

# Social-Semiotic Analysis to Multimodal Discourse: Political Advertisements in Focus

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**Abstract**— The study aimed to investigate the semiotic modes used in the political advertisement of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. This also examined the interaction of language, music, pictures, gesture, proximity and angle to rebrand Marcos as presidential candidate for 2022 election. This employed social semiotic approach in analyzing the linguistic corpora. The results showed that the represented participant is Ferdinand Marcos Jr. which made use of both narrative and conceptual process. For narrative process, the actor is Marcos himself which is represented by real vectors. For its conceptual process, the political advertisement has used analytical process connecting Marcos and the number of audience representing the different sectors and group of people. As to its interactive meaning, the advertisement has its gaze element classified as demand as Marcos, himself, directly looks at the viewers' eyes. When it comes to its frame or distance, Marcos manifested a closer social relationship between him and the Filipino people. The power relation between Marcos and the viewers are equal as it uses the angle of eye level as its perspective. As to its compositional meaning, the advertisement highly emphasized the information value elaborating on the platforms of Marcos. The different elements are evident that attract viewers' attention such as size, focus, color contrast, perspective. The political advertisement, as form of multimodal discourse, has various ways in integrating into a meaningful whole of re branding Marcos Jr. that made him the 17th President of the Philippines.

**Keywords**— Social semiotic analysis, multimodal discourse, political advertisements, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Marcos' presidential bid for 2022 election was met with controversies and criticisms from all sectors. His name has been and will always be associated to martial law, human rights violation, ill-gotten wealth and luxurious lifestyles as public figures. To represent Marcos for 2022 presidential elections is a question of democracy in its truest essence as it has been carved in the Philippine history how cruel and ruthless the administration was during the declaration of martial law, during the time of his late father-Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

Political parties on the other hand, are always associated or reflected the leaders' aspirations for their country (Johnson, 2012 and Briandana, 2019). Political parties are avenue for politicians to fight for their ideals as future leaders of the land (Gazali, Hidayat, & Menayang, 2009 and Briandana, 2019). Particularly, political party has the main task of introducing its party, people can get to know, know and "who knows" they want to participate as members of the new political party (Gazali et al., 2009). Therefore, the founders and party administrators are required to be smart in making strategies, one of which is a strategy to increase public awareness, i.e. through advertisements (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2014).

Many critiques claim that Marcos Jr tries to seek historical revisionism and rebrand Marcos as golden era of the Philippine History. To rebrand him is to revisit the great era and contribution of his late father to the people during his reign. Thus, the focus is to dominate social media with contents related to golden age of Philippine government. As Morissan, (2016) claimed, political advertisement through social media is among the easiest ways of introducing the candidate to the public.

Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2016) assert that advertisement is a tool for sending messages for promoting

aspirations. It has primary objective which is to mold and modify the behavior of the target audience. It is in this process where the target people are influenced such as creating new social status and culture (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2006).

Relating to the construction of meaning, Bungin (2008) states that advertisement has the ability to construct people's minds towards aspiring candidates. These contents reflected in political advertisements are the construction of reality using language as device for persuasion. This language or selected words illuminate/s the choice, attitude as well as the its tendencies to convey messages on the target audience or recipients (McMillin, 2016).

The use of pictures and texts are essential aspects of advertising political ideologies where creators can produce a sign reflecting the candidate's aspirations (Caywood, 2014 as cited by Briandana, 2019). Van Leeuwen (2005) states that when different semiotic modes are combined for a certain communicative goal, the process is now called multimodal discourse. O'Halloran, Tan, Smith & Podlasov (2011) as cited by Yang (2016) give a more specific and detailed definition of multimodality as discourse involving the interaction of multiple semiotic resources such as language, gesture, dress, architecture, proximity lighting, movement, gaze, camera angle and so on.

Jewitts (2009) as cited by Yang (2016) claims that multimodality underpins interconnected assumptions that the multimodal ensembles and communication of intended communicative goal constitute the language used and that each mode such as music, lighting, dress and angle serves the diverse and different communicative aspect to convey successfully the intended message of the multimodal discourse. Moreover, these various ensembles are shaped through the cultural, historical and social uses in order to realize the social function of the discourse.

The same perspective is asserted by Kress (2012) stating that multimodal discourse comprises of various modes framed as one field. These different semiotic ensembles are the references of the processes in making meanings by a speech community that perceive and share the same perspectives of the ensembles being part of their culture.

In the political advertisement of Marcos Jr., multimodality is indeed used by the creator communicating a message that he, despite of what history unfolds, regardless of the dark past that associates his name, is a perfect fit for the presidency claiming that he has all the skills of leader essential for the country's progress and unity. It is in this premise that the researcher would like to explore and investigate the different semiotic modes used in his advertisements in constructing the new image of the Marcoses, creating a new perspective of democracy, and rebranding him a leader who perpetuates the value of democracy in the next six (6) years of his leadership as president of the republic of the Philippines.

The current research is inspired by the Visual Grammar Theory of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). This was first introduced by Michael Halliday in his Systemic Functional Grammar (1978) stating the three systems of language such as semantic, lexico-grammatical and phonological system of language. Halliday further elaborates the three subsystems of the semantic system which is the basis of the Visual Grammar Theory. The three subsystems are the ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. In VG Theory, ideational function of language constitutes the representational meaning that focuses on the represented participant of the multimodal discourse. Kress and van Leeuwen classified the two kinds of participants: represented and interactive participant. The represented is the participant shown or depicted in the discourse while interactive participants are the viewers of the image. This represented participant can be analyzed using the narrative process and conceptual process.

The Interpersonal function of the semantic system is what Visual Grammar identified as interactive meaning. This pertains to the relationships between the represented participants and the audience or viewers of the image. To examine the interactive meaning, one must consider three aspects such as gazes or the demand and offer relationship, size of frame or distance and the perspectives.

The Compositional meaning of the Visual Grammar Theory constitutes the textual function of language. This specifies the processes where the representational and interactive aspects are made to relate each other and the way they are incorporated to make a meaningful whole. The three systems that relate the representational and interactive meaning are the information value which refers to placement of elements in the image, salience or degree that attracts viewers' attention and the framing that delimits the space and defines the domain of interest.

Considering the importance of multimodal discourse to communicating meaning to diverse group of people, the researcher was motivated to investigate how political advertisement of Marcos Jr. during the 2022 presidential election and how these images resonate the grand narrative of "golden age" that rebrands him as the president far different

with his predecessor- his late father, the dictator.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative social semiotic approach in analyzing the multimodal discourse. This explored the different meanings conveyed by the different semiotic ensembles through political advertisement of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.

Jewitt and Henriksen (2016) state that social semiotic approach to multimodality allows the analysis of the text and semiotic resources in order to recognize the social values and the positioning of the sign-maker at the moment of making the sign.

### 1.1 Linguistic Corpora

The 30 second video clip political advertisement of the president is the linguistic corpus analyzed using the Visual Grammar Theory of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). The corpus was retrieved from the official Youtube channel of his political party –KBL (Kilusang Bagong Lipunan/Movement towards New Society).

This video material elaborates the aspirations of President Marcos Jr. to attain the desired unity essential for nation building and development of all sectors of the society.

### 1.2 Data Collection

The corpora that were collected for analysis are considered secondary data since these are the political advertisement of 2022 presidential election of the elected president- Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the seventeenth president of the republic of the Philippines. Wolf (2016) stated that any information that has been obtained by others from any public domain is referred to as secondary data. It's usually free or inexpensive to access, and it can provide a strong foundation for any ongoing research if you know where to seek for it and how to assess its value and usefulness.

Primarily, the researcher meticulously watched the identified political advertisement and subjected the corpora into a deeper scrutiny using the Visual Grammar Theory.

### 1.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis as it entails, refers to the process of making deductions from the linguistic corpora gathered. This could be done through analytical and logical arguments to recognize the patterns, connections, or themes. The researcher examined and made an evaluation of the political advertisement of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. using the Visual Grammar Theory of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). The identified linguistic corpora were scrutinized according to the different kinds of meaning the corpora communicated towards the target audience. The analysis delved on the different semiotic resources ensemble in the political advertisement such as the use of motion pictures or images, sounds and texts that contributed on the attainment of its intended meaning.

In order to exemplify the different semiotic resources, semiotic approach to multimodal discourse is used for comprehensive data extrapolation. The results were stated in order to answer the question of the study. Generated explanations were provided with selected examples of semiotic

resources such as symbols, pictures colors, gestures and texts used in the advertisement.

### III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Former Senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has elevated his candidacy with his political advertisement that highlights Filipino's strength and unity to attain the desired better future. This advertisement has captivated the majority of the people which uses the song "Umagang Kay Ganda". The windmills in Marcos' province in Ilocos Norte is given prime importance as the start of the advertisement when Marcos plucks a digitally –altered windmill like a flower and is passed on the various group of people magnifying his aspirations for better future for all Filipinos.

#### Representational Meaning

It focuses on the represented participants of the multimodal discourse.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

a. *Narrative Process*: Marcos holding the windmill, has created an illuminating experience and exuded a sense of his potential that commands respects for his ability to transform the Philippines to be great again as windmills are associated as his legacy in his home province-Ilocos Norte. This is a narrative visual where the represented participants are connected by real vectors depicting that participants are "doing something to or for each other". As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the windmill is passed on a farmer

manifesting the motion of change and hope as Marcos narrated his desire for the people. It is a transactional process as represented participants continue to pass the digitally altered windmill to youth, teacher, vendor and medical practitioner urging people not to divide but to unite for common goal.

Portrayed by Marcos himself, he and the Filipino people are the represented participants in this multimodal discourse. Diverse socioeconomic background and origin of each representative of each sectors are also shown. In the first part of the video clip, it is Marcos who inspires the Filipinos to unite themselves for the common good of the every member of the society. All sectors of the Philippine society are all represented as shown in the advertisement. Marcos, as the presidential candidates, elaborates the different issues encountered by teachers, fishermen, youth, farmers and medical practitioners emphasizing the significance of uniting together as one people for one nation. Representative of each sector is depicted as happily holding the windmill, passing on to other members of the society.

By "participants", Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:47) suggest the representation of people and objects that come in different shapes and sizes. Furthermore, representation of participants involves actors; actions; events; symbols; and settings. "Actors" in the context of representation involve individuals or a collective group of men and women represented in the form of non-verbal rhetoric in the media text. Actors also involve the representation of objects as non-verbal rhetoric in the media text (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996:47). "Actions" is usually represented as non-verbal and visual rhetoric in the media text (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996; Thatelo, 2016) .



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

However, Filipinos, as the target audience of the political

advertisement are also the interactive participants who also aspire for unity and progress. The actor is Marcos himself which is represented by real vectors.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

b. *Conceptual process:* The conceptual process is relatively stable and more general. The participants are represented in terms of their classifications, the analytical and the symbolic process (Zhou, 2020). In the corpora, the symbols that are communicated on the target audience are the windmills which for him served as the legacy of Marcos family in his home province. This has been used as a visual and narrative anchor of his presidential campaign as he is shown in the videos holding the windmill with superimposed background.

*Classificatory:* In its classificatory aspect of the conceptual process, the corpora have shown the kind of relation the participants have in terms of taxonomy or their occupations as separate sector of the government. Marcos Jr. himself is a represented participant who acted as subordinate with the representative of each sector of the government. In his political advertisement, farmers, nurses, teachers, street vendors and fishermen and youth were shown indicating the “taxonomy or relation” of each sector in attaining the common goal for the Philippines which are classified as superordinate (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

*Analytical:* For its analytical process, the political advertisement has shown how Marcos Jr. and the number of audience representing the different sectors and group of people are connected as Filipino people. In this advertisements, all sectors of the society are all represented by showing different groups of people ranging from middle class to poor people in the society especially the labor sector. This specifically applies symbolic process or uses the symbol of wind mills as Marcos

himself represents the legacy of his father, emphasizing that through progress and unity, Philippines will rise again as a nation and this aspect of the ensemble is the symbolic attributive.

c. *Symbolic Process:*

The Visual Grammar Theory, this aspect focuses on what a participant means or is. Since many participants were included in the advertisement, Marcos Jr. himself is the carrier that achieves the meaning of the president and fulfills his identity in the process of communicating the intended meaning. The video shows the connection of participants in terms of a part-whole structure. Two participants involved in these processes are respectively one Carrier (the whole) and any number of Possessive Attributes (the parts). Marcos, as the future president of the Philippines acts as the carrier of Filipinos’ aspirations in different sectors and the different image of Filipino people are the possessive attributes or the image totally relying on the whole structure.

*Interactive Meaning*

The interactive meaning corresponds to the Interpersonal function of Systemic Functional Grammar. This is any semiotic system which projects the relations between the producer of a sign and the receiver of that sign. This identifies the the relationship between the represented participants and the target viewers.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

a. *Gaze/Demand and Offer:* Kress & van Leeuwen( 2006) state that the images are demand if the represented participants directly look at the viewers’ eyes and this means the demand images mean that the producers want to do something to viewers. On the other hand, the image is

offer, if the represented participants do not look at the viewers' eyes and that means that the producer only want to provide information. As to its Gaze element, the image is demand since the represented participant directly looks at the viewers' eyes which in this case, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The demand image of Marcos communicated the Filipino people that he wants to do something, to change the Philippines under his leadership. Talking and looking directly on the eyes of the viewers, Marcos aspires to be the president who can bring progress in all sectors of the government.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

b. *Social Distance and Intimacy*: When it comes to its frame or distance, Marcos Jr. as shown in Figure 7 and 8 as the represented participant is in extreme close-up which indicates a closer social relationship between the represented and interactive participants or the target viewers. This also shows that the power relation between represented participants and the viewers are equal as it uses the angle of eye level as its perspective (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). On the other hand, Fig. 9 and Fig 10 depicted a close social distance since the whole figure of Marcos and the Filipino people were shown, walking together and uniting as one nation. The projected images of people from different walks of life and from different part of the Philippines created an image that also reflects how intimate Marcos Jr. with the Filipino people, thereby resulting in feeling of intimacy or distance (Harrison, 2003).

#### Compositional Meaning

Any semiotic system has to have the capacity to form texts, complexes of signs which cohere both internally and with the context in and for which they are produced. This aspect of the Visual Grammar Theory corresponds to the textual function of Systemic Functional Grammar. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) stipulate that any semiotic system has to have the capacity to form texts, complexes of signs which cohere both internally and with the context in and for which they are produced. This is the feature of the VGT establishes the relationship between the representational and interactive elements of the multimodal discourse to form an integrated and meaningful whole (Yang, 2016).



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

To elaborate the compositional meaning, the three resources should be considered: the information value, framing and salience of the multimodal discourse.

*Information Value*: This is realized with the placement of elements in the image or in the advertisement video as used in this study. Since the study made use of motion pictures or videos as linguistic corpora, the three placements of elements were observed.

a. *Given and New*: The video clips provided the information using the "given and new". In figure 11, the text "Education, Infrastructure, Job, Agriculture and Industrialization" appears on the left side of as projected in the screenshot of the corpora. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) state that when the text as element of the multi modal ensemble appears on left side, the element used is Given. This further means, according to the Visual Grammar Theory, something which has already known or part of the culture. These sectors of the society are all essential for the country's economy which are already known by all Filipino people. However, the video clips indicate an emphasis for

reiterating the focus of his administration when elected as the president.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

- b. *Ideal and Real*: Considering the Ideal and Real element of the information value, the political advertisement of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. made use of the textual placement both of top and bottom. In the VGT, Kress and van Leeuwen elaborate that the placement is Ideal when the texts are placed in the top of the image which makes some kinds of emotive appeal towards the target audience and contains the general essence of information. The information value is real when situated in the bottom of the image and that shows more of informative and practical information. Figure 13 and 14 showing the subtitle of political advertisement with the translation “*Healthcare will be accessible by all people*” and “*Available doctors for Rural Health Units*” are situated at the bottom part of the image/ motion picture. Providing this textual information on his platform about the health of the Filipino people makes his advertisement practical and useful on the daily life of the people. Adding these subtitles or texts at te bottom part of his advertisement makes the multimodal discourse more informative on the target audience which in this case, the Filipino voters for 2022 Presidential election.
- c. *Center and Margin*: This aspect of information looks from the dimension of center and margin. The center which is situated at the middle of the image or video is considered as the core or important information for a multimodal ensemble. On the other hand, the margin is subservient to its center ( Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Figures 15, 16, 17 and 18 indicate the most important and core information of the political advertisement. Marcos repeated and reiterated

from the very beginning of his advertisement his campaign slogan “*Bangon Bayan Muli*” representing BBM ( Bong Bong Marcos ) which translated as “*Rise Country Again*”. The multimodal ensemble, when transitioning to another of his platform always reiterates the BBM emphasizing, despite of his root as the son of the late dictator, the importance of unity for common goal of the Filipino people.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

Moreover, figures 16, 17 and 18 showing Marcos’ platforms are positioned at the center of the video indicating that Agriculture, Build Build Build, Digital Infrastructure, Healthcare, Jobs to Jobs and Tourism all are essential to attain the goal of BBM- Rise Country Again.

*Saliency*: As an element of the compositional meaning, this refers to the different degrees to which elements attract the viewers’ attention, which can be achieved through the size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast, color contrast, perspective and it is also affected by cultural difference. As observed in figures 19, 20, 21, and 22, the gathered linguistic corpora indicate a vibrant, bright and highly saturated colors. Li and Gou (2020) stipulate that images with high saturation colors have natural features reflecting the reality and that have a high sensory modality.



Fig. 21

The use of saturated colors can make an image bright and lively, and this captures the viewer's eye (Li & Guo, 2020). Color saturation, color distinction, modulation, contextualization, representation, depth, lighting, and brightness are all modality markers with high modality value. When the modality is high, the image feels real and natural on the target or interacted participants, which in this case, the Filipino people, making the advertisement engaging and enticing.

*Framing*: Framing as an element of compositional metafunction shows how represented participants are framed to see whether they are presented as connected or separate (Harrison , 2003). To frame the represented participants starts from a decision to mark and/or delimit a ‘space’ – material or conceptual – which sets establishes or defines a domain of interest / concern /meaning at a particular level. The elements and their relationships represent the meaning-potential of the framed semiotic entity ( Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 20



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

In figures 21, 22, 23 and 24, frame lines are evident separating or dividing the represented participants which are the different Filipino people representing the different sectors of the Philippine government. Figure 21 specifically showcases the Healthcare sector emphasizing what Marcos has envisioned to rise again as a nation. The contrast of colors, both in bright and dark, in telling his vision for the Philippines is also reciprocated with the pictorial framing devices. As depicted in the corpora, the lines separating two conditions of life are stronger, thereby creating a stronger connection of the multimodal ensemble.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Political advertisements as multimodal discourse have a potent tool of persuasion combining the power of visual images along with the linguistic aspect. When words are joined together with the visual elements, intended meaning can certainly be expressed in most practical and comprehensive way. Rebranding Marcos Jr and shaping a new image of him as the president needed by the Filipino people essentially needs an ensemble of modes such as music, lighting, dress and angle which intensifies the culture of unity among people from various geographical location and from different walks of life. Telling what he is capable of doing despite of his roots may be difficult to achieve, but with the power of multimodal discourse, perspectives were changed. The linguistic element combined with the rightful music and moving pictures illustrating his platforms for a better tomorrow of the Philippines communicated a clear and vivid message to the interacted participants that Marcos Jr is not for the division of political perspectives, not for revenge but rather for unity and

progress of the country. Motion pictures or moving visuals, as a form of multimodal discourse, have complex and unique structures but its potential can never be underestimated in orchestrating and amplifying messages.

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