

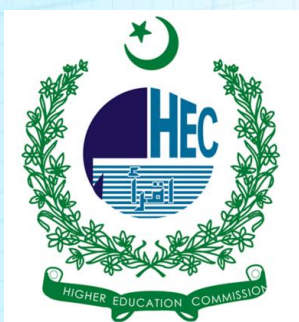
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**Ideological Polarization Of Meaning-Making Processes In
Pakistani Political Cartoons: A Semiotic Analysis**



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Abstract

The meaning-making processes are involved in the development of ideologies associated with a particular event, which leads to the psychological schema of the contextualized event, as well as communicative talk. The present research has analyzed that these meaning-making processes can be polarized by the one who generates the information and by the one who further disperses the information to the viewers. The current study has particularly analyzed the polarization designed by the cartoonist in the domain of political discourse. The cartoonist violates the actual piece of information by utilizing different linguistic tools and discursive strategies. The current study has analyzed four political cartoons under the theoretical framework of Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, which concludes that ideologically polarized political discourse has become a linguistic tool for controlling the mental modes and ideologies associated with a political party, its leaders, and their narratives. This study has found that the cartoonist has utilized fifteen types of socio-cognitive discursive strategies to ideologically polarize the meaning-making processes and control the cognitive abilities of the audience.

Keywords: Polarization; Meaning Making Processes; Political Cartoons; Semiotic Analysis; Discursive strategies

1. Introduction

Ideological polarization in the context of political discourse deals with the divergence of the people into two groups, i.e. in-group and the out-group, on the basis of the ideologies they share. Cartoonists tend to ideologically polarize the meaning-making processes of the political cartoons to craft particular ideologies through subjective representation of the event, with the intent to control the interpretation and the social cognition of the viewers. Cartoonists' subjective use of rhetorical discursive strategies in the development of ideologies through linguistic means polarizes the meaning-making processes of the political cartoons.

Meaning-making processes under the umbrella of constructivist psychology deal with people's understanding of the communicative event to make epistemological sense of the contextual knowledge source and its relationship to their psychology (Magolda & King, 2012; Fantozzi, 2012). The present study explores the cartoonists' polarization of the naming-making processes in the Pakistani political cartoons by analyzing the verbal and non-verbal modes of communication under the interdisciplinary field of study:

cognitive psychology, semantics, and semiotics.

Semiotics is the study of visual language, which contains signs, symbols, gestures, postures, images, videos, animations, gifs, charts, diagrams, drawings, paintings, color schemes, dress codes, etc. Ideological polarization is not only concerned with the polarized textual language, rather it also includes both verbal and visual information. Even polarization can occur in a single sign, the displacement, and different sizes of particular signs and symbols can control the linguistic meaning. *The present study explores the ways through which the cartoonists polarize the verbal and visual modes of communication to mediate the cognitive perception and comprehension of the viewers.*

This study explores the types of discursive strategies used to polarize the group ideologies through the subjective use of the meaning-making process and the semiotic resources by using Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach (2006). The present study highlights the role of the semiotic modes in developing polarized ideologies and controlling the interpretation of an audience. The current study is delimited to the ideological polarization in 5 political cartoons taken from the Pakistani newspaper "Minute Mirror" from June and July of the year 2023.

The current study attempts to answer the following research questions: What are the types of discursive strategies used to polarize the meaning-making processes of political cartoons? How do cartoonists control the cognitive abilities of the audience through polarized ideologies?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Van Dijk (1995), critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary field of study that focuses on the text and talk on the issues of social inequalities, power, dominance, injustice, oppression, exploitation, and suppression. Critical Discourse studies are not only limited to the critical analysis of textual discursive patterns rather it also analyze the multimodal semiotic communicative patterns which can be located in the visual form of images, videos, films, and documentaries (Magalhaes, 2005; Usman & Nuhu, 2016; Jabeen & Ahmad, 2018). CDA primarily focuses on the manipulation (Kadhim & Jawad, 2020), exploitation (Sarvat, 2021), legitimation (Rizwan, 2019), maneuvering (Mwombeki, 2019), domination (Wahdania & Hamzah, 2022), resistance (Trochmann et al., 2022), mind control (Abdu & Khafaga, 2019), and other concepts. The present study focuses on the polarization of the meaning-making processes in the political cartoons to control the minds of the readers through manipulating the semiotic modes.

2.2 Political Cartoons

Walker (2003) argues that politics has been one of the subjects of political discourse in cartoons. Cartoonists utilize the discourse of cartoons as a political weapon against politicians and political parties to reinforce their fabricated ideology on society. Treanor and Mateas (2009) argue that political cartoons are comical illustrations utilizing particular stylistic techniques of a designer's biased verbal and non-verbal metaphor and imagery to discuss political and social issues with the intention to persuade readers.

2.3 Rhetorical Discursive Strategies

Rhetorical Discursive Strategies are the techniques through which the speaker or author of the information polarizes the meaning-making processes to manipulate and persuade the audience to achieve his / her objectives. These rhetorical discursive strategies can be used in both the verbal and non-verbal types of communication. Liua et al. (2022) have critically analyzed the multiple modes of communication through highlighting discursive strategies used in a political cartoon video titled "*How Leaders are Made*", which has been published on Chinese social media. The multimodal critical discourse analysis of the cartoon video involves textual, musical, and visual representation, which concludes that the imbalanced comparison between the Chinese and Western presidential election systems has been depicted through implicit and rational positive self-glorification and negative other representation. Similarly, Kadhim and Abbas (2023) have critically analyzed the ideological framing of prejudiced beliefs against black people in an animated movie titled "*The Lion King*". The critical discourse analysis under the framework of Van Dijk's (2000) model has found that racism has been implanted through the multiple discursive strategies of negative representation of the black people depicted as illiterate, undisciplined, and manipulative. Wirana and Pradipta (2023) have investigated the discursive strategies used in the derogatory dialogues between the characters of the game "*God of War 2018*" through highlighting each derogatory word or phrase along with its contextual function under a qualitative descriptive research method. Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis of the derogatory dialogues resulted in nine types of discursive strategies: actor description, authority, empathy, self-positive representation, polarization, Us vs them, manipulated categorization of the characters, norm Expression, populism, and example or illustration have been utilized to denigrate or humiliate other group members.

The rhetorical discursive strategies are not limited only to the visual graphics; rather, these devices are also manifested in the speeches, news, and

textual discourse. Lafta et al. (2022) have critically investigated ideological representation in twenty Facebook posts of Islamic state under the theoretical underpinnings of the Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (1995) approach and Van Dijk's (2006) ideological square model (ISD) which founds that the Islamic state group has used the multiple discursive strategies of actor description, authority, categorization, comparison, generalization, hyperbole, and lexicalization to glorify their self by using the rhetorical methods of I, we, and us and denigrate the Muslims, Non-Muslims, and Jewish through using rhetorical methods of they, you and them according to the Us vs them strategy.

Yavuz et al. (2018) have identified that Turkish political leaders have utilized Van Dijk's discursive strategies of actor descriptions and categorization, burden, lexicalization, and metaphor during the Gezi Park protests held in 2013 to ideologically represent themselves positively and the rival party negatively in their tweets. Similarly, Naeem et al. (2022) argue that political speeches of two PDM Leaders Bilawal Bhutto and Molana Fazal-ul-Rehman utilize the discursive strategies of actor description, authority, distancing, number game, polarization, hyperbole, and history, evidentiality, and repetition on micro and macro level of analysis through using linguistic form of noun, pronoun and adjectives on word class, sentence and discourse level to propagate their positive self-glorified and manipulated ideologies by discriminating other group members.

2.4 Ideological Polarization

The ideological polarization of the meaning making processes in the political cartoons refers to the speaker's or author's division of group members based on positive or negative ideologies associated to the particular group; positive self-representation of the in-group (US) members and negative other representation of the out-group (them) members, comprising of ideological polarization of US vs Them strategy.

Masroor et al. (2019) have critically analyzed the forms and functions of discourse propagating political ideologies on the mini-blogging social media website "Twitter". This study has uncovered the relationship between language and its social practices through analyzing the linguistic structures of the ideologically polarized discourse. The Twitter discourse of the two Pakistani political leaders has been critically analyzed under the theoretical underpinnings of the socio-cognitive model of ideological square, which unmasks that political leaders have polarized the Twitter discourse by using a cognitive binary of positive self and negative other representation to control the public opinion via political legitimization and domination.

Similarly, Abbas and Obied (2023) have investigated the macro and micro level of discursive strategies in the twitter discourse of Donald Trump on the subject of immigration, by integrating two data analysis models Van Dijk (2000) and Masroor et al. (2019) which founds that he has utilized the discursive strategies of positive self and national glorification to personify his goodness and immigrant's disloyalty to the country. Flayih and Taifoor (2018) used critical discourse analysis of Julia Gillard's speech on the issue of immigration. They found that Gillard utilized Van Dijk's discursive strategy of implication to express her positive self and negative other representation implicitly.

Akhtar and Rasul (2021) have critically analyzed the polarization of political ideologies constructed through the linguistic construction of songs during election campaigns in Pakistan. The political songs of two Pakistani political parties, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League (N), from the time period of the 2018 elections were analyzed under the theoretical understandings of Dijk's socio-cognitive framework (2004) and Social Identity Theory (Oktar, 2001). Akhtar and Rasul (2021) found that the linguistic construction of the election songs of both parties has used different discursive strategies under the positive self and negative other representation by projecting the positive characteristics of the in-group and negative characteristics of the out-group.

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative research design has been followed in the present study, which addresses subjectively polarized ideologies through the meaning-making processes in Pakistani political cartoons, which are analyzed under the theoretical lens of Van Dijk's ideological square and socio-cognitive approach. The present study takes four political cartoons from the official website of the "Minute Mirror" newspaper in the form of figures, over the time span of two months, May and June of the year 2023, by following the purposive sampling technique. Only those political cartoons have been taken that contain a controversial depiction of the participants of the cartoons. These political cartoons have been codified on the basis of the ideology being presented through story, settings, dialogue, and the actions of the participants involved in the event. The semiotic analysis has been used to analyze the modes of communication involved in the meaning-making processes of the political cartoons to explore the ideological polarization through using us vs them and rhetorical discursive strategies.

4. Theoretical Framework

Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive approach has been utilized as the theoretical framework of the current study, which links it to the text and talk:

communicative situation of a society that is also known as the mental models.

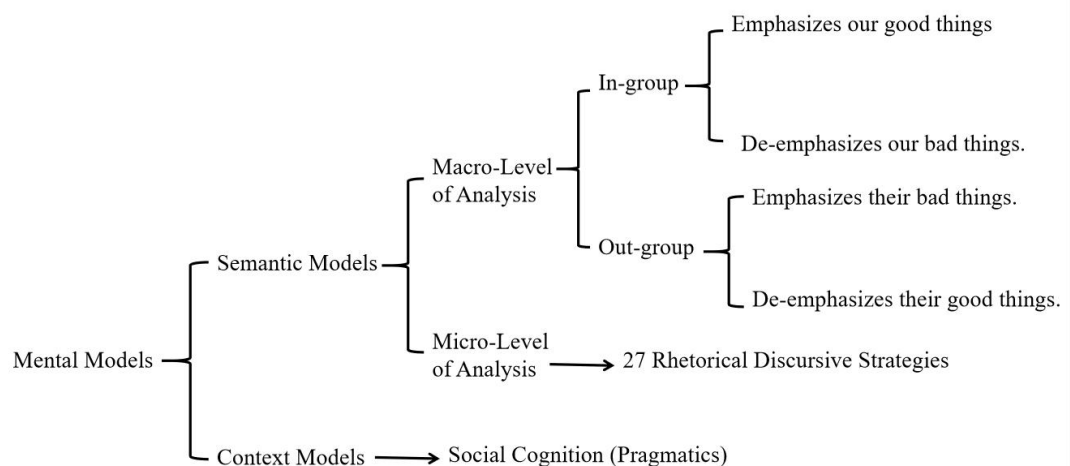


Figure 1 Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach

Mental models are further categorized into semantic and context models, where semantic models function with the verbal and non-verbal processes of the language, while context models function as a pragmatic understanding of social cognition.

Semantic models have been further categorized into the two levels of analysis: Macro and Micro levels of analysis. Macro-level analysis focuses on the inequalities and power dominance on a social level, while the micro-level of analysis focuses on the discursive strategies in discourse. Van Dijk has examined the macro level of analysis on four ideological squares on the basis of positive self-representation and negative other representation by formulating the two social groups; in-group and out-group according to us vs them strategy while micro level of analysis involves twenty seven rhetorical discursive strategies of Actor Description (refers to the description of the actors involved in the communication event, usually portrays positive self-representation and negative other representation); Authority (validating the arguments through mentioning the relevant representative authorities); Burden (refers to the *topos* or loss of a group who is under a burden of victimization); Categorization (refers to the categorization between the two group participants divided on the bases of social ideologies, political and religious attitudes); Comparison (refers to the comparison between the participants; in-group represented positively and out-group with negative representation); Consensus (refers to the political strategy of wide agreement to know the general opinion or unanimity of the members of a particular community or group); Counterfactual (refers to the conditional sentence in the

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counter response of particular situation by using "if"; what will happen, if...); Disclaimer (refers to the repudiation of the particular positive out-group statement by using the conjunctions but, yet, nevertheless, however to represent them negatively); Euphemism (refers to the substitution of the particular harmful or offensive word with the inoffensive word with an intention to de-emphasize the bad things of the in-group members and emphasizing good things with polite and face saving acts); Evidentiality (refers to the speaker's or author's use of evidences to prove his subjective argument through quoting the representative authorities); Example/Illustration (refers to the speaker's or author's use of concrete examples and illustrations to represent themselves positively and others negatively in an authenticate way); Generalization (refers to the act of generalizing the already supported through concrete examples and illustrations against the negative other representation); Hyperbole (refers to the exaggerated semantic pieces of rhetorical strategy to sound something bigger than its actual value with an intention to emphasize on particular thing or narrative); Implication (refers to the act of not disclosing everything but let other to make conclusion out of the situation or communicative event); Irony (refers to the use of an opposite expression of language, typically humorous one); Lexicalization (refers to the author or speaker's use of lexical items to share their ideological believes); Metaphor (refers to the act of comparing two different things, on the basis of similar ideologies or attributes but Van Dijk utilizes it for more concrete and abstract meanings associated to the particular lexical items); National self-glorification (refers to the act of positive portrayal of one's nation under the paradigm of positive self-representation); Negative other-presentation (refers to the act of portraying out-group members negatively with an intention to the positive self-glorification and face saving act of an in-group); Norm expression (refers to the societal attitudes towards the normative expression of anti-racism, discrimination and prejudice); Number Game (refers to the speaker's objectivity based on the facts and figures contrary to the subjectivity or opinions to enhance the credibility of an argument); Polarization (refers to the author's or speakers subjective categorization of the in-group and out-group members on the basis of attitudes and the ideologies according to the Us vs them strategy with an intention to portray a polarized social cognition); Populism (refers to the politician's use of persuasive strategies to develop, maintain or enhance their popularity by sharing significant ideas and policies); Positive self-presentation (refers to the act of showing favoritism to the in-group members and derogation to the out-group members through using face saving act of disclaimer strategy with an intention to portray themselves

positively); Presupposition (refers to the semantic implicit assumption as the author or speaker does not say everything explicitly, so the speaker presupposes the audience on the basis of the shared socio-cultural ideologies); Vagueness (refers to the author's use of vague linguistic structures by using expressions: some, many, few, a lot, very, little, low, high, etc.); and Victimization (refers to the act of dramatization of the discourse on the basis of us vs them strategy in-group and out-group division, mainly portray them (out-group) as the negative oppressors and us (in-group under burden/topos) as the victims of the out-group's threats) (pp. 735-39).

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Contempt of Parliament Bill



Figure 2 Contempt of Parliament Bill

Figure 2 portrays the conflict between the Government and the Judiciary by polarizing the meaning-making through multiple modes of communication. The characters of Prime Minister Shahbaz Shareef and the members of the Judicial Institute have been depicted in this cartoon. The cartoonist has delivered the ideological narrative by using multiple semiotic modes: textual elements, a gun, a Judge's gavel, a traditional gown of the Judge with a particular wig, and a drop of Sweat, which is a sign of nervousness dropping from the forehead of a judicial representative.

The cartoonist has placed Shahbaz Shareef in an in-group (US) while the Judiciary has been placed in an out-group (them). On a macro level, Figure 2 highlights **our** good characteristics by passing a constitutional bill to save the honor and self-esteem of the Parliament, and (highlights) their bad characteristics of manipulating the domains of the Parliament. Figure 2 de-emphasizes our bad things on violating the domains of the judiciary and their good things of implementing the laws and providing Justice to the Public. On a micro level of analysis, discursive strategies of actor description, authority, evidentiality, comparison, lexicalization, euphemism, polarization, and

victimization are examined.

The cartoonist has described the characters of Shahbaz Shareef and a Judicial representative involved in the tension of the institutional honor and reputation. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, head of the government has passed the "*Contempt of Parliament Bill*" to save the honor of the Parliament but the cartoonist has ideologically polarized the meaning making processes by using strategy of a euphemism by naming the "*CONTEMPT OF PARLIAMENT*" inoffensive word to the offensive act of displaying gun to judicial representative to threaten him.

The cartoonist has particularly designed the judicial character to depict the subjective ideology through using the discursive strategy of evidentiality that Parliament is being manipulated by the Judiciary. The visual argument has been supported by the lexicalization "NA PASSES THE CONTEMPT OF PARLIAMENT" to validate the narrative of in-group (us) participants by using the lexical items of authority, Parliament, National Assembly (NA), and Contempt of Parliament.

The authority of the Parliament has been compared to the judicial authority represented through the law gavel, judge's gown, and the wig. The cartoonist has utilized discursive strategies to control the comprehension of the readers by portraying his own subjective and manipulated ideology of political victimization of the members of the national assembly (particularly the government) by the judicial institutions.

5.2 Fulfillment of IMF Obligations



Figure 3 Fulfillment of IMF's Obligations

The meaning-making processes in Figure 3 involve the portrayals of three characters: Prime Minister Shahbaz Shareef, the IMF representative, and a random character representing the public. Multiple semiotic modes used in Figure 3 are: textual elements, a hat containing the abbreviation of an "IMF", a

drop of sweat, which is a sign of fear dropping from the forehead of the public character, and a cleaver knife in the right hand of Shahbaz Shareef.

The Prime Minister Shahbaz Shareef and an "IMF" representative have been designated in the out-group (them) with the negative characteristics associated with them, while a random public character has been portrayed (US), which represents the negative characteristics of the out-group.

On a macro level analysis, Figure 3 emphasizes (their) bad things of government, such as an increase in inflation in the country to fulfill the obligations with the IMF, and de-emphasizes the good characteristics of the IMF for providing loans to the financially unstable countries for their well-being.

On a micro level of analysis, discursive strategies of actor description, authority, lexicalization, implication, burden, euphemism, irony, polarization, hyperbole, negative other representation, and victimization have been utilized.

The actors Shahbaz Shareef and IMF have been described negatively for causing harm to the public by rising inflation in the country. The act of more inflation has been represented through using the discursive strategy of euphemism and irony. The act of using a butcher's cleaver for public has been denoted as an inflation. The ironic contradiction in the verbal phrase and the visual depiction exaggerated the meaning-making processes by associating it with animal slaughtering through the use of the discursive strategy of hyperbole. Negative other representations of Shahbaz Shareef and the IMF have polarized the meaning-making processes and victimized their ideological narratives. The portrayal of the IMF representative in the background implies support for rising inflation in the country and overburdening the public. The cartoonist has designed the IMF character by using the strategy of authority and evidentiality to support his subjective ideological polarization of causing harm to the public, which is also supported through the lexicalization of "IMF", "COMMITTED TO FULFILL ALL OBLIGATIONS", and "MORE INFLATION", and the visual mode of a Butcher's cleaver knife.

5.3 Zardari Promises Not to Betray PML-N



Figure 4 Zardari: A Betrayal

The meaning-making processes of Figure 4 represent the betrayal of Asif Ali Zardari, leaving PML-N alone in the time of economic crisis in Pakistan. The cartoonist has used multiple semiotic modes of communication a boat, a board of economic crisis, palm trees on an island, hills, and birds in the background, to deliver his intended ideology of Zardari's betrayal of PML-N.

According to the social group differentiation of the us vs them strategy, Shahbaz Shareef has been positively depicted in the in-group (us), while the negative characteristics of the betrayal of Asif Ali Zardari have been placed in the out-group (them).

On a macro level of analysis, Figure 4 highlights our (in-group) positive characteristics of bravely tackling the economic crisis and the negative other representation (out-group) fleeing cowardly and betraying their collateral government in times of need. It implicitly de-emphasizes their (out-group) positive aspects of supporting the formation of the PML-N's government.

On a micro level of analysis, discursive strategies categorization, Illustration, generalization, irony, hyperbole, lexicalization, positive self and negative other representation, and polarization have been utilized. The actors in the Figure have been categorized on the basis of ideological orientation towards both the political leaders, on the basis of political group differentiation, and positive and negative characteristics are also associated accordingly. The depiction of Asif Ali Zardari is contradictory to the lexicalization of "ECONOMIC CRISIS" and "ZARDARI PROMISES NOT TO BETRAY PML-N." The cartoonist has used the discursive strategies of hyperbole and irony to portray the act of betrayal of Asif Ali Zardari, leaving PML-N on the verge of economic crisis. The cartoonist has polarized the meanings of the verbal statement given by PML-N representatives, by designing the illustration which generalizes the betrayal of Asif Ali Zardari and not the fulfillment of his

promises. The in-group participant Shahbaz Shareef has been depicted with the discursive strategy of positive self-representation, standing alone in the time of crisis, while his ally Asif Ali Zardari (out-group) has been portrayed with negative other representation, who just saved himself and betrayed the collateral government.

5.4 Load Shedding Dragon



Figure 5 Load shedding: A Dragon

The meaning-making processes of Figure 5 represent the negligence of the government to deal with the load shedding, which is causing a severe problem to businesses. The meaning-making processes have been represented through the general characters of business and government. Semiotic modes, the Serpent of load shedding folded around the neck of the character representing business, and music symbols coming out of the flute have been used in this cartoon to control the cognition of the readers by ideologically polarizing the meanings.

The cartoonist has categorized the participants of the cartoons on the basis of ideological differentiation. The random public character representing business has been ideologically supported through US strategy and placed in the in-group, while the character representing government has been placed in the out-group (them).

This figure represents the negative characteristics of the government, which is enjoying the music and trying to mesmerize the serpent of load-shedding through flute without exerting its energies to control the serpent of load shedding and to make policies in support of business.

The cartoonist has used multiple discursive strategies to validate his ideology. These discursive strategies are actor description, authority, lexicalization, euphemism, negative other representation, burden, polarization, and victimization.

The actor representing the government has been described negatively

as he is enjoying music instead of fulfilling the responsibilities assigned to him, while the actor representing business has been captured by the serpent of load shedding, which is causing the death of the character named business. For the validation of the authority of the government to control inflation and the load shedding in the country, the cartoonist has used the discursive strategy of authority by naming the character "GOVT." Euphemism discursive strategy has been used to call the offensive act of causing death to the character named as business by tying him with the serpent and calling it load-shedding. The visual depiction of the cartoon has been supported through the lexical items of "GOVT", "LOAD SHEDDING", and "BUSINESS", which burdensome the ideology and the narrative of the government that they are exerting energies to control the inflation and load shedding. The narrative of the government is being victimized by polarizing the meaning-making processes through designing the serpent around the neck of the in-group participant, which states that the government itself is causing harm to the business through load shedding that may lead to the destruction of the business community in the country.

6. Findings of the Study

This study has found that cartoonists attempted to control the meaning-making processes by using multiple semiotic resources and discursive strategies. The cartoonist mediates in the meaning-making processes through subjective representation of the event. Cartoonists' ideological mediation to influence the socio-cognitive abilities of the readers of the cartoons not only polarize the meaning-making processes but also impact the already constructed schemas about the political parties, narrative, and ideologies.

This study has found that the cartoonist has not only ideologically polarized the semiotic modes, but textual and verbal statements also supported the cartoonist's manipulation of the meanings. Fifteen discursive strategies, actor description, authority, lexicalization, euphemism, comparison, positive self-representation, negative other representation, burden, categorization, Illustration, generalization, irony, hyperbole, polarization, and victimization have been found in these four selected political cartoons.

7. Conclusion

Ideologies are the shared knowledge of beliefs, customs, culture, etc. People do share ideologies; based on shared ideologies, one may polarize these ideologies to make them effective. It has become a tool of communication in the domain of political discourse to alter the meanings associated with the particular political ideologies, parties, leaders, etc. Cartoonists also change the political ideologies to support the ingroup political manifesto and to severely

criticize the out-group participants. The semiotic analysis of the multiple modes utilized by the cartoonists has been critically analyzed to infer the ideological meanings conveyed by the selected political cartoons. The socio-cognitive analysis of the political cartoons concludes that the cartoonist has not only mediated the ideologies but also violated them by designing modes to support his subjective and opinionated messages. The cartoonist has controlled the mental models by utilizing fifteen types of Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to influence the meaning-making processes. The original narrative has lost the actual essence of meaning and can divert the associated political ideologies of the viewers.

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