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Original Research Article

A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Visual and Linguistic Weaponization in the Iran-Israel Digital Conflict

Prof. Dr. Qasim Abass Dhayef[1], Lect. Ali Muhammed Ridha Abdulwahid Smesim[2]*

[1]Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon
[2]Department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Kufa

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***Corresponding author:** Ali Muhammed Ridha Abdulwahid Smesim
Department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Kufa

Abstract

This paper will provide a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) of the ways in which both Iran and Israel used Visual and Linguistic Weaponization Strategies to engage each other throughout the Digital Conflict in 2025 and 2024. A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis will be conducted in order to understand how both sides of the conflict were able to utilize the combination of Visual Imagery, Textual Narratives, and Symbolic Representations to create Disinformation, Manipulate Public Perception, and to further Strategic Communication Objectives. Utilizing theoretical constructs from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Multimodal Discourse Analysis, and Visual Rhetoric; this research will illustrate the various types of Visual and Linguistic manipulation that took place through Official State Media Channels, Social Media Platforms, and Strategic Communication Outlets. The results will indicate that both Iranian and Israeli Actors were able to successfully deploy Sophisticated Multimodal Disinformation Campaigns that included Mislabeled Images, Out-Of-Context Video Footage, Fabricated Claims, and Emotionally Charged Visual Rhetoric. These findings will contribute to the ever-growing body of literature on Information Warfare in the Digital Age and will also demonstrate the Urgent Need for Developing Enhanced Media Literacy Frameworks capable of Addressing the Complex Semiotic Landscape of Contemporary Conflict Zones.

Keywords: Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Visual Weaponization, Linguistic Weaponization, Iran-Israel Conflict, Disinformation, Digital Conflict, Information Warfare, Visual Rhetoric.

1. INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Iran and Israel represents one of the most significant examples of the evolving nature of conflict in the information age. For the first time in history, both parties employed Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) to produce hundreds of images that were intended to create a distorted view of reality. These images, often referred to as "deep fakes," were so realistic that they could not be distinguished from real ones. The images depicted everything from missile attacks to destroyed buildings and civilians in distress.

During the conflict, both parties engaged in a massive campaign of disinformation using visual and linguistic weapons. Each side produced dozens of images that depicted their version of events. These images were designed to create a specific view of the conflict and to influence public opinion. However, many of the images were completely false. In fact, many of the images were produced using GAI. This technology allowed both sides to create fake images that were nearly indistinguishable from real ones.

In addition to the images, both parties also used other forms of visual and linguistic weapons. They produced videos, audio recordings, and written communications. The communications were designed to promote a particular version of the conflict and to discredit their opponent. Both parties used all forms of digital communication, including social media, to disseminate their messages.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the visual and linguistic weapons employed by both parties during the conflict. This will include analyzing the images, videos, audio recordings, and written communications produced by both parties. This will enable us to understand how both parties used visual and linguistic weapons to create a distorted view of the conflict and to influence public opinion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis: Theoretical Foundations

Multimodal critical discourse analysis extends traditional critical discourse analysis (CDA) by examining how meaning is constructed through semiotics and multiple communicative modes in contemporary contexts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) were primary developers of multimodal discourse analysis, with significant contributions from Machin and Mayr (2012) and Norris (2004). The approach to meaning-making in multimodal discourse analysis differs fundamentally from that of CDA. While CDA focuses on language to reveal how discourse reflects or reproduces power relations, ideologies, and social inequality (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993; Wodak 2001), multimodal CDA considers all forms of communication—including visual, audio, gesture, and spatial elements—as means to construct or challenge ideological meanings (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

The theoretical framework for this research comprises three interrelated concepts from multimodal discourse theory. The first concept, modal affordance (Kress *et al.,* 2001), refers to the capacity of a specific mode to generate meaning. Each communicative form possesses distinct meaning-making potential and can convey information in ways unique to that mode. For instance, visual communication can present multiple pieces of information simultaneously, whereas linguistic communication conveys information sequentially and facilitates logical argumentation. The second concept, semiotic aggregation (Jewitt, 2009), describes how meaning emerges when two or more communicative modes are combined, resulting in a meaning greater than the sum of the individual modes. For example, a logo may evoke emotional responses through its design and color, but the combination of the visual logo and the written company name produce the logo's overall meaning. The third concept, visual rhetoric (Kose & Gruber, 2019), offers a framework for analyzing how visual communication is employed persuasively to create rhetorical devices that appeal to consumers' beliefs, values, and emotions.

2.2 Visual Weaponization in Conflict Zones

The use of visual communication during times of war or conflict is an evolving practice that extends back as far as World War I propaganda posters through television news coverage. However, the way in which this type of visual communication has been produced and disseminated has dramatically changed with the advent of the digital age. The proliferation of social media has created a medium for the mass production and dissemination of visual communications by all parties; state actors, non-state actors, and individual users can now create and distribute their own visual communication campaigns (Tufekci, 2017). Additionally, the development of artificial intelligence technology that enables the creation of highly realistic visual fabrications such as deepfakes, artificially generated images, and synthetic videos has created a unique environment that challenges current methods of fact checking.

Several scholars have identified some common strategies used by states and other actors in the production and dissemination of visual propaganda in conflict zones. Bolter and Grusin (1999) developed the concept of "remediation," to explain how new media technologies are used to revise earlier media formats. Thus, contemporary conflict imagery often combines documentary conventions with entertainment aesthetics. Researchers have also explored how visual content operates in larger "networked propaganda" systems, in which a variety of different types of accounts (including authentic user accounts, automated bot accounts, and official state accounts) work together to amplify specific stories (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). The recent conflict between Israel and Iran, exemplified these dynamics with documented cases of coordinated inauthentic activity, AI-generated imagery, and the strategic reuse of authentic content across various platforms.

2.3 Linguistic Weaponization and Strategic Narrative Construction

Similar to weapons, conflicts also have their own form of weaponry. Language can be used as a form of weaponry in war zones by using strategic storytelling. By strategically telling stories about the same event, the individual is able to tell the story in a way that is favorable to the party telling the story. Van Dijk's (1993) research on language and power illustrates how people use language to justify the current social hierarchy. Wodak's (2001) research on historical approaches to discourse highlights how people utilize certain types of rhetorical strategies to create an identity of being a nation, or a politician. Strategic use of language is utilized in many forms of linguistic warfare in war zones. These include the use of dehumanizing language to make it difficult for enemies to be seen as legitimate, using language that softens the impact of violent acts against civilians, and utilizing language to describe victims and/or those who resist as heroes. An example of this type of linguistic warfare includes the use of language in the Iran – Israel conflict. Studies have shown that the media in Iran uses religious and nationalist language to describe Iran's military actions as necessary defense measures against Zionism. While Israeli government uses security-based language to illustrate the threat that exists to Israel's existence, and Israel's right to defend itself. Miskimmon *et al.,* (2013), define strategic narrative as a methodical process of developing a cohesive story, which connects events to an overall framework of interpretation. This can help illustrate the ways that both sides of the Iran – Israel conflict attempted to influence international public opinion regarding the conflict in 2024 and 2025.

2.4 Disinformation in the Iran-Israel Context

The background of Iran and Israel's relationship is important to understand informational dynamics in their current confrontation. Both parties have advanced strategic communication capabilities and extensive experience with information warfare. Iran's IRGC has developed significant cyber and information operations abilities. Israel possesses one of the most advanced technological apparatuses for strategic communication in the world (Cohen, 2018). The Gaza conflict since October 2023 has served as a testing ground for disinformation tactics. Both Iranian-affiliated accounts and Israeli state media engage in extensive information combat (Dostri, 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This paper employed a qualitative MCDA methodology to study how both the visual and linguistic weapons were used by Iran and Israel in their 2024 and 2025 digital conflict. Research design is an integration of three different methodologies that are used in critical discourse studies, visual rhetoric and content studies. In this study, the data is systematically analyzed using the qualitative approach with content studies. According to Machin & Mayr (2012), this methodology followed their MCDA framework for multimodal CDA.

3.2 Data Collection

The data set contains materials in three different categories: (1) visual content which includes images, videos, and graphics distributed by means of official social media channels and official state media platforms; (2) texts that include all official statements, state media publications, and strategic communication from both Iranian and Israeli sources; and (3) secondarily collected materials from fact-checking organizations, media monitoring services, and academic researchers. The time frame for collecting data was limited to official materials published between 2024 and 2025 included the period of active conflict plus a short time after the end of the conflict. Sources used in the study included official Iranian state media news agencies (Iranian Press TV, Fars News Agency, Tasnim News Agency, Mehr News Agency, IRNA, Iran Newspaper, Hamshahri Newspaper, Noornews, Shargh Newspaper, and other state television news channels); official Israeli strategic communication channels (official Israel Defense Force social media accounts, communications of the Israeli government spokesperson, and related media sources); and primarily social media networks, particularly X (previously known as Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The investigation is divided into three interconnected analytical levels that correspond to the multimodal dimensions of the discourse:

1. **The descriptive level**: the research investigates the formal properties of the visual and linguistic artifacts used in the discourse. The properties include compositional features, textual structures and modal features.
2. **The interpretative level:** the research studies how the formal properties generate meaning using existing semiotic and rhetorical conventions.
3. **The explanatory level:** the research links the ways that meaning is generated to the overall ideological framework and the power relationships present in society, which addresses questions of what interests a particular choice of representation serves.

In terms of the specific methodologies used for the analysis, the visual methodology will use the Visual Grammar developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). Specifically, this methodology will be used to analyze compositional elements including Information Value (Given/New, Ideal/Real), Salience (Size, Color, Contrast), Framing (Connected/Disconnected), and Modality (the degree of believability attributed to visual representations).

In addition, the linguistic methodology will use Critical Discourse Analysis methods and tools. These tools/methodologies will include Transitivity Analysis (how actions and actors are represented), Evaluation Analysis (attitudinal positionings), and Argumentation Analysis (the logical structure of claims and justifications).

4. Analysis

4.1 Iranian Visual and Linguistic Weaponization Strategies

4.1.1 Fabricated Visual Content: The Chile Fire Video – Nevatim Airbase Fabrication

One of the most well-documented examples of the Iranian state using visual misinformation has been through releasing a video that appeared to be of Israeli forces attacking Nevatim Air Base in Israel's Negev Desert. The video in question was released by several government-affiliated news agencies including Mehr News Agency, Iran Newspaper, and Tasnim News Agency. However, the video in fact represented footage of a fire in Chile (IranWire, 2024).

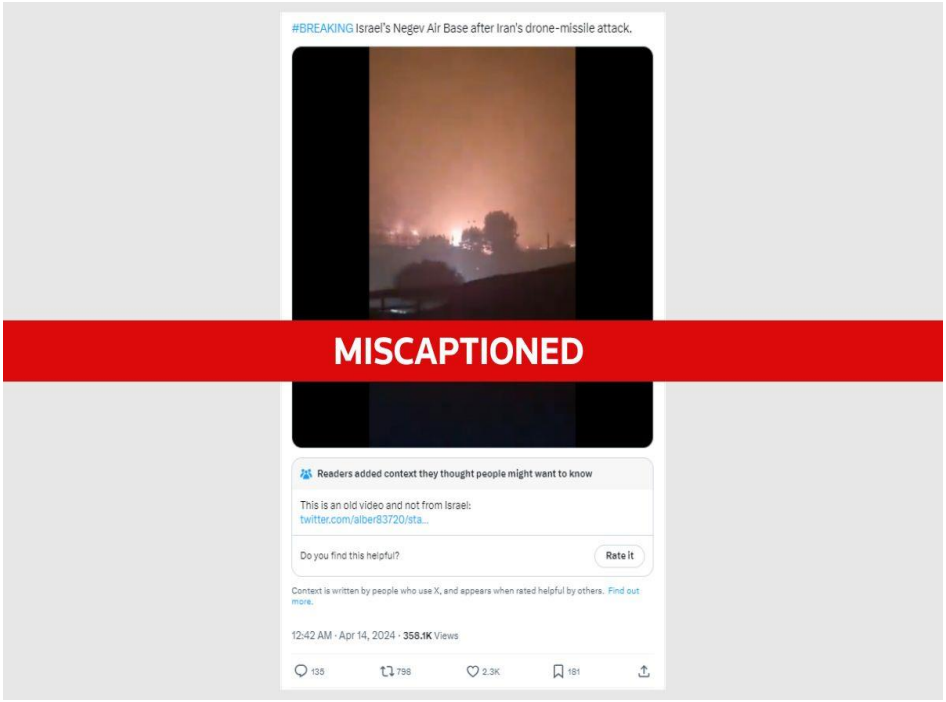

Figure 1: Social media post from April 2024 falsely claiming to show Israel's Negev Air Base under attack by Iran, overlaid with a "MISCAPTIONED" banner. The video actually depicted a fire in Chile
(Source: Reuters/Social Media)

A multimodal analysis of this video shows how there is strategic use of "Visual Metastasis" as described by Machin (2019), which means using images to make false connections between two different places. The overall composition of the video included many images associated with military installations (e.g. runways, aircraft, defense systems), which created a visually engaging image of missiles successfully striking targets. Since there are no temporal indicators on the video such as dates, times or other context information the video was able to be used as a form of proof for current events even though it is irrelevant in terms of history.

Figure 2: Low-resolution still from the viral video showing a large orange glow and smoke plumes over a city—identified as footage of a 2024 fire in Chile that was widely miscaptioned as a missile strike on Israel's Nevatim Airbase
(Source: Various/Social Media)

The language in the video supported the claim that Iran's weapons systems were precise and effective. In terms of rhetoric, the language used in the video combined technical language (the name of specific missiles, coordinates for the target, etc.) with victory-oriented language (a "decisive response," "strategic targets," "precision strikes," etc.). The combination of this technical and victorious language constructed a picture of military capability and strategic sophistication; however, the visual proof that supported the claim was completely made-up.

Figure 3: Satellite photograph of the actual Nevatim Airbase in Israel, showing the layout of runways, hangars, and infrastructure within a desert environment—the actual target of Iranian strikes
(Source: AP News)

4.1.2 The "Escape of Zionist Settlers" Video: One Direction Fans in Buenos Aires

A good example of how Iranians have used visual weapons is in their manipulation of the video titled "The Escape of Zionist Settlers." In this video, Noornews, an Iranian news organization, claimed that it was showing the escape of Israeli civilians who were fleeing from Iranian rockets. An investigation conducted by IranWire (2024) showed that the video was actually showing thousands of young girls who were fans of the British boy band, One Direction and especially of Louis Tomlinson at a concert they had attended in Buenos Aires. This is another example of using a completely innocuous piece of content as a way to create propaganda.

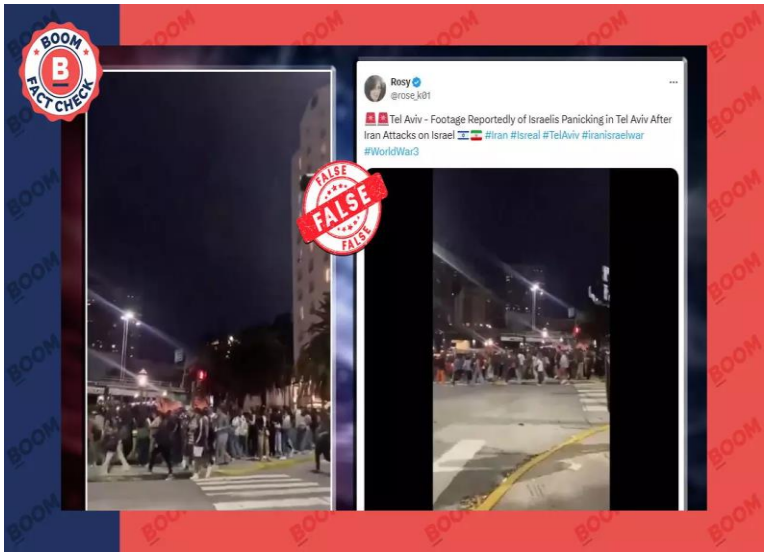

Figure 4: Fact-check graphic from BOOM Fact Check debunking the viral video claiming One Direction fans in Buenos Aires were Israelis panicking during an attack. The footage was actually of a fan gathering, marked with a "FALSE" stamp
(Source: BOOM)

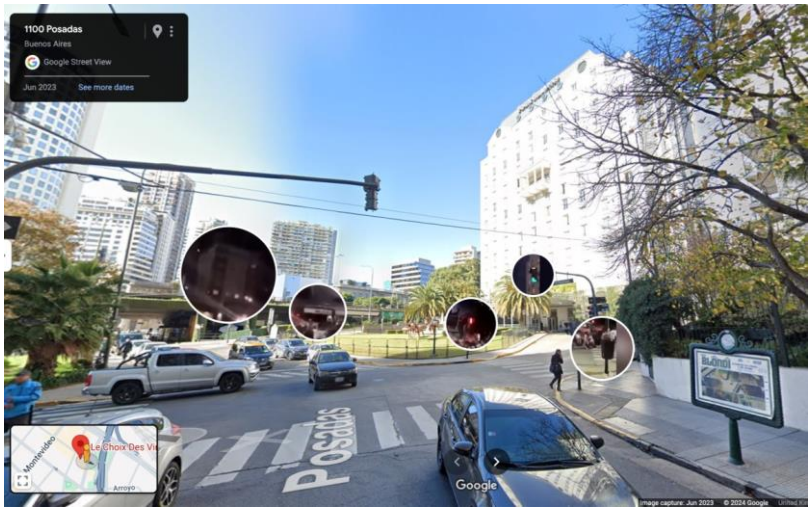

Figure 5: Composite screenshot showing the Google Street View location in Buenos Aires where One Direction fans regularly gather, with circular insets of the footage erroneously used by Iranian state TV to represent a 2024 attack
(Source: The Independent/Telegraph)

Through this multimodal analysis, the study shows how titles and captions impact how people visually understand images. In the case of the image titled "Escape of Zionist Settlers," the title framed or influenced viewers' understanding of the images they were viewing — no matter what those images actually were. Therefore, the use of captions as ideological framing (how word elements affect the way one interprets visual elements), clearly shows how captions can limit the interpretation of visual elements by directing their interpretation. Furthermore, because the visual element was unrelated to the title's language, this is an example of a "discursive contradiction" (Fairclough, 1995), in which contradictory information is contained in a seemingly consistent message.

After being published on Noornews' social media account, the video was removed; however, some other outlets such as Shargh Newspaper were still using it. Thus, through selective removal of videos, it is possible to demonstrate the strategic decision-making process involved in disseminating disinformation — continuing to amplify disinformation for as long as it is effective, but limiting one's liability after an item has been debunked.

4.1.3 Fabricated Visual Content: The Chile Forest Fire Incident

Another example of Iranian visual disinformation was when they posted images that claimed to be IRGC drone and missile strikes on an Israeli military base in Negev. Those same images had been published through social media by Iranian state affiliated entities as well as broadcast multiple times on Iranian state TV, however they actually depicted a wildfire in Valparaiso, Chile. In this case we can see Iran's State Media has adopted a tactic of repurposing unrelated visual evidence to present their own narratives of military successes.

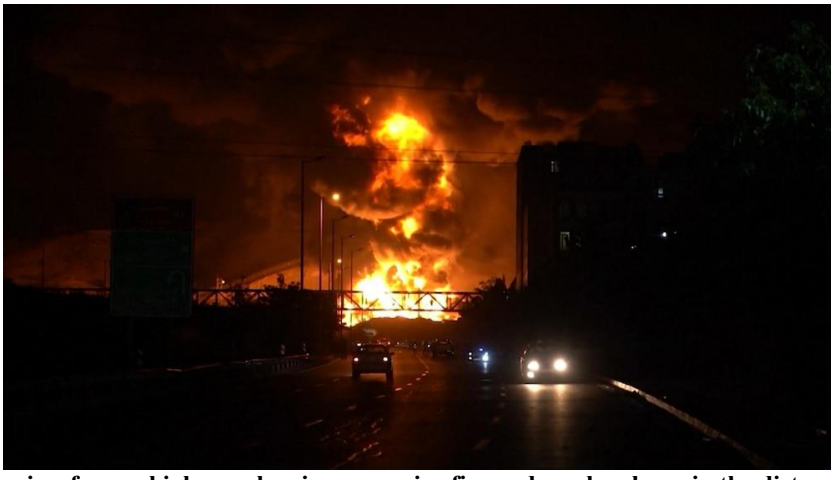

Figure 6: Night-time view from a highway showing a massive fire and smoke plume in the distance, which was widely mislabeled as an Iranian missile strike on Israel in April 2024. The image actually depicts a wildfire in Valparaiso, Chile
(Source: ABC News/Reuters)

From a multimodal point of view, this fabrication shows an advanced level of awareness of the conventions of visual rhetoric. The images were shown as being without context, which would have indicated the source of the image. The viewer assumed that images from state television are always accurate. The composition of the images (explosions, etc.) used familiar visual codes from war reporting. Therefore, the viewer could interpret the images using established schema even though the images were fabrications. The accompanying text also contributed to the interpretation of the images by utilizing assertive declarative sentences. These declarative sentences asserted that Iran had successfully struck at "Zionist military bases." The declarative sentence utilized a rhetorical strategy of asserting success prior to verifying such success.

The semiotic analysis of the visual and linguistic modes show how they worked together to create persuasive results. The images used the visual codes of low-angle shots and dramatic lighting that visually represent smoke and fire. These visual codes trigger associations in the viewer with actual conflict coverage. The language used to report the claims utilize authoritative voices of institutions (i.e., IRGC statements, State Media Reports). These institutional voices carry institutional credibility. Together, the visual and linguistic modes created immediacy. As defined by Bolter & Grusin (1999), immediacy is the feeling of direct and unmediated access to events. This immediacy was enough to make the fabricated content believable even to the most skeptical viewers.

4.1.4 Linguistic Manipulation: The IRGC Initial Claims

Beyond the fabricated visuals of the attacks, another aspect of Iranian linguistic weaponization was its intentional use of claims about the outcome of military operations. Nearly simultaneously to the launch of drones and missiles, the IRGC issued a press statement which claimed that "forces launched dozens of missiles and drones and struck specific targets in the occupied territories." (IranWire, 2024) This occurred almost an hour before Iranian projectiles actually arrived on Israeli soil. Therefore, it is apparent the IRGC utilized time-based manipulation similar to other types of information warfare.

Upon performing a critical discourse analysis of the IRGC's statement we can see several important characteristics. The transitivity structure places Iran as the agent ("launched," "struck") while placing the target ("occupied territories") as passive recipient of the action. By utilizing the term "occupied territories" instead of "Israel", the IRGC placed itself within an explicitly politicized context. In doing so, the IRGC framed the conflict in terms of anti-colonial resistance versus traditional state-to-state warfare. The use of the present tense ("strike," "launched") created a sense of immediacy and urgency to the actions described. However, the fact that the actions took place prior to the arrival of the projectiles at their destination placed them in a sense of the actions being ongoing, as opposed to completed.

As reports emerged confirming that 99% of all Iranian projectiles were intercepted by Israel or the U.S. and therefore did not reach their target, the IRGC altered its language. According to IranWire, 2024; Fars and Tasnim News Agency, the two news agencies for the IRGC quickly altered the original statement from the IRGC that included the portion stating that the drones and missiles successfully struck their targets.

4.1.5 Temporal Manipulation: The Al-Aqsa Mosque Joy Video

One of the most notable patterns in this type of propaganda were the temporal manipulations of pre-existing material. State-owned Iranian media aired footage of alleged jubilation by Palestinians at Al-Aqsa Mosque after Iranian airstrikes. In fact, investigation confirmed that the same footage had first appeared on social networks on April 6th, 2024; before Iran's strike against Israel (IranWire, 2024). Therefore, the content has been backdated to show it as authentic proof of people responding to new events.

Through this multimodal analysis, it is clear that time-positioning serves as a method of visual argumentation. The visual content—crowds gathered at a major religious site—is associated with both resistance and solidarity within the Islamic world and adds credibility to the greater story of anti-Zionist struggle. The use of language (the "joy of Palestinian people," "Al-Aqsa Mosque") added to the content's persuasive power through its ability to activate both religious and nationalistic resonances.

4.1.6 Recycled Content: The Iron Dome Video

Historical footage of the same type as the one that depicts Israel's Iron Dome missile defense systems reacting to rockets, were used to support a claim that Iran fired missiles at Israel in early April 2024. An investigation by IranWire found that the footage was taken on Oct. 2023. This is an example of "archival manipulation," where the past visual record is retrieved and reused in order to tell a story about something that has happened now. Although the video footage provided no temporal indicators, it included all of the standard visual elements for war footage including defensive interceptions, exploding rockets, emergency responders etc., which made it easy for people to believe it was current even though they knew it had been shot some time before.

4.2 Israeli and Pro-Israeli Visual and Linguistic Weaponization Strategies

4.2.1 AI-Generated Content: The "We Love Israel" Video

The development of generative AI technology has shown an advanced understanding of visual

weaponization as it pertains to both Israeli and Pro-Israeli communications. An example is an AI-generated video that claims to be Iranian protesters chanting "we love Israel" on the streets of Tehran (BBC, 2025). This is not just any form of fake news; this video was created from scratch using generative AI to produce fake images and videos. Thus, this is the beginning of a new era in visual persuasion — the production of synthetic content that depicts things that never happened.

A multi-modal approach to analyzing the use of AI-generated visuals to support the spread of disinformation provides insight into some of the special features of such visuals. Because AI-generated content can depict impossible scenarios — i.e., things that could not have been captured by a camera because they did not happen — there are no limits to the lies that may be told through AI-generated visuals. In addition, AI-generated content, like all other forms of content, must adhere to certain visual conventions in order for its intended audience to understand what the producer of the content intends. For example, the video used many of the same visual conventions that documentary journalists use when creating a documentary about an event in a foreign country (e.g., crowd scenes, street scenes, clothing and signs that appear to reflect what people would wear and display during the time period being reported on). Through these conventions, the producers of the video were able to make their content appear as though it was legitimate documentation of real events. The producers also included a linguistic element (the supposed crowd chanting) to reinforce the visual impression of authenticity by providing auditory evidence to support the visual evidence.

Figure 7: AFP fact-check graphic debunking a viral video that falsely claimed to show Israelis fleeing cities after threats from Iran. Such fabricated content demonstrates the use of AI-generated synthetic media in the conflict
(Source: AFP)

The particular challenge of AI-generated disinformation, which is the problem of using traditional verification techniques based on metadata, source verification, and cross-referencing with other materials to verify this type of information. Thus, this content was verified by AI-specific detection methods, therefore marking the beginning of a new type of visual disinformation that cannot be verified through traditional fact-checking.

4.2.2 AI-Generated F-35 and B-2 Bomber Images

The use of authentic footage in the April 2024 conflict, while still predominant, is more than matched by an increased reliance on the use of Generative AI for disinformation purposes in the subsequent escalations to include the twelve day (June) 2025 confrontation between Israel and Iran. This second phase also included AI generated images purporting to show Israeli military losses which were widely disseminated via social media platforms. For example one particular image purported to show a downed Israeli F-35 fighter jet. If the image had been true it would have accounted for approximately fifteen percent of Israel's total F-35 inventory (BBC, 2025).

Figure 8: AFP Fact Check graphic debunking a viral photo of an F-35 jet falsely claimed to be from the Middle East conflict. The image was entirely fabricated
(Source: AFP)

Figure 9: A manipulated image of an F-35 fighter jet on the ground in a desert setting, often circulated as fake news or AI-generated misinformation regarding military conflicts between Israel and Iran
(Source: AFP)

In addition to videos of F-16 fighters over Tehran that were allegedly generated by AI (in reality they had been created with the Adobe After Effects video editing software) - and thus demonstrated a degree of sophistication that could be used for purposes of disinformation - images also appeared on social media depicting U.S. B-2 Stealth Bombers over the same city. The B-2 is an aircraft with the capability to attack Iranian underground nuclear facilities. In both cases, these images displayed characteristics typical of AI images such as un-natural shadows, distorted image ratios, and irregularities in lighting. This type of media poses particularly difficult problems for those attempting to identify disinformation in areas of active conflict.

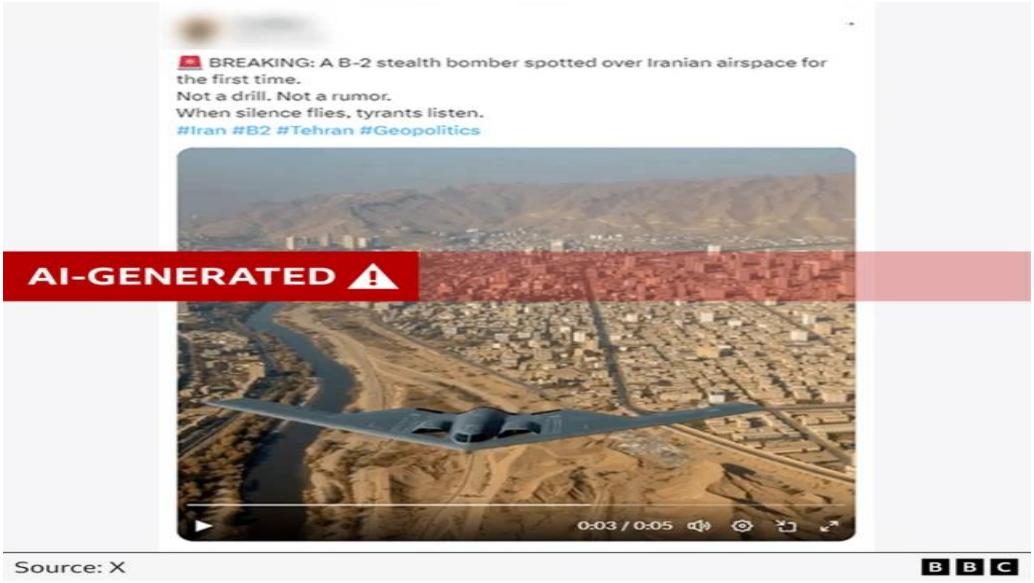

Figure 10: Fact-checking graphic showing a social media post with an AI-generated image of a B-2 stealth bomber flying over Tehran, Iran, featuring a prominent "AI-GENERATED" warning banner
(Source: BBC)

Figure 11: A debunked AI-generated image showing a crashed B-2 Spirit stealth bomber on a runway, surrounded by emergency responders. The red banner explicitly identifies it as AI-generated
(Source: BBC)

A number of characteristics were found among the examined AI-created content. First, AI-generated content is commonly seen as having what can be called "impossible lighting" — the lighted conditions that cannot occur within the depiction. Second, the background objects in AI-generated content often have nonsensical information -- buildings with non-existent geometric shapes, and scenes with non-consistent perspective. Third, human figures in AI-generated content are typically portrayed with anatomically incorrect body parts — odd limb proportionality, absent or excess fingers, inconsistencies in their facial appearance. While some of these attributes may be very slight, they do allow for analysis of the artificiality of the created content.

4.2.3 Misrepresentation of Old Footage

Israeli strategic communication also used reused footage from older video, but it was done in a manner that is different to the Iranian cases. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) published videos of previous unrelated footage showing missile barrages during the April 2024 conflict (BBC, 2025). Community notes were placed on X (formerly known as Twitter) for this content which indicated that the platform recognized the misleading nature of the content.

Figure 12: BBC Verify thumbnail featuring an aerial image intended to fact-check misleading content related to the Iran-Israel conflict
(Source: BBC)

The study of this particular practice has shown the temporal politics of conflict imagery. The use of archival footage from the past as "contemporary" documentation to convey an image of ongoing conflict and active fighting is an example of the way Israeli strategic communications have worked to create the perception of continuing intensity. The visual vocabulary of military footage (fire, smoke, defensive systems firing) has a high degree of emotional value for audiences; thus, regardless of when it was shot, military footage can be used by strategic communicators to achieve strategic objectives.

4.3 Comparative Analysis: Symmetrical Asymmetries

4.3.1 Structural Similarities

Both parties used similar methods for structurally weaponizing visual and linguistic information. Both manipulated time — creating a false sense of presentness when presenting older images; creating false reports of events that had never occurred; and selectively using real evidence to support pre-determined narrative structures. Both used visually similar documentary formats in order to give greater credibility to fake or misleading images. Both used the combination of images and words to create multimodal arguments which were more compelling than either modality could have been separately.

Additionally, both parties functioned similarly in terms of rhetorical purpose. Both constructed narratives of success and legitimacy. Both attempted to use visual and textual forms of argumentation to persuade domestic and international audiences. However, the ideological bases of their appeals were quite distinct. Iran's narrative was framed in the context of anti-colonialism and solidarity with Islam. Israel's was framed in the context of security threats and defense.

4.3.2 Technological Asymmetries

Although both campaigns demonstrate a common structural similarity in terms of how they use technology, there were many differences in terms of the level of technological sophistication used for producing disinformation. The April 2024 Iran-Israel conflict has been dubbed the "First AI War" because it is believed that this was the first time AI technology was utilized at such a large scale (EDMO, 2024) in a campaign of disinformation. While Iran's disinformation efforts relied on pre-existing content being reused (an example of "analog" misinformation in today's digital world), pro-Israeli and Israeli affiliated groups were utilizing AI generation technologies in a much broader capacity.

The AI generated content found in this study, which includes the "We Love Israel" video and the fabricated images of missiles striking Israel, were largely produced by pro-Israeli sources (BBC, 2025). It is possible that this difference in the amount of AI generation technology used, along with the expertise to utilize the technology, resulted in the differences observed. However, regardless of who produced the AI generated disinformation, the sheer number of pieces of disinformation created using AI technology, and the sheer volume of fabricated visual content presented to the public, had a profound effect on the overall information environment. Analysts have stated that the volume of AI-generated disinformation was "astonishing" (BBC, 2025).

4.3.3 Platform Dynamics

The data provides an overview of the unique features of each political parties' use of digital media

platforms to disseminate disinformation. As it relates to Iran's disinformation efforts, state run media outlets used the same type of official channels as they do for their own strategic communication efforts; official state TV and government affiliated news agencies, along with official social media accounts. These are all examples of relatively centralize systems to distribute information. Iran has a very top-down approach to its communications system. Therefore, all information is disseminated through the governments official sources.

Disinformation related to Israel and pro-Israeli forces exhibited much more decentralized attributes. In fact, these efforts were able to take advantage of the social media dynamics to combine the authentic spread of content with the coordinated inauthentic behavior. A great example of this can be seen in the growth of the "Daily Iran Military" Twitter account. Between June 13th and June 19th, 2025, the account went from having approximately 700,000 followers to over 1.4 million followers. The growth of the account was due to the coordinated engagement on the part of the account owner and other supporters of the account (BBC, 2025). Although the account was created during a different conflict than what occurred in April, 2024, the principles behind the rapid follower acquisition still applied.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The research of this Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis also contributes to various theoretical debates regarding critical discourse studies and media studies. Firstly, the results show that truly multimodal analytical frameworks are required for an understanding of modern information warfare. The earlier studies and analyses of only textual or linguistic data fail to capture the many ways in which visual aspects of communication can interact with language to create meaning. In addition, the cases studied illustrate that it is very rare that both visual and linguistic components operate independent of one another. More typically, the two modes of communication interact in semiotically complex ways in which the various modes either amplify or constrain the meanings created by the other.

Secondly, the research contributes to our comprehension of how semiotic resources are utilized in the context of asymmetric information warfare. Regardless of whether they are ideologically oriented to opposing sides or technologically sophisticated to varying degrees, both parties utilize remarkably similar semiotic strategies in order to attain analogous rhetorical objectives. This convergence implies that the multimodal weaponization strategies employed in information warfare contexts may be more determined by the structural requirements of persuading an audience in a conflict environment than by the particular ideological content that is being communicated. Thus, the visual grammar of war reporting, the rhetoric of victory and achievement and the utilization of emotional appeals constitute semiotic resources accessible to any party engaged in information warfare, irrespective of their political perspective.

Lastly, the advent of Generative AI as a disinformation instrument presents basic questions for multimodal discourse theory. Previous assumptions about visual representation (i.e., visual representation distorts, selects, frames) assume some form of relationship between visual representation and the physical world. AI-generated visual representation enables the creation of visual representations of events that never existed and therefore could never have been photographed. Therefore, AI-generated content necessitates theoretical frameworks capable of analyzing what may be described as "post-indexical" visual discourse — visual communication that has lost its link to documentary evidence.

5.2 Practical Implications

The analysis has several practical applications for media literacy, fact-checking and policy. Firstly, the complexity of multimodal disinformation necessitates equally complex analytical responses. Therefore, fact checking organizations and media literacy programs will have to train to analyze both the factual content of claims, and how visual and linguistic elements are used together to persuade; requiring training in multimodal discourse analysis as a supplement to traditional verification techniques. Secondly, the quick distribution of disinformation through social media indicates a lack of effectiveness in using reactive fact checking methods. While specific items are being identified, verified and made publically available as false, they have usually been distributed to many people and have likely accomplished their intended persuasion. Therefore, it is necessary to use pro-active methods such as intervention at the platform level, pre-bunking methods that help build resistance to manipulative techniques, and changes in the structure of incentives on social media platforms that reward engagement rather than truth. Thirdly, because disinformation can be distributed across multiple platforms in multiple countries, there needs to be an internationally-coordinated response. The examples examined included content generated by individuals in one or more different national jurisdictions, distributed through global platforms, and received by diverse audiences. An effective response will require coordination between government agencies, social media platforms, civil society organizations, and academic researchers - coordination that is difficult to establish due to existing tensions and conflicting interests.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the study conducted a multimodal critical discourse analysis of weaponized visual and linguistic communication in the context of the Iran-Israel digital conflict. The analysis shows widespread use of

disinformation by both Iranian and Israeli sources during the conflict, including fabrication/misuse of images, manipulation of time-references, and the effective use of multi-modal rhetoric. The study found that both sides used visual representations of documentation (visual conventions of war reporting) to create a sense of authenticity to support their claims, but they combined visual and linguistic representations to achieve persuasiveness beyond what each mode alone was able to do.

Generative AI presents new possibilities for generating believable visual misinformation, which adds to the challenges of verifying information. Although AI-generated content appears to have been generated predominantly by pro-Israeli sources in the April 2024 conflict, the potential for AI-generated content to be produced by any actor exists. Thus, it can reasonably be expected that future conflicts will be characterized by increasingly complex information environments and increased levels of visual ambiguity.

This research demonstrates the necessity of developing truly multimodal analytical frameworks to understand the construction of meaning in the context of modern information warfare. Traditional methods that rely solely on textual/linguistic analyses cannot capture the full range of meaning-making in the highly visual digital environments. Practical implications of this research include the importance of developing media literacy programs, fact-checking methodologies, and social media platform policies that address the multifaceted nature of contemporary disinformation. As the boundaries of conflicts continue to expand into digital environments, the analytic tools and techniques presented here offer ways for scholars, policy makers, and citizens to engage critically with the visual and linguistic aspects of information warfare. In order to effectively navigate the complex information landscapes of the twenty-first century, an understanding of how meaning is constructed through the interactions among visual, textual, and other signifying modalities is essential. The Iran-Israel digital conflict provides a model for analyzing the current state of practice and predicting the potential problems that will arise as information warfare evolves.

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