lessons, Leo, her only student in her root life, goes down a dangerous path and commits crimes on a regular basis. Remembering Mrs. Elm's advice: "Never underestimate the big importance of small things" (Haig, 2020, p.240), Nora realizes that the smallest things she once talked about with a dismissive attitude have a significant influence on other people's lives, which fills her heart with uncannily warm and soothing contentment. This gradually transitioned her towards a state of Totally Inclusive Self-love, where she directs to others the same love as she gives herself. This transition marks a vital moment in her journey, as her mindset shifts from focusing solely on her own happiness and fulfillment to fostering empathy and compassion for others.

7.3. The Awakening of Self-Love and Empowerment

Nora's newfound self-awareness profoundly influences her life after leaving the Midnight Library, sparking significant changes in her behavior, mindset, and interactions with others.

7.3.1. Recognizing Potential Within Herself

One key aspect of Nora's transformation is her recognition of the potential within herself. Through her experiences in the Midnight Library, Nora comes to understand that she possesses the capability to lead diverse and fulfilling lives.

As Nora reflects on the multiple lives she experienced, she realizes while she "might not have felt everything she had felt in those lives, she had the capability" (Haig, 2020, p. 253). This discovery becomes a source of empowerment, as she realizes that her life is not restricted by her past decisions or the paths not taken. Instead, she sees her life as a canvas of limitless possibilities, each with its own set of challenges and pleasures. This perspective provides her with a sense of optimism and purpose, motivating her effort of self-development and personal

fulfillment.

Furthermore, Nora's new attitude enables her to view her past decisions and experiences in a more positive light. Rather than focusing on wasted possibilities or perceived mistakes, she expresses gratitude for her original life, acknowledging even the most seemingly insignificant aspects, such as the presence of her loved ones and the little yet positive impacts she has had on others.

7.3.2. Being Fully Present and Engaged in the Current Moment

Nora also demonstrates a profound shift in perspective and her newfound appreciation for life's inherent beauty and complexity.

First, Nora highlights the value of being fully present, appreciating the richness of each experience, and cherishing life's simple pleasures, such as the flavor of a drink or the melody of a song. This perspective reflects her newfound realization that every moment, no matter how ordinary, has the possibility for joy and fulfillment.

Furthermore, Nora faces the reality that suffering, sorrow, and loneliness are inevitable in life and recognizes that these emotions are no less important than happiness in the human experience.

“Will my life be miraculously free from pain, despair, grief, heartbreak, hardship, loneliness, depression? No.

But do I want to live?

Yes. Yes.

A thousand times, yes” (Haig, 2020, p.261)

Her root life is still unchanged, with “the same electric piano and books,” “the same sad absence of a feline and lack of a job,” and “the same unknowability about her life ahead” (Haig, 2020, p.268); she reaffirms her desire to live nevertheless, expressing a resounding affirmation of life's value and her commitment to embracing it wholeheartedly.

7.3.3. Embracing Connections

Waking up in the hospital after the failed suicidal attempt, Nora reconciles with her brother and reconnects with her best friend, putting aside all of the conflicts and resentment in the past. These interactions highlight the value of love and companionship in overcoming challenges and finding meaning in life.

In essence, this attitude signifies Nora's profound shift in perspective as she learns to prioritize love, kindness, and genuine human connections above external markers of success or the pursuit of escaping regrets. It encapsulates the central theme of the novel, emphasizing the transformative power of love and compassion in shaping one's journey toward fulfillment and inner peace.

8. Results and Discussion

8.1. Inner Strengths That Allow Nora Seed to Find Joy and Motivation

Throughout Nora's quest for fulfillment, Totally Inclusive Self-love in general, and self-awareness in particular, emerge as vital inner strengths for various reasons. Firstly, regarding self-awareness, this inner strength facilitates Nora's reconnection with her authentic self, encompassing her emotions, passions, aspirations, and core values. Visible in every lesson Nora has learned in her journey, self-awareness serves as a foundation for other dimensions to

develop. In other words, only by having a clear and consistent sense of personal identity can Nora truly validate her potential, abilities, choices and empower herself to step beyond her comfort zone with confidence. This discovery correlates with previous research conducted by Campell et al. (1996) and Crocetti et al. (2015), highlighting the role of self-awareness as a source of empowerment. In essence, through thorough reflection and a profound understanding of herself, Nora discovers both her motivation to live and her life's purpose.

Besides, Total Inclusive Self-love proves to be essential in enriching Nora's life with joy and meaning. It is a decisive factor in Nora's final decision to return to her root life. More specifically, despite the allure of alternate lives where she may have achieved certain goals or aspirations, Nora ultimately values the authenticity and depth of her relationships above all else, as these connections hold a foundational significance in her identity and sense of belonging. Therefore, it can be argued that Totally Inclusive Self-love not only empowers Nora to adhere to her core values but also extends her love and appreciation to others. This can in turn create a positive cycle of kindness and compassion, in which one can support and be supported (Cosley et al., 2010). This difference is the decisive factor that makes her original life, though imperfect, profoundly meaningful and worth living.

8.2. The Role of Self-Awareness in Nora Seed's Path to Break Free From the Influence of External Factors

In Nora's journey, self-awareness plays a transformative role. It enables her to regain her authenticity, develop resilience against external pressures, and have the courage to pursue her own path.

To begin with, Self-awareness serves as a crucial element in Nora Seed's journey, allowing her to break free from external influences and reconnect with her authenticity. To be specific, being reflective and having a clear sense of herself enable Nora to dictate her values, aspirations, and purpose.

Furthermore, self-awareness equips Nora with resilience against external pressures and influences. This result has been confirmed by previous studies, in which self-awareness is considered crucial in developing certain psychological resources, including resilience and willpower (Reivich & Shatte, 2002; McGonigal, 2013; Goleman, 1995). Therefore, with a heightened sense of self-awareness, she becomes more immune to the weight of societal expectations. Gradually, Nora learns to embrace her identity and accept the imperfections of her life with grace, which, according to Xiang et al. (2022), can become a great source of motivation and liberation in the long term. As a result, she slowly gravitates towards prioritizing her needs instead of sacrificing them for the sake of others.

Finally, self-awareness enables Nora to define her own path and make decisions that align with her authentic feelings and values. As proven by Levey et al. (2019) and Posavac and Posavac (2020), people's beliefs about themselves can greatly influence their thoughts and actions. Sharing the same notion, Xiang et al. (2022) specifically emphasized the idea that acknowledging one's limitations is a foundational step toward overcoming them. On that account, as Nora is equipped with a deep understanding of her strengths, weaknesses, values, and potential, she can confidently develop herself and pursue her own fulfillment without being pressured by external expectations.

8.3. Educational Potential of Nora Seed's Narrative

Aligning with previous research, Nora's journey in "The Midnight Library" vividly illustrates literature's educational potential both as a learning tool for readers to understand the

human experience in contemporary society and as a medium for self-reflection (Hernadi, 2002).

Exploring the themes of choices and regrets and seeking answers to existential questions such as the meaning and purpose of life, Nora's narrative fosters a deeper comprehension of human experiences from diverse viewpoints, which confirms the findings of Gabriel (2021). Moreover, by depicting how Nora copes with external factors such as her loved ones' expectations and social norms, "The Midnight Library" also serves as a simulation of modern society, allowing readers to gain insights into its values and conventions, which aligns with the conclusions of Gautam (2014) and Bazimaziki et al (2019).

Moreover, Nora's journey serves as a rich source of insight and reflection for readers, offering valuable lessons that resonate with their own experiences. By looking into common struggles in modern society, such as depression, demotivation, and isolation, this narrative allows a wide range of readers to connect deeply with the protagonist's challenges and dilemmas. As a result, it fosters readers' empathy and understanding, which echoes the findings of Culler (1997). A lot of readers, at various levels of relatability, can extract meaningful lessons from Nora's journey that are applicable to their lives and embark on their own paths of self-reflection so as to strengthen their self-awareness, and develop themselves into the best version possible.

9. Conclusion

This paper explores Nora Seed's transformative journey toward joy and motivation, thus revealing the educational potential of her story. It is concluded that self-awareness and Totally Inclusive Self-love are the two most essential inner strengths in her transformative journey, with self-awareness playing a transformative role in liberating the main character from the constraints of external influences.

Not only contributing to the limited existing studies on "The Midnight Library," this research also offers implications in education. Nora Seed's journey in "The Midnight Library" holds significant educational potential. Through Nora's experiences and struggles, readers can learn about the human experience in modern society and acquire valuable lessons that are applicable to their own lives.

However, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of this research. While focusing on the protagonist's journey and analyzing the evolution of her perspective, this study may have overlooked the impact of other characters, particularly Mrs. Elm, who serves as a crucial figure in Nora's transformative journey as a companion, friend, and guide. Additionally, due to the constrained scope of this article, this study has only scratched the surface of several dimensions of Self-love. Future research could broaden its scope to offer a more thorough understanding of the character's psyche and development.

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“LA HAINE”: CINEMATIC INSIGHTS INTO PERIPHERY INEQUITY AND FRENCH NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: The multicultural suburban areas, known as banlieues, surrounding French cities are marked by social inequalities, systemic discrimination, crime, and violence. Mathieu Kassovitz’s film “La Haine” (1995) is set in one such Paris suburb, capturing the daily lives of a group of multi-ethnic friends amidst escalating tensions between the French police and immigrant residents. The film “La Haine”, which received critical acclaim and won the César Award in 1996, serves as a powerful portrayal of life in the banlieues, capturing the essence of marginal inequality. By focusing on the contrasting experiences of suburban youth and the disparities between Paris and its outskirts, the film highlights societal issues that remain relevant even two decades later. This study uses “La Haine” as a lens to explore whether the challenges depicted in the film persist in contemporary society, demonstrating the enduring impact of marginal inequality. Through this analysis, the film emerges as a significant cultural artifact that challenges national identities in France.

Keywords: France, La Haine, inequality, banlieues, national identity

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SỰ BẤT BÌNH ĐẲNG VÀ SỰ THÁCH THỨC BẢN SẮC PHÁP TRONG BỘ PHIM “LA HAINE”

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Tóm tắt: Banlieues là tên gọi của vùng ngoại ô của Pháp, nằm ngoài rìa các thành phố lớn, và thường gắn với dân nhập cư, sự bất bình đẳng xã hội, phân biệt chủng tộc, tội phạm và bạo lực giữa thanh niên và cảnh sát. “La Haine”, một bộ phim được công chiếu năm 1995 của đạo diễn Mathieu Kassovitz, lấy bối cảnh ở banlieues. Bộ phim xoay quanh cuộc sống thường ngày của ba chàng trai nhập cư sống tại vùng ngoại ô này trong một giai đoạn có nhiều bạo lực leo thang giữa cảnh sát và dân nhập cư sinh sống tại ngoại ô Paris. Bộ phim đã thành công khắc họa cuộc sống của dân nhập cư ở banlieues, và đã trở nên nổi tiếng khắp thế giới, đạt giải Cesar năm 1996. Bằng cách tập trung vào trải nghiệm đối lập của người trẻ ở ngoại thành và sự khác biệt Paris và ngoại ô Paris, bộ phim đã khắc họa thành công các vấn đề xã hội vẫn tồn tại 20 năm sau. Nghiên cứu này sử dụng bộ phim “La Haine” như một lăng kính để nghiên cứu những vấn đề bộ phim khắc họa, những vấn đề như sự bất bình đẳng và bạo lực giữa người trẻ và cảnh sát vẫn tồn tại trong xã hội hiện nay. Trong nghiên cứu này, bộ phim cũng nổi lên là tác phẩm văn hóa nổi bật, thách thức bản sắc Pháp.

Từ khóa: Pháp, La Haine, bất bình đẳng, banlieues, bản sắc dân tộc

1. Introduction

On June 29, 2023, protests erupted across France following the police shooting of 17-year-old Nahel in Nanterre, a suburb of Paris. The incident sparked widespread demonstrations, with signs reading “Justice for Nahel” appearing in cities like Marseille, Pau, and Lyon. These protests, documented extensively on social media, sometimes turned violent, leading to looting and clashes with law enforcement. Over 800 individuals were arrested overnight, and many more in the following days, while nearly 250 police officers were injured. The unrest echoed the 2005 riots following the deaths of Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, highlighting ongoing tensions between police and marginalized communities. These two events, occurring nearly two decades apart, sparked widespread mobilization against injustice, both stemming from extensive police actions directed toward marginalized communities. These incidents created a shared collective experience that piqued our interest in the issues of periphery inequity and France’s national identity, particularly as they are portrayed in visual arts and cinematic narratives.

Central to French national identity is the principle of *laïcité*, emphasizing secularism and inclusivity, as stated by President Emmanuel Macron. However, marginalized residents in the banlieues often face social exclusion and economic disparity, leading to frequent unrest. The contrast between the ideals of the French Republic and the lived experiences of these populations underscores the complexities of national identity.

This paper explores these themes through the lens of the film “La Haine” (1995) by Mathieu Kassovitz, which portrays the daily struggles of multi-ethnic youth in the Parisian

suburbs amidst police conflict. The film's critical acclaim and its relevance to recent events make it a compelling case study. This study centers on the film's portrayal of suburban youth and the stark contrast between Paris and its suburbs, aiming to demonstrate how "La Haine" highlights the persistence of marginal inequality and its profound impact on national identity in France.

Our modes of inquiry are cinematography and mise-en-scène. Cinematography as a mode of inquiry refers to the use of visual storytelling techniques, such as camera angles, lighting, framing, and movement, to explore and analyze themes, characters, and social issues within a film. Cinematography is a critical tool for examining how the film "La Haine" visually represents the harsh realities of life in the banlieues and the marginal inequality experienced by its inhabitants. To be more specific, cinematography is used to investigate how specific visual choices—like the use of black and white film, close-up shots of characters, and the portrayal of the urban environment—convey the tension, alienation, and violence that define the lives of the characters. By analyzing these cinematic techniques, the study can reveal how the film not only narrates but also visually constructs the social and political landscape of the banlieues, making the audience feel the impact of marginalization and systemic discrimination. This approach allows the film to be examined not just as a narrative, but as a visual document that captures the essence of the socio-political issues it portrays. Mise-en-scène as a mode of inquiry refers to the examination of the visual elements within a film—such as setting, lighting, costume, and the arrangement of actors and objects within the frame—to understand how these elements contribute to the film's overall meaning and thematic exploration. Mise-en-scène helps portray how the film's visual composition reflects and amplifies the social realities of life in the banlieues, from the bleak urban landscapes to the cramped, deteriorating housing projects. The use of real locations, the stark contrast between the suburbs and Paris, and the choice of props and costumes all work together to create a sense of isolation, despair, and tension. By focusing on these elements, the study can reveal how the visual design of the film not only depicts but also critiques the socio-political conditions that lead to marginal inequality.

2. The Parisian Banlieues: Periphery of Inequity

The term "periphery of inequity," introduced by Angélil and Siress (2012), describes urban outskirts marked by poverty, unemployment, and social disadvantage. In France, the banlieues epitomize this concept.

The migration of lower-income classes to Paris's outskirts began during the Second Empire under Baron Haussmann, leading to social stratification (Harvey, 2004). The restructuring aimed to expel "dangerous classes" from the city center, relocating them to the eastern and northeastern districts. This process continued post-World War I (WWI), with immigrants from Italy settling in the outskirts. Paris exported various elements, including hospitals, cemeteries, factories, and low-income residents, leading to "uneven geographical development."

After World War II (WWII), significant waves of North African immigrants moved to France to address labor shortages (MNasiali, 2014). They settled in new housing projects called "habitation à loyer modéré" (HLM), which were supported by the government to stimulate the economy during the "glorious thirty" (1945-1975) (Mulvey, 2011). However, the focus on quantity over quality in these projects led to further social and spatial segregation (Wong & Goldblum, 2016).

Wacquant (2018) describes "advanced marginality" as relegating marginalized

populations to neglected neighborhoods, devaluing and dehumanizing them. This form of exclusion is evident in the banlieues, where poor immigrant families face high unemployment and deteriorating living conditions.

During François Mitterrand's presidency (1981-1995), the Banlieue 89 Program aimed to improve living conditions in these areas through renovations and new housing models (Angélil & Siress, 2012). Despite these efforts, the program primarily focused on aesthetic improvements without adequately addressing unemployment, leaving many suburbs unchanged (Sicilianno, 2007).

HLMs have become emblematic of banlieue spaces, often portrayed negatively in the media as areas of crime and violence (Canteux, 2018). Films like "La Haine" (1995) highlight the decline of these neighborhoods and the struggles of marginalized youth. This perspective continues to shape cinematic depictions, emphasizing themes of criminal violence (Sylvia, 2012).

Urban planning and socio-political factors have significantly contributed to the creation and perpetuation of poverty and social marginalization in the banlieues. Historical policies focused on the city center have failed to address the needs of the marginalized periphery, resulting in ongoing social inequities.

The contrast between Paris and the banlieues

In "La Haine", Kassovitz emphasizes the contrast between the banlieues and Paris through his choices of scenery and shooting locations. Through cinematography, "La Haine" paints Chantelooup-les-Vignes as a concrete landscape dominated by towering public housing complexes, cramped living spaces, and bustling households, exemplified by Vinz and Hubert's cramped apartments. Vinz shared a room with his sister, and there was not much of a dining room due to the small kitchen. Hubert's apartment had a similar layout, with the dining room and kitchen being challenging to maneuver around. These settings underscore the harsh realities of poverty in the banlieue, where vacant lots serve as hubs for illicit activities, graffiti mars decaying buildings, and police presence is ubiquitous. Much like Spike Lee's portrayal of Brooklyn in "Do the Right Thing," the banlieue is portrayed as a perpetual battleground, where inhabitants are constantly exposed to violence. On the other hand, the city center of Paris radiates elegance, culture, and historical significance, marked by the symbolic monument- the Eiffel Tower and grand boulevards. Yet, under this facade, social issues still exist. A scene in the Paris subway further underscores social issues, as Said sarcastically advises a beggar to seek employment, highlighting the existence of poverty amidst the grandeur.

Figure 1

Banlieues and Paris Image in La Haine



Kassovitz skillfully contrasts the banlieues and Paris through deliberate technical and aesthetic choices. In Paris, he employs expansive camera movements and long, sweeping shots that capture the city's grandeur and fluidity. In contrast, scenes set in the banlieues are filmed with close-up, monochromatic shots and a smaller technical crew, creating a more intimate and constrained atmosphere. When filming in Paris, Kassovitz uses deep focus to seamlessly integrate side characters into their surroundings, emphasizing their connection to the city. However, when focusing on the three main characters in Paris, he sharpens the focus on them while deliberately blurring the cityscape behind them, highlighting their sense of disconnection and alienation from the urban environment.

The director's manipulation of camera techniques is particularly effective in conveying the characters' experiences. For example, during tense nighttime scenes in the city, Kassovitz uses shorter shots and a telephoto lens to create a disorienting ambiance. The shorter shots—often close-ups or medium shots—concentrate on the characters or specific objects, minimizing the surrounding environment. Combined with the narrow field of view provided by the telephoto lens, this technique effectively communicates the isolation and estrangement felt by the young protagonists, underscoring their exclusion from the dominant urban space.

Conversely, when filming in the banlieue, Kassovitz extensively uses long shots and wide-angle lenses to capture the full scene, including the environment. These long shots emphasize the characters' familiarity and sense of belonging within their community, while also interweaving themes of exclusion and integration between the banlieue and the city. This contrast in filming techniques not only enhances the visual storytelling but also deepens the thematic exploration of belonging and alienation in "La Haine".

Figure 2

Medium Shots on the Characters and Less Concentration on the Surroundings



Figure 3*Long shots in La Haine*

“La Haine” portrays these stark contrasts with the realism and authenticity of a documentary film, distinguishing itself from other films like “The 400 Blow” (1959) and “Breathless” (1960) in terms of style. For the most realistic images in the film, he chooses not to use film stock with the characteristic grain and smaller contrast ratio of documentary film. Instead, he goes for a black-and-white film tone, which lends a gritty authenticity reminiscent of CCTV footage or documentary style, intensifying the portrayal of the banlieues as a desolate environment.

Andrew (1995) has described the aesthetic of poetic realism as something that connects with societal experiences in an analogous manner, rather than a direct one. He selects Chanteloup-les-Vignes, a real banlieue, as the shooting location—though it remains unnamed in the film—which enhances the authenticity of the banlieue scenes. Through common banlieue symbols in Chanteloup-les-Vignes like HLMs buildings, courtyards, playgrounds, deserted parking lots, police officers loitering everywhere, and cramped apartments with large families, the film allows viewers to see a real banlieue. The exact location of the film is not disclosed to the audience, but this ambiguity allows them to associate the narrative with any banlieue in France and its related societal problems, thereby enhancing the film's universal appeal.

The film’s commitment to realism is further enhanced by the inclusion of seemingly inconsequential dialogue, such as Said's brother's commentary on “Candid Camera”, which reflects the film's ethos of capturing the authenticity of everyday life, even in its mundane or seemingly irrelevant moments.

Figure 4*The Trio Listens to a Young Boy Discuss the French Candid Camera in La Haine*

Despite its commitment to portraying genuine experiences, “La Haine” maintains a distance from documentary realism, as evidenced by scenes like the police chase through narrow alleyways, which metaphorically depict the feeling of entrapment. These scenes, along with other extended shots in the film, possess a lyrical quality, blending realism with cinematic artistry.

The suburban youth - the “Other” in France

In “La Haine”, director Mathieu Kassovitz skillfully portrays the three main characters—Vinz, Hubert, and Saïd—as “others,” existing on the margins of French society through the following themes:

Diverse backgrounds. The banlieues and their characteristics were shaped by countless cultures imported from around the world. The film mirrors this reality by depicting the black-blanc-beur trio—Hubert, of Black descent, Vinz, a White Jew, and Saïd, of Arab origin—as its central characters, representing the “Other” in French society at the time. However, Tarr (2005) argues that La Haine primarily addresses exclusion rather than ethnicity. Higbee (2013) states that the protagonists’ exclusion is emphasized through the spatial disadvantage of the urban periphery rather than ethnic or cultural differences, evident as the film unfolds in the banlieue in its first half and in the predominantly French and white center of Paris in the second half.

Shared struggles. Despite their different backgrounds, the trio faces common struggles—unemployment, limited opportunity, stereotypes and exclusion.

Limited opportunities. The film juxtaposes various locations, contrasting the suburbs with the more traditional and romantic parts of Paris. From abandoned buildings filled with graffiti to prestigious art galleries where the trio feels out of place. The trio’s social interaction context is different from that of people residing in the city. They cannot afford to hang out in traditional venues like coffee shops or dance floors. Nevertheless, the young people in that neighborhood have built their own social hub on roofs or vacant lots that are covered with debris and graffiti. Making the most of the available area, they ingeniously utilize the surroundings, setting up impromptu hot dog stands and engaging in lively conversations. As the main characters line up for food, a strong sense of community is fostered when the seller shakes Hubert’s hand and gives him a discount. Their experiences as outsiders bind them together, creating a sense of camaraderie. Kassovitz’s camera deftly navigates the rooftop, capturing the diverse interactions and transactions taking place. Conversations often revolve around topics like drugs and incarceration. However, their gathering is abruptly disrupted when the police arrive and forcefully disperse them, asserting that they do not belong in the area.

Figure 5

The Roof Where the Youth Hang out



Spending their days wandering around the banlieue, it becomes evident that the trio of young men are unemployed. With most of their time spent idling at home, congregating in vacant lots, or on rooftops, their lack of employment makes life challenging, leading them to engage in increasingly nefarious activities. In fact, France is facing a large youth unemployment rate. In 2018, the nationwide youth unemployment rate stood at 21%, with many suburban areas experiencing a sharp increase to 40%. By 2020, young people under 25 were disproportionately represented in Priority Urban Neighborhoods (QPVs), where the unemployment rate for those under 30 rose to 30.4%. In 2023, the employment center, Pôle emploi, was vandalized and set on fire following the death of young Nahel M., serving as a symbol for communities whose residents often face significant barriers to accessing employment opportunities.

Society's vices. The film portrays drug use and theft as prominent among these hardships. While the attempted car theft in Paris is a memorable scene for many viewers, another less conspicuous moment deserves attention. It unfolds in a grocery store where Said and Vinz are purchasing items for Vinz's grandmother. The focus shifts to Said, who discreetly pilfers cakes from the shelves, slipping them into his pocket without paying. Meanwhile, Vinz attempts to placate the cashier, citing his grandmother's regular patronage and his shortfall in funds. The cashier's skeptical response, "You are not your grandmother," hints at distrust. Then, Vinz's outburst towards an elderly woman behind him: "Stop muttering and give me a franc, you old dinosaur!" This line is ironic since the "old dinosaur" he is talking about is a small and elderly person, reminiscent of his own grandmother. Despite his imposing stature, Vinz's behavior resembles that of a petulant child. He said: "Fine, just give me the red pepper!" As he walked out of the store, he turned to Said and said: "My grandmother is going to kill me; she hates red peppers." Just a minute ago, he was rude and intended to take money from someone the same age as his grandmother. But as soon as he walked out of the store, he was afraid that his grandmother would be angry with him for not buying the right kind of chili. He respects his grandmother but is disrespectful and has bad intentions towards others.

Beyond theft, the involvement of the young men in drugs is also apparent. While Said and Vinz are portrayed as users, Hubert takes on the role of a small-time drug dealer to make ends meet. This is evident in scenes depicting money exchanges on the rooftop and Hubert's interactions with other dealers in Paris, highlighting the extent to which economic hardship drives their involvement in illicit activities.

Figure 6

Said Stole in the Grocery Store

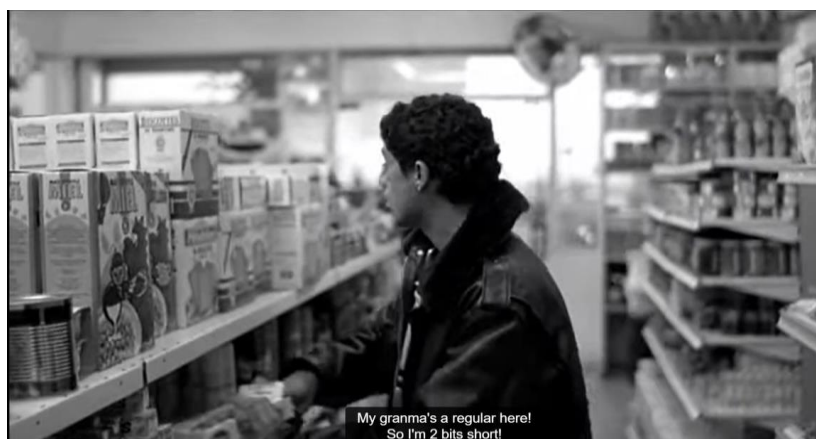


Figure 7*Selling Drug in the Roof*

Stereotyped. According to Champagne (1991) in "The Media Construction of Social Discomfort," media portrayal of the banlieues consistently highlights urban crime, violence, drug issues, and police involvement. Champagne suggests that journalists often sensationalize stories to meet readers' expectations, perpetuating a cycle of biased reporting. Furthermore, he asserts that residents of these areas lack control over their representation in the national media, leaving them voiceless and marginalized. This scenario is reflected in a scene from "La Haine" where a reporter stops their car and questions the main characters about their knowledge of the recent rebellion. Implicitly assuming their involvement, the media's attempt to implicate them in violence reflects racist undertones, stereotyping them based on their suburban residence and immigrant backgrounds. The trio challenges these assumptions, refusing to accept the portrayal of themselves as thugs, particularly rebuffing the questions of a white female journalist. Additionally, the scene featuring a group of reporters standing on a bridge, physically distant from the trio below, symbolizes the power and dominance of mainstream French culture. Another example of banlieue youth being subject to common prejudices is when an older neighbor scolds Said for taking part in the riot at the beginning of the film. This caused the young man to retort "Did you see me there?". Another notable scene is when the television displays images of the city ablaze from the previous night's riots while Hubert sits at the kitchen table with his mother. These scenes appear to validate Moudjaoui's (2018) contention that residents of the banlieues are held responsible for issues beyond their influence, such as their familial origins, educational background, residential location, crime rates in their area, or even their birthplace. Consequently, they face exclusion and limited opportunities.

Figure 8*The News Crew Asks the Trio About the Riot*

It is evident that mainstream media plays a significant role in perpetuating these stereotypes, fueling the animosity of "native" French individuals towards residents of banlieues and immigrants in general. When reporting on the banlieues, these areas are often depicted as isolated districts cut off from the rest of the country, portrayed as strongholds for armed gangs. In her 2018 study "Media Representation of the Banlieues" in France, Fatima Moudjaoui found that 2017-2018 articles about the banlieues consistently portray them negatively, focusing on issues such as illegal activities, a failing education system, territories abandoned by rappers, violence, and despair. In addition to textual narratives, the media also uses imagery to reinforce negative stereotypes of the banlieues, showing scenes of riots, burning cars, and police arrests. A recent example of biased media coverage occurred after the June 2023 riots in the eastern suburbs of Paris in Nanterre, where the BBC's report featured images of burned cars, damaged shops, and a heavy police presence. Such images often shape public perception of the banlieues. The violent acts reported in these articles reflect societal fractures, further exacerbating the experiences of those living in suburban areas, while reinforcing dominant narratives about the Other (Rousset, 2016). The "Other" is often scorned and unable to integrate because the "Us" retains the power to ensure the "Other's" inferiority and creates "a homogeneous French national identity from which immigrants living in the banlieues are excluded" (Costelloe, 2014, p.322).

Figure 9

Image of the banlieues on BBC News Website



Exclusion. Additionally, the characters face exclusion whenever it appears they might integrate into society. They encounter denial of entry on no less than five occasions: at showrooms, trains, rooftops, luxury apartment buildings in Paris, and a club. In particular, the gallery is the context that most clearly shows the social exclusion of the three main characters as well as the banlieue people. The stark contrast between space and clothing style, knowledge about art and the way they interact with others highlights their marginalized status. The gallery, representing a space of culture and sophistication, inherently excludes those who are ethnically diverse or economically disadvantaged. While the other attendees are dressed formally, the main characters stand out in their casual hip-hop attire. Their lack of familiarity with the artworks is evident. The works in the gallery made Said confused and dumbfounded, saying "It's scary." A similarly confused Vinz asked Hubert if "the guy that made this is famous." Their bewilderment is underscored by their reaction to a simple porcelain dog sculpture, suggesting their limited exposure to art and cultural experiences, especially in comparison to the cosmopolitan environment of present-day Paris.

After growing bored of observing the artwork, the trio made their way to the refreshment table. The boys munched on peanuts and other refreshing drinks, while rudely taunting the waiter who handed them glasses of champagne. Across the room, Said and Hubert spotted two

women they found attractive and decided to initiate a conversation. Hubert took the lead as Said admitted to feeling too shy. Initially, the exchange seemed promising, with one of the women even joking "Haven't we met before somewhere?". Observing that the conversation was progressing well, Said approached, introduced himself, and promptly requested one of the women's phone numbers. Regrettably, due to the woman's social class and viewpoint, she responded, "You're all the same," referring to individuals like him as a collective. The situation intensified when the other woman defended her friend, stating, "You're jerks. We would have liked to have a conversation with you, but you immediately became aggressive. How can we respect you?" This remark made Said feel embarrassed and out of place, prompting him to angrily raise his hand in a threatening gesture towards the woman. To make matters worse, Vinz retorted, "Who are you? The girls in the Wonderbra ads?" Amid the heated altercation, the gallery owner stepped in, prompting the main characters to leave the exhibition. As they exited the exhibition in frustration, the gallerist shrugged his shoulders and lamented, "Troubled youth!", expressing sympathy for the boys as mere products of their disadvantaged environments. Connel (2023) has noted that "troubled" is a significant misunderstanding. The poor behavior of the three main characters stems from the fear and alienation they experience in this specific location. At first glance, the three young men appear to be ordinary villains, but the disgusted glances directed at them, the stark contrast in attire (the three main characters wear a more hip-hop and casual style, while the other characters wear more formal suits), and the different use of dialect (e.g., the man refers to the three boys as "gentlemen" and Hubert calls him "pop") contribute to the escalating sense of threat among the three men. The music also plays a role in portraying this feeling among the three of them. At the start of the scene, the music is soft as the three main characters merely glance at the artwork without paying attention to their surroundings. When Said is rejected and feels insulted, the music abruptly intensifies. As a result, viewers can associate these sounds with a threat, related to Said's reaction to the two women's unexpected responses. Finally, as more characters appear and the three main characters are shouting at the rest of the gallery, the music completely stops, highlighting and emphasizing Said's, Hubert's, and Vinz's embarrassing and obnoxious reactions. With the aid of these sound aspects, Kassovitz creates an environment that feels hostile and gloomy.

Figure 10

The Trio Was Asked to Leave the Gallery



Attempt to escape. The sole genuine solution to the myriad issues depicted in the film is to leave the neighborhood, as Hubert shares with his mother. Hubert emerges as the character most driven to break free from confinement, evidenced by his determination to support his family. This aspiration is evident during a conversation when Vinz and Said visit Hubert amidst

the charred remains of his boxing gym, discussing its destruction during the riot:

Hubert: I knew this would eventually happen.

Saïd: Then why did you work your ass off for it?

Vinz: Because he thought it was worth it, d*ck.

Despite anticipating the inevitable, he attempted to open it in a desperate bid to escape. The irony lies in the fact that the very environment he sought to flee ended up thwarting his efforts. The film suggests that the banlieues themselves contribute to the problem, insinuating that the culture within and surrounding these neighborhoods inevitably breeds violence. This culture encompasses not just the minority culture within the banlieues, but also factors such as the economic prospects available, the treatment of the banlieues by law enforcement, the political landscape in France, media portrayal, and more.

The poignant reality is that despite Hubert's longing to break free from it all, the film quickly illustrates why this aspiration is unattainable. His struggles to assist his sister with her homework underscore the limited opportunities for traditional means of upward mobility, such as education. This realization leaves him feeling trapped. As he rides the train and encounters a sign that reads "The world is yours," his gaze meets the camera as he closes his eyes, symbolizing a moment of resignation. While later in the film, Saïd alters the sign to read "The world is ours," the underlying message remains abundantly clear. Indeed, that line encapsulates a central message of the film, challenging stereotypes of banlieue residents as mere delinquents prone to rioting without cause. It portrays these individuals as ordinary people, neither inherently good nor bad.

Figure 11

Saïd Change the Word From "Yours" to "Ours"



The film sheds light on the toxic and confining environment of the banlieues, highlighting how simplistic responses, such as "they shouldn't riot" or "they should study more", fail to grasp the complex reality of their situation. Realistically, the primary question is not what actions the people could have taken to prevent unrest, as their options were limited and the systemic issues they face are deeply entrenched.

3. Persistent Violence

The World Health Organization defines violence as the intentional or threatening use of force against oneself, another individual, or a group, resulting in physical or psychological harm, or even death (Krug et al., 2012). Violence encompasses acts of aggression that cause damage or destruction. According to Riches (1986), violence is an act of harm considered

legitimate by the perpetrator but illegal by some observers.

In France, ethnic minorities often face violence, particularly from the police, who view them as lesser members of society, leading to racial profiling and harassment. Research indicates that high inequality levels correlate with increased violence (Gartner, 1990). Krivo and Peterson (1996) suggest that the link between race and violent crime is largely due to extreme hardship. Inequality and social exclusion sever ties between minority groups and the community, fostering violence among youth against state symbols.

Violence in France typically involves clashes between police and youth, escalating to protests and riots. Castañeda (2022) argues that dismissing the demands of the oppressed provokes youth to target state symbols they perceive as excluding and controlling. Roux (2017) found that banlieue youth have a more negative view of the police than adults, citing harassment and discrimination.

“La Haine” reflects this cycle of violence, encapsulated in the phrase “La Haine attire la haine” (hatred breeds hatred). The film portrays discrimination, police brutality, and riots as fueling a cycle of hostility. The opening scene with a Molotov cocktail and the quote about falling from a skyscraper underscores the ongoing deterioration of French society.

The scene erupts into protests and riots, accompanied by Bob Marley's “Burning and Looting”, creating a visceral atmosphere where the sounds of the city blend seamlessly with the music. Kassovitz said he wanted the sounds of the city to become a part of their music: “a growl, a layer of sound but a natural sound”. The original music featured sporadic siren sounds that broke up the reggae beat. As Marley sang, “Could not recognize the faces standing over me / All dressed in uniforms of brutality,” Molotov cocktails, tear gas, and batons descended from the skies. The lyrics of the song, with mentions of uniforms and violence, further emphasize the connection between the fictional narrative of the film and the real-world political and social turmoil. Only after this intense opening scene are the three main characters introduced: Said, seen defacing a police car; Hubert, seen practicing boxing in a gym that has been destroyed by fire; and Vinz, waking up in bed and concealing a pistol he stole from a police officer. According to Gott (2016), these character introductions set the tone for the rest of the film, illustrating the raw and gritty reality of life in the banlieue and the simmering tensions that underlie their existence. In this opening sequence, the director utilizes detailed news footage of riots, showcasing instances of police violence and resistance. This footage serves as a prelude to the fate of both the riots and the main characters, who ultimately become victims of police brutality at the end of the film.

Figure 12

The Real Images of Riots in the Suburbs



The second half of the film, when the three main characters arrive in Paris, most clearly demonstrates marginalized individuals as targets of both police brutality and racism. A typical scene illustrating the victimization of the banlieue youth by the police and the reinforcement of stereotypes occurs when two of the three characters, Said and Hubert, are apprehended after drawing attention to themselves near a luxury apartment building, prompting bystanders to call the police. Following their arrest, they endure torture at the police station before eventually being released. Additionally, the character Hubert experiences sexual assault at the hands of the police, who make derogatory remarks such as, "You look like a b*tch from behind. A nice b to suck me off!". During this scene, Hubert and Said find themselves subjected to humiliating treatment intended to serve as a lesson for a new rookie police officer (Rossignon, 1995; Vincendeau, 2005). The officers, treating the two young men as mere objects, openly discuss their desire to harm them but restrain themselves. The policemen demonstrate techniques they consider professional and effective for subduing individuals, including forcefully grabbing the head, pinching the ears, and employing a method known as the "Shanghai squeeze". These tactics evoke a troubling history of police brutality, reminiscent of the systemic abuses endured by black men in cities like Chicago and Philadelphia. Such practices have been used for generations, with reports of police using extreme methods such as attaching individuals to car batteries or resorting to physical violence as a means of control and punishment. The scene underscores the disturbing reality that police officers view the lives of these young men as expendable and treat their suffering as a game, perpetuating a cycle of conflict.

Figure 13

Säid and Hubert get Abused by Racist Police Officers



Teaching new police recruits how to assault young men like that shows that police brutality will not disappear, but will be continued. While the new recruit appears visibly shaken by the abuse he witnesses, he lacks the courage to intervene, reflecting the pervasive culture of complicity within the police force. His reluctance to act suggests a glimmer of conscience, but the toxic environment in which he operates raises doubts about his future trajectory. Despite his initial hesitation, there is no guarantee that he will resist becoming like his abusive superiors, illustrating the insidious nature of institutional corruption within law enforcement.

Following their release from the cell, they rush to the station only to miss the last train home, leaving them stranded in Paris. Subsequently, they are ejected from the art gallery and denied by a taxi, prompting Said to curse, "Nique c'est délire, on est enfermés dehors" (F* it's crazy, we're locked outside). This quote encapsulates the characters' frustration with their marginalized existence in French society. As episodes of exclusion escalate, punctuated by

encounters with skinheads, the cycle of violence is perpetuated by entrenched social and institutional prejudices. Upon their return to the banlieue at 6 a.m., Vinz inexplicably hands the pistol to Hubert. In a tragic turn of events, a police officer arrests and accidentally shoots Vinz, leading to a tense standoff between Hubert and the officer. The film ends with a haunting image of Hubert and the officer aiming guns at each other, followed by a sudden blackout and the sound of gunshots. This ending underscores the tragic irony of Hubert's earlier catchphrase, "So far so good... but what matters is not the fall but the landing." Kassovitz's portrayal suggests a belief in the escalating violence within the banlieue, depicting it as inevitable and cyclical. The symbolic exchange of the gun from Vinz to Hubert signifies the perpetuation of violence, with Hubert poised to avenge his friend's death. The abrupt conclusion leaves viewers in a state of uncertainty and speculation, reflecting the grim reality that regardless of the outcome, riots are bound to erupt again. With such an ambiguous ending, Kassovitz anticipates a never-ending cycle of violence for the people in the banlieue (Rossignon, 1995; Vincendeau, 2005).

Figure 14

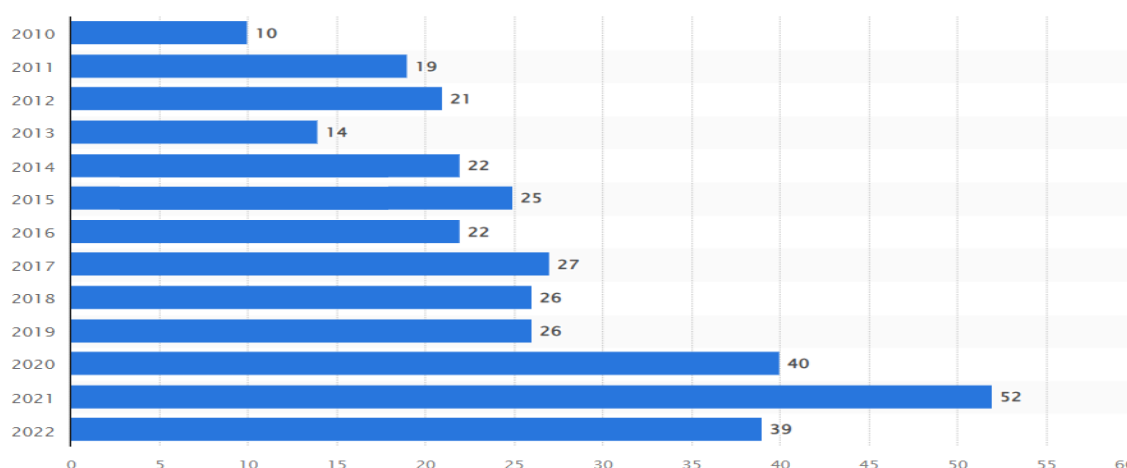
The Ending Scene



A film from over two decades ago remains relevant to today's incidents involving police "slip-ups" and racial discrimination. Police "slip-ups" continue to occur with alarming frequency, and nationwide riots have become a recurring phenomenon in recent years. As per the data in figure 15, there has been a rise in fatalities resulting from police interventions since 2010. The year 2021 marked a peak with a record 52 deaths. Meanwhile, society has become desensitized to violence, with incidents of police brutality routinely captured and circulated on news and social media platforms. It is ironic how organizations that cause violence tell the people they oppress that it's not an option for them. Then, the oppressed cannot stand it anymore and behave the way they were treated. The violence happened again. As Hubert astutely remarks, "Hatred breeds hatred," indicating that these protests are not without cause. The underlying issue lies in the systemic violence perpetrated against marginalized communities by those in positions of authority. However, expecting a solution to emerge from within the same system that perpetuates the problem seems unrealistic.

Figure 15

Annual Number of Deaths Linked to Police Intervention in France Between 2010 and 2022
(Source: Statista Research Department)



“La Haine” also predates the Black Lives Matter movement. Although “La Haine” was created as a political commentary on 1990s France, it would be inaccurate to suggest that its themes have been irrelevant in France and globally in recent years. A nationwide study conducted in 2017 on police misconduct revealed that “40% of young men aged 18 to 24 reported being stopped by police, as did 80% of men aged 18 to 24” who were perceived to be of black or Arab descent. Despite France's multiracial makeup, studies indicate that racism persists in society despite professed secularism and “color-blindness.” Individuals of black or North African descent, particularly youth, are disproportionately targeted by police, being 20 times more likely to be stopped and asked for identification than their white counterparts (Elzas, 2023). However, official data fails to fully capture the extent of the disadvantages faced by these communities.

4. Challenging the Notion of French National Identity

The disparities faced by immigrants and the banlieue people are powerfully depicted in “La Haine”. Over 20 years since its release, the film's relevance endures in reflecting contemporary French society. France has grappled with immigration and nationalism, especially during the 2005 and 2016 elections. Despite being a coming-of-age story, “La Haine” explores French identity through its protagonists and the cultural convergence in the banlieues.

France prides itself on being a multicultural nation, shaped by waves of immigration, particularly in the early 20th century. Policies have aimed to foster diversity, such as President Macron's 2021 initiative to promote social diversity in education. The transformation of France's national colors to “black-blanc-beur” during the 1998 FIFA World Cup symbolized unity and multiculturalism, emphasizing the ideology of ‘solidarité’.

Despite these efforts, recurring unrest suggests a gap between the ideal and reality. The removal of the word “race” from the constitution in 2018 aimed to combat racism, but systemic issues persist. France's assimilationist model expects immigrants to abandon their original identities, a challenging expectation for non-white immigrants, especially from the Maghreb and Africa. Policies like the veil ban and recent prohibitions on religious attire in schools underscore the difficulties in balancing secularism and multiculturalism.

“La Haine” reveals the hidden facets of France, focusing on social disparity and police violence. Its characters—Hubert, Saïd, and Vinz—represent a multicultural identity, highlighting the flaws in France’s social solidarity. The film critiques the motto “Liberté, égalité, fraternité” as it fails to extend to banlieue residents, who are categorized as “Other” and face mistreatment due to racial and cultural disparities.

Figure 16

Hubert and Vinz on the rooftop



In the film “La Haine”, discrimination and inequality are shown through racial prejudice and violent clashes between the young characters and the police. The Maghrebian, African, and Jewish characters are not explicitly stigmatized due to their biological 'otherness', but rather their cultural 'otherness' as inhabitants of the banlieue - which becomes a spatialized, racialized symbol of political unrest, societal fragmentation, crime, and violence (Siciliano, 2007, p. 220). When Vinz expresses his fear of becoming the next Arab killed in a police station, Saïd humorously refers to Vinz's honorary Arab status. The film provides the police officers with minimal dialogue, but their actions result in grim tragedies that the trio seeks to avenge through violence. This violence gives these areas a collective territorial expression, making them visible. However, the vocal expression through violence has led to the association of banlieues with it, with images of torched cars, looted shops, and confrontations between police officers and stone-throwing youths.

To conclude, “La Haine” exposes the marginalized and violent experiences of diverse cultural groups in France, particularly the youth of the banlieue and their interactions with the police. The film challenges the French government's portrayal of the nation as an egalitarian society where “liberty, equality, and fraternity” apply to all.

“La Haine” is not alone in exploring these themes. Films such as “Hexagone” (1994), “Ma 6-T va Crack-er” (1997), “Wesh Wesh, qu'est-ce qui se passe?” (2001), “Divines” (2016), and “Les Misérables” (2019) also address inequality and police brutality in the banlieues. Each film offers a unique perspective: “Ma 6-T va Crack-er” focuses solely on the banlieues, while “Les Misérables” shifts the focus to the police, highlighting the ongoing tension and disparity between Parisians and peripheral residents.

These films collectively underscore social injustice and violence in disadvantaged urban areas, challenging the government's constructed national identity. “La Haine” remains a seminal work in this genre, exemplifying the persistent struggles faced by marginalized communities in France.

5. Conclusion

“La Haine” portrays life on the outskirts of France, underscoring the absence of

opportunities, conflicts of identity, and rampant police brutality, thereby laying bare the shortcomings of the French government. The film delves into the viewpoints of three young suburban men to reveal the social dynamics that mold the center and the periphery, as well as the degrees of mediation between them. They are ostracized, belittled, and live in perpetual dread of a government-sanctioned organization funded by taxpayers. Due to this voicelessness, the inhabitants here have no alternative but to revolt to make their voices heard. In recent years, Paahps has been the scene of numerous riots. Yet, the legal and judicial systems have made no headway in addressing these issues. The emblems of French nationalism and the conduct of the police expose the state's hypocrisy. The slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" appears not to extend to the suburban areas, as these residents are oppressed by the government.

In summary, this examination of "La Haine" and its context within French society starkly illustrates the parallels between the events depicted in "La Haine" and current events indicative of the ongoing social injustice in France, forming a bleak aspect of French national identity. Despite being over 20 years old, "La Haine" can still serve as a rallying cry for systemic reform in France.

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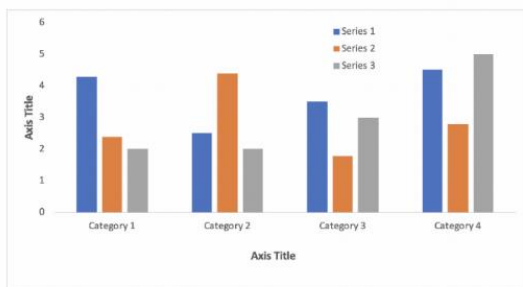
THẺ LỆ GỬI BÀI

- Tạp chí Nghiên cứu nước ngoài** là ấn phẩm khoa học chính thức của Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội, kế thừa và phát triển *Chuyên san Nghiên cứu Nước ngoài* của Tạp chí Khoa học, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội. Tạp chí xuất bản định kỳ 06 số/năm (02 số tiếng Việt/năm và 04 số tiếng Anh/năm từ năm 2019 trở đi), công bố các công trình nghiên cứu có nội dung khoa học mới, chưa đăng và chưa được gửi đăng ở bất kỳ tạp chí nào, thuộc các lĩnh vực: *ngôn ngữ học, giáo dục ngoại ngữ/ngôn ngữ, quốc tế học hoặc các ngành khoa học xã hội và nhân văn có liên quan*.
- Bài gửi đăng cần trích dẫn ÍT NHẤT 01 bài đã đăng trên Tạp chí Nghiên cứu nước ngoài.
- Bài báo sẽ được gửi tới phản biện kín, vì vậy tác giả cần tránh tiết lộ danh tính trong nội dung bài một cách không cần thiết.
- Bài báo có thể viết bằng tiếng Việt hoặc tiếng Anh (*tối thiểu 10 trang/khoảng 4.000 từ đối với bài nghiên cứu và 5 trang/khoảng 2.000 từ đối với bài thông tin-trao đổi*) được soạn trên máy vi tính, khổ giấy A4, cách lề trái 2,5cm, lề phải 2,5cm, trên 3,5cm, dưới 3cm, font chữ Times New Roman, cỡ chữ 12, cách dòng Single.
- Hình ảnh, sơ đồ, biểu đồ trong bài viết phải đảm bảo rõ nét và được đánh số thứ tự theo trình tự xuất hiện trong bài viết. Nguồn của các hình ảnh, sơ đồ trong bài viết cũng phải được chỉ rõ. Tên ảnh, sơ đồ, biểu đồ trong bài viết phải được cung cấp trên ảnh, sơ đồ, biểu đồ.

Ví dụ:

Figure 1

Sample Figure Title



Note. A note describing content in the figure would appear here.

- Bảng biểu trong bài viết được đánh số thứ tự theo trình tự xuất hiện trong bài viết. Tên bảng trong bài phải được cung cấp trên bảng. Yêu cầu bảng không có đường kẻ sọc.

Ví dụ:

Table 3

Sample Table Showing Decked Heads and P Value Note

Variable	Visual		Infrared		F	η
	M	SD	M	SD		
Row 1	3.6	.49	9.2	1.02	69.9***	.12
Row 2	2.4	.67	10.1	.08	42.7***	.23
Row 3	1.2	.78	3.6	.46	53.9***	.34
Row 4	0.8	.93	4.7	.71	21.1***	.45

*** $p < .01$.

7. Quy cách trích dẫn: Các tài liệu, nội dung được trích dẫn trong bài báo và phần tài liệu tham khảo cần phải được **trình bày theo APA7** (vui lòng tham khảo trang web: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines> hoặc hướng dẫn của Tạp chí trên trang web <https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/index.php/fs/about/submissions>)

8. Bản thảo xin gửi đến website của Tạp chí tại <https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/>. Tòa soạn không trả lại bản thảo nếu bài không được đăng. Tác giả chịu hoàn toàn trách nhiệm trước pháp luật về nội dung bài viết và xuất xứ tài liệu trích dẫn.

MẪU TRÌNH BÀY BỐ CỤC CỦA MỘT BÀI VIẾT TIÊU ĐỀ BÀI BÁO

(bằng tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, in hoa, cỡ chữ: 16,
giãn dòng: single, căn lề: giữa)

Tên tác giả (cỡ 13)*

Tên cơ quan / trường đại học (cỡ 10, in nghiêng)
Địa chỉ cơ quan / trường đại học (cỡ 10, in nghiêng)

Tóm tắt: Tóm tắt bằng tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, không quá 250 từ, cỡ chữ: 11

Từ khóa: Không quá 5 từ, cỡ chữ: 11

Phần nội dung chính của bài báo thường bao gồm các phần sau:

1. Đặt vấn đề

2. Mục tiêu

3. Cơ sở lý thuyết

3.1. ...

3.2.

4. Phương pháp nghiên cứu

4.1. ...

4.2. ...

5. Kết quả nghiên cứu

6. Thảo luận

7. Kết luận và khuyến nghị

Lời cảm ơn (nếu có)

Tài liệu tham khảo

Phụ lục (nếu có)

* ĐT.: (Số của tác giả liên hệ)

Email: (Email của tác giả liên hệ)