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A MULTIMODAL CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON NEWSPAPER COVERAGE ON WAR ON DRUGS IN THE PHILIPPINES: MERITS AND DEMERITS

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ABSTRACT
The main purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the use of different modes of communication in Philippine newspaper coverage of the war on drugs. The research also sought to identify the linguistic organization of these modes of communication, how it presents the merits and demerits of war on drugs, the perspective of Filipino readers, and the types of ideological appeals depicted. Guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory on multimodality, the researcher analyzed 31 news articles published from 2016 to 2018. The results indicated that verbal, visual, and spatial modes were frequently employed. In addition, articles strategically employed headlines, evaluative language, photographs, and visual emphasis to frame the war on drugs in ways that either reinforced or challenged dominant state narratives. Moreover, key themes that emerged were public safety, rehabilitation programs, human rights violations, media bias, public fear, and class disparity, among others. Findings also highlight how the use of multimodal discourse in newspaper coverage can either justify or question the government-led campaign, specifically, it can enhance clarity and engagement, but also risk of reinforcing ideological bias and simplifying complex socio-political issues surrounding the Philippine war on drugs.

KEYWORDS: *Applied Linguistics, Multimodality, Modes Of Communication, Linguistic Organization, Newspaper Coverages, Merits, Demerits, Ideological Appeals*

INTRODUCTION
The war on drugs refers to government-led initiatives aimed at reducing illegal drug use, distribution, and trade through strict enforcement of drug laws and policies (Jones, 2022). The term gained prominence in the 1970s when U.S. President Richard Nixon declared drug abuse as public enemy number one, leading to increased federal funding for drug control agencies and drug treatment programs (Cheliotis, 2024).

The media's portrayal of the war on drugs is characterized by specific linguistic features such as the use of numbers, labeling, lexical choices, and particular grammatical structures that shape public understanding. This portrayal influenced the public by prompting assertive views, fostering critical attitudes toward the media, and generating social stigma. The interaction between media and audiences was dynamic and interactive, with public responses acting as a form of cyber-activism that challenged the traditional notion that news language is neutral and unbiased. Thus, media discourse on the War on Drugs was not merely informational but a socially constructed space reflecting particular values and ideologies, actively shaping perceptions and debates surrounding the issue (Calamba, 2017). Research conducted in the United Kingdom by Sumnall et al. (2025) found that the use of dehumanizing metaphors, such as zombie drugs, in media reporting significantly correlates with increased stigma towards individuals who use drugs.

Globally, a study conducted by Orsini (2017) thoroughly examines how U.S. media sources have framed news stories of heroin and cocaine. This study identifies essential framing, such as ongoing fight, dangerous use, and violent traffickers. In the study, among 1235 participants exposed to news articles that employed these dehumanizing frames, they exhibited more negative attitudes towards drug users and demonstrated lower support for harm reduction programs. On the other hand, Singh et al. (2021), in their study on Malaysian Media regarding the representation of the war on drugs, stated that articles gave primacy to images and language that outraged readers, which resulted in negative public perceptions.

In addition, in the case of the Philippines, studies showed various framing strategies implemented in news articles published by most broadsheets of the major newspapers in the country, which shaped public perceptions, especially on meaningful social issues like the war on drugs (Soriano et al., 2019). Several basic frames emerged in their study, including justice, crime, and security, as Geçer and Mahinay (2018) argued that war on drugs a highly contentious issue, which started during the presidential election in 2016 as former president Rodrigo Duterte's central platform. After his electoral victory, extensive media coverage highlighting the campaign emerged, influencing public perception. For example, the media conveys negative characteristics of drug users and drug sellers. It also showed that the tone of the article employed in the narratives regarding the campaign is neutral and is not agenda-based to favor one party over another.

Llamera (2018) argued in her analysis of 378 articles from three Philippine digital broadsheets and revealed that these articles engaged in a critical and evaluative assessment of the issue towards the war on drugs. Specifically, some broadsheets were negative in slant, garnering 72.90%, while the others were neutral with 44.90%, and some more articles had a positive tone, reflecting 21.96%. The frames used by the columnists were attribution of responsibility, conflict, articulation of solution, morality, and human interest, respectively.

In Davao City, a study by Aguisando et al. (2017) found that the most common news topics on the war on drugs in Philippine newspapers included slain drug suspects, government officials involved in illegal drugs, drug lords, foreigners in the drug trade, and drug users or pushers who surrendered. Regarding the language structure, the news articles employ descriptive modifiers and quantifiers, which could provoke an emotional response from the audience. Moreover, it also tries to capture the readers' attention by emphasizing various societal problems behind the issue of the war on drugs. A study of Ilagan et al. (2020) also looked at how local newspapers influence the public's perception and their impact on political propaganda against the anti-drug campaign in Davao City. Specifically, it has been revealed that among 256 news articles, the news reports only reiterated the voice of the government instead of acting as a critic. The social relevance of this research is highlighted through the persisting issue of human rights violations, the justice system, and accountability. With the Philippines facing scrutiny all over the world due to the anti-drug campaign and the implications involved with it legally and ethically, looking closely into how

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news articles or media present the issue is vital in shaping public opinion and society in general. Furthermore, even though there are existing studies that have looked into how the media frames the issue of war on drugs, it is evident that further research is necessary with the use of a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) approach. Traditional discourse analysis focuses on the text alone and overlooks other factors or elements that can affect meaning-making (Soriano et al., 2019). In this study, the researcher aims to address the gap using the multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) approach to present a more robust insight into how the different modes of communication worked together to influence public perception. Moreover, with the continuing debate and societal implications linked to the anti-drug campaign, this proves that looking into this topic is important and urgent. Furthermore, this study's findings could provide valuable input to several media practices and provide awareness to the public and readers of news regarding the impact of media representations on the issue of the war on drugs.

Overall, the findings of the study can also be disseminated through national or international research forums. Afterwards, the study may also be published in reputable research journals. The dissemination of the research in this manner will provide an opportunity to improve readers' understanding of how different language structures and framing strategies can influence the perception of the public on critical issues like the war on drugs, hence contributing to a more critical analysis among scholars, policymakers, and the public.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This qualitative research study utilized multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to examine how the different modes of communication were employed in Philippine newspaper coverage of the war on drugs. It also sought to analyze how these different modes of communication were linguistically organized to contribute to the overall narratives presented. Furthermore, it aimed to explore how multimodal discourse, through the interplay of textual and visual elements, was used to highlight the merits and demerits of the campaign, shaping public perception. Additionally, the study aimed to understand Filipino readers' perspectives on the representations of the war on drugs in newspapers and investigated the types of ideological appeals embedded within these coverages.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the modes of communication employed in newspaper coverage of the Philippines' war on drugs?
2. How are these modes of communication linguistically organized to contribute to the overall expression present in newspaper coverage of the Philippines' war on drugs?
3. How do these Philippine newspaper coverages use multimodal discourse to present the merits and demerits on war on drugs?
4. What are the perspectives of the Filipino readers on the merits and demerits of the war on drugs as presented in the Philippine newspaper?
5. What types of ideological appeal are depicted in the newspaper coverage of the Philippines 'War on Drugs'?

THEORETICAL LENS

The study was grounded in the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) theoretical framework, as developed by Machin and Mayr (2013). MCDA integrated Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) principles with multimodal analysis to uncover how power, ideology, and social inequalities were expressed and reinforced through semiotic resources, such as language, images, typography, and layout. MCDA was particularly pertinent in examining newspaper coverage of the war on drugs because it provided a holistic approach to understanding how various modes of communication worked together to create meaning and influence public perceptions.

This framework was particularly suited for analyzing newspaper coverage of the war on drugs, as it provided a holistic approach to understanding how different modes of communication functioned independently while working together to create meaning through interaction and influence public perception. This study drew on some of the central principles of MCDA, specifically how multiple modes represented social actors, events, and ideologies, how the frames and narratives employed by the authors shaped the audience's interpretation, and how visual grammar served to communicate ideological messages.

This framework aligned closely with Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodality theory, which referred to communication systems and was treated as identifiable semiotic resources (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Modes encompassed various meanings that were distinct yet interdependent, such as language, image, color, typography, spatial layout, and gesture, all of which specifically contributed to making meaning. Their visual grammar included a specification of how the visual performed meanings, situating communication in terms of separable parts that cohered within the social milieu rather than being simply reducible to codes. In their analysis, Kress and van Leeuwen also displayed strategies for understanding how discrete visual elements could be strategically deployed to interact with or modify predefined ideological messages and to allocate or manage power relations in newspaper frames. The design and organization of the modes, such as language and image, created a multimodal ensemble where visual presentation evoked and mediated complex modal views that structured emotional and cognitive orientations to a text. As such, it aligned with or challenged dominant discourses in ideological and discursive reassembly.

In addition to Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal framework, this study was further enhanced with Halliday's textual metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Halliday highlighted how textual elements could be manipulated, organized, or formed so that coherence and relevance were reinforced to enable meaning-making. As Halliday (1985) suggested, meaning relied on the purposeful selection of modalities organized according to conventions of those modes. The spatial layer in texts is considered the physical layout of different sections by news editors, the thematic variations of headings for articles and captions, and the framing modalities in images, which guide viewers on "what to see" in them. The textual metafunction foregrounded considerations of thematic system, information structure, and language cohesion. All of these choices in language and across modalities created connected or integrated wholes, presenting critical insights into how the narrative regarding the war on drugs was arranged to foreground or emphasize importance, as determined by textual choices made by the publication and by the texts themselves. This organization also revealed and sometimes rearranged ideological stances, expressing hidden ideological values that could exaggerate the ideological concerns raised—not only through what was said or displayed, but crucially through how it was enacted or organized in the text.

By integrating these theoretical frameworks, this research provided a broad critical lens to understand the complexities of newspaper discourse on the War on Drugs. While Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) ensures attention to power, ideology, and social inequalities as they are expressed in and connected to multimodal resources, Kress and van Leeuwen's framework also builds upon the visual and semiotic elements considered. Halliday's textual meta function also helps elucidate how the modes are connected in a particular way to sustain the frames or narratives of either the merits or demerits of the campaign. Taken together, these frameworks not only support the analysis of linguistic and visual strategies found in articles but were also helpful in bringing out some of the subtle ideological work done in multimodal arrangements. Thus, the integrated theoretical lens enhances our understanding of how media representations enable and constrain how power and public discourse, opinion making, and public actions are connected to a particularly contentious socio-political issue like the war on drugs in the Philippines.

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METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design utilized in this study was qualitative research, specifically the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, as noted by Machin (2013), provides a systematic way of studying not only the language but also different semiotic modes like image, photographs, diagrams or graphics in a media text. Visual media, like television, the internet, magazines, and newspapers, which converge different communication forms together, need to be analyzed with a multi-layered approach. In visual media, meaning is not only communicated through language but also with image, sound and other semiotic modes. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis studies different modes of a media text and how they function together. Visual Strategies and lexical choices in a media text contribute to the representation of persons or events. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is used in this study to critically examine how both linguistic and visual elements in newspaper coverage of the War on Drugs interact to construct and convey meanings, shape public perception, and frame the issue's merits and demerits.

Research Materials

This study analyzed 31 newspaper reports on the war on drugs in the Philippines, covering 2016 to 2018, which marked the height of the anti-drug operations campaign. The data were comprised of online articles in the public domain and were discovered through the official websites of national broadsheets. Articles were selected based on the following criteria: they had to have been published between 2016 and 2018, include multimodal elements such as text, visual images, and layout, and be published digitally for easy access. They were found using search terms such as "articles on the war on drugs" and were further classified based on the date of publication. Exclusions included articles published in the period from 2019 to the present and before 2016, those without accompanying images or with images presented in plain text, commentary, editorials, or opinion pieces related to the war on drugs, and newspaper articles in video format, as audio-based data were not included.

The focus of the study included 31 newspaper articles, which fit Creswell's (2018) recommendation of using between 10 and 50 resources depending on the type and question of research. Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasized that data saturation could often be achieved with a sample size of around 30 in thematic analysis, where depth and richness of data were prioritized over sheer volume. This flexible approach ensured a balance between depth and quality in the analysis.

Research Participants

The study also explored 10 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with participants to answer research question 4. Purposive sampling is also used to ensure diversity of participants. Purposive sampling, as defined by Creswell (2018), is a non-probability technique used to intentionally select individuals or groups based on specific criteria relevant to the research question. Participants aged 18 and above must be perceived as politically aware individuals who were part of the target audience. A wide range of characteristics and perspectives was necessary to explore the varying interpretations of newspaper coverage of the Philippine war on drugs.

Also, given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, it was acknowledged that participants might be considered vulnerable, especially if they had personal experiences related to the war on drugs or expressed politically sensitive opinions. To address this, strict ethical protocols were observed. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the measures taken to protect their identities. They were assured that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences, and their data would be excluded if requested. Informed consent was obtained before participation, and anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research. This aligned with Josephson and Smale (2021) on the importance of obtaining informed consent and voluntary participation from research participants.

Data Collection

The researcher addressed a formal letter to the Dean of the Graduate School at the University of the Immaculate Conception, requesting permission to conduct the study. Upon receiving consent, the researcher sought approval from the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC REC) to ensure adherence to ethical standards throughout the study. Following ethical approval, the researcher gathered the materials needed for the study. Data was collected from various online newspaper articles accessible from public domains of reputable or official websites of Philippine national broadsheets to ensure that the data that will be collected is available to the public. These articles must fall within the study's timeframe (2016–2018) and contain multimodal elements. This ensures the materials are within the public domain and relevant to the research objectives.

Each participant was contacted via email or phone, during which the researcher explained the study's objectives and provided a copy of the Informed Consent Form. This document includes information on the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any point without penalty, and the freedom to skip questions or ask clarifying questions throughout the interview process. The form also clarified the expected extent of participation, such as responding to selected news articles, and gave participants ample time to review it. Informed consent was obtained before any data collection, either in physical or digital format.

To align with ethical standards, at least 50% of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. At the same time, the rest was held online based on participant preference, especially in cases where health, safety, or logistics are a concern. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted in the participant's preferred language, English, Filipino, or Bisaya, to ensure comfort and clarity. While the interviews will focus on academic analysis, the subject may evoke discomfort. To address this, participants were informed that they may decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time without consequence, and referrals to local support services were offered upon request.

The study upholds the principles of the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participants' identities are protected through coding and anonymization. Data will only be accessible to the researcher, the research adviser, and the UIC REC when necessary, in anonymized form. All data are stored in encrypted, password-protected digital folders and permanently deleted five years after the study's completion to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis

This qualitative multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) study focused primarily on thematic analysis as the method of analyzing the data taken from newspaper coverages on the war on drugs published from 2016 through 2018, as well as through in-depth interviews (IDI). Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach to thematic analysis, specifically: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes, and writing up the findings. These phases were approached in the study as follows:

First, data reduction involved gathering and limiting newspaper coverage on the war on drugs published from 2016 through 2018. Second, the study drew on Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodality theory to identify various modes of communication in the articles, including verbal, visual, and spatial modes, to examine how meaning was constructed around the war on drugs in the newspaper coverages. Third, drawing on Halliday's textual metafunction, the study explored how language resources such as cohesion, thematic structure, and information structure were used to analyze how the modes of communication were linguistically organized, which contributed to the overall expression in the newspaper coverages of the war on drugs. Fourth, the researcher explored how the use of multimodal

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discourse highlighted merits and demerits using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework to analyze the multimodal composition of texts, specifically how representational, interactive, and compositional meanings in visual texts reinforced or challenged textual narratives. Fifth, the researcher sought to understand the perspectives of Filipino readers on the merits and demerits of the war on drugs as presented in Philippine newspapers by employing thematic analysis to identify common themes in reader responses, specifically whether they agreed or disagreed with the newspaper articles. Sixth, based on the merits, demerits, and patterns, thematic analysis was also used to investigate what ideological appeals were revealed across various articles.

RESULTS

Modes of Communication Employed in Newspaper Coverages of the Philippines' War on Drugs

Table 1 shows a perfectly balanced multimodal pattern: verbal, visual, and spatial modes were each employed in 31 instances across the same 31 coded news items (PSC1–PSC8, TMT1–TMT4, SC1–SC6, INQ1–INQ13). Verbal texts foregrounded legitimation and due-process appeals—e.g., presidential resolve, calls for police procedural compliance, and assurances that killings were "done in a legal manner." Visual and spatial resources were deployed across the identical corpus, indicating systematic use of imagery and page/layout positioning to reinforce the verbal framing rather than privileging a single channel. Overall, the coverage relied on a deliberately balanced multimodal strategy to construct meaning around the Philippines' war on drugs.

Table 1
Modes Of Communication Employed in Newspaper Coverages of the Philippines' War on Drugs

Mode of communication	Frequency	Codes	Sample Corpora
Verbal	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	The President knows fully well that his policy on the war on drugs is necessary, even saying that he is willing to **sacrifice** his life, his honor, even the presidency to fulfill his electoral vow. (SC2) We **pray** that the police follow the prescribed steps in implementing the law, steps that should be done in exercising their responsibility as policemen. (TMT3) There will come a time when we can confidently say we have the data, we have the **facts**, and we are confidently able to say all the killings were done in a legal manner. (SC5)
Visual	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 (PSC5)  (TMT4)  (INQ1)

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Spatial	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 (PSC1)  (PSC6)  (INQ11)

Linguistic Organization of the Modes of Communication in Contributing to the Overall Expression of the Philippine War on Drugs

Table 2 indicates that cohesion was realized almost exclusively through referential markers, with exhaustive use in verbal (31/31 items) and spatial modes (31/31) but only sparse occurrence in visuals (5 instances); no instances were recorded for conjunctions or lexical cohesion. Thematic organization similarly foregrounded themes in both verbal and spatial modes (31 each), with no rheme-specific coding reported. Information structure emphasized given information in verbal and spatial modes (31 each), with no entries under New information. Overall, the results show a linguistically conservative pattern: heavy reliance on referential cohesion and theme/given configurations in verbal and spatial resources, and limited deployment of equivalent devices in visuals.

Table 2

Linguistic organization of the modes of communication in contributing to the overall expression of the Philippine War on Drugs

Organization Strategy	Devices	Mode	F	Codes	Sample corpora
Cohesion	Referential markers Conjunctions Lexical cohesion	Verbal	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	**The government's** relentless crackdown on **illegal drugs and crime coupled with** the agonizingly slow resolution of **cases** have led to severe **jail congestion**. (SC1) **Roque**, **however**, maintained **that Duterte** was not owning up to orchestrating the **killings** of **drug suspects** in the country. (SC2) A week **after Duterte's pronouncement**, the **PNP** has announced the recalibration of its

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					campaign against **illegal drugs**. (SC3)
	Referential markers Conjunctions Lexical cohesion	Visual	5	TMT4, INQ3, INQ8, INQ9, INQ11	 (TMT4)  (INQ3)  (INQ8)
	Referential markers Conjunctions Lexical cohesion	Spatial	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 (PSC4)  (SC2)  (INQ2)
Thematic System	Theme Rheme	Verbal	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	**PNP** bares numbers: 4,251 dead in drug war (PSC6) **'Nothing to fear in revived Oplan Tokhang'** – police (TMT3) **Duterte gov't** ordered, paid killers in war on drugs — AI (INQ3)
	Theme	Spatial	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8,	

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	Rheme			TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 (PSC1)  (TMT3)  (INQ9)
Information Structure	Given information New information	Verbal	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	**Addiction** is defined as **a chronic, relapsing brain disease** characterized by compulsive drug seeking and drug use, despite harmful consequences (INQ4) The **PDEA** was tasked to take the **lead in the administration's war on drugs** while the Philippine National Police is cleansing its ranks following the death of a South Korean businessman allegedly killed by rogue policemen. (INQ6) The **photo**, which was likened to Michelangelo's sculpture *Pietà*, went viral and was even **described by the firebrand President as melodramatic** during his first State of the Nation Address (Sona). (INQ11)

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	Given information	Spatial	31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 (PSC7)  (TMT1)  (INQ5)

The Use of Multimodal Discourse to Present the Merits and Demerits on War on Drugs

Table 3 reports a fully uniform pattern across the corpus: all 31 coded items deploy conceptual representations (representational metafunction), modality resources (interactive metafunction), and compositional structuring (information value, salience, framing). Narrative and interactional subtypes were not separately evidenced. In short, every item realizes merits/demerits through conceptual depiction, calibrated modality, and consistent compositional cues, with 31/31 frequency in each observed category.

Table 3
The use of multimodal discourse to present the merits and demerits on war on drugs

Metafunctions	Strategy	Frequency	Codes	Sample Corpora
Representational - Narrative - Conceptual		31	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 (PSC2)  (PSC6)

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Interactive - Interaction - Modality		**31**	PSC1, PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 **(TMT1)**  **(TMT4)**
Compositional - Information value - Salience - Framing		**31**	PSC1,PSC2, PSC3, PSC4, PSC5, PSC6, PSC7, PSC8, TMT1, TMT2, TMT3, TMT4, SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4, SC5, SC6, INQ1, INQ2, INQ3, INQ4, INQ5, INQ6, INQ7, INQ8, INQ9, INQ10, INQ11, INQ12, INQ13	 **(SC3)**  **(INQ9)**

Perspectives of the Filipino Readers on the Merits and Demerits of the War on Drugs as Presented in the Philippine Newspaper

Table 5 shows that readers perceived the drug war's merits as concentrated in five domains: enhanced public safety (quieter neighborhoods, fewer visible drug transactions, lower crime, greater peace of mind); rehabilitative promise (program completion, personal change, family reintegration, "second chances," though underreported); police effort (professionalization, body cameras, acknowledgment of risk, and many non-violent operations unseen in the news); fear as deterrent (curbed activity, surrenders, heightened caution, concealment/discipline via fear); and strong leadership (political will, decisiveness, accelerated action). Overall, benefits were framed as order, deterrence, and state capacity, with rehabilitation noted but media-marginalized.

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Table 5

Perspectives of the Filipino readers on the merits of the war on drugs as presented in the Philippine newspaper

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Public safety	Quieter surroundings Absence of visible drug selling Lower crime rate Peace of mind Increased sense of safety outdoors
Rehabilitation programs	Completion of rehabilitation programs Opportunities for personal change Reintegration into families Survival and second chances Underrepresentation of rehabilitation in media
Police effort	Positive aspects of policing Use of body cameras Risk to police lives Lack of media coverage of police efforts Unreported non-violent operations
Fear deterrent	Cessation of drug activities due to fear Surrender motivated by fear Increased caution among drug dealers Discipline through fear Concealment of drug use out of fear
Strong leadership	Political will in leadership Demonstration of seriousness Accelerated government action Leadership-driven campaign Decisive and fearless leadership

Table 6 shows that readers identified demerits clustered around human rights risks (due-process deficits, headlines on extrajudicial killings, brutality framing, warrantless actions), media bias (Metro Manila focus, negativity bias, burying positive stories, anti-administration tone), pervasive public fear (panic-inducing narratives, anxiety over "lists," fear shaping perceptions), and class disparity (victims depicted as poor, slum-centred raids, exclusion of elites, focus on low-level pushers). Net harms were construed as rights erosion, stigmatizing coverage, fear-saturated public life, and inequitable targeting.

Table 6

Perspectives of the Filipino readers on the demerits of the war on drugs as presented in the Philippine newspaper

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Human rights violations	Lack of due process Prevalence of extrajudicial killings in headlines Media emphasis on brutality Focus on killings over justice Disregard for warrants in reports
Media bias	Metro Manila–centred coverage Obvious bias in reporting Focus on failures Burial of positive stories Anti-Duterte sentiment in writing
Public fear	Pervasive fear in media Panic-inducing stories Representation of scared communities Fear of being listed Influence of fear on public perception
Class disparity	Portrayal of poor victims in media Highlighting injustice against the poor Media coverage of slum raids Exclusion of elites as targets Focus on low-level drug pushers

Ideological Appeals Depicted in the Newspaper Coverage of the Philippines 'War on Drugs'

Newspaper coverage of the Philippine drug war mobilized multimodal appeals—law-and-order, sovereignty, social/human consequences, and morality—through coordinated verbal, visual, and spatial resources. Linguistic organization (cohesion, thematic choice, information structure) systematically foregrounded authority while backgrounding victims. Interpreted via representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions, these frames advanced perceived merits (public safety, rehabilitation, police action, deterrence, strong leadership) alongside demerits (human-rights violations, fear, media bias, class disparity). Recurrent imagery—Duterte and political elites, armed police, prisoners, and bodies—helped construct competing narratives of security versus moral/efficacy concerns. Outlet emphases diverged (e.g., law-enforcement/sovereignty in The Philippine Star and The Manila Times; social costs in SunStar; moral critique in the Philippine Daily Inquirer). Findings pertain to the sampled outlets/timeframe and reflect interpretive analysis.

DISCUSSION

Modes of Communication Employed in Newspaper Coverages of the Philippines' War on Drugs

Across the 31 articles, meaning is built jointly by verbal wording, images, and page/layout. Verbal headlines and lead paragraphs cue stance and frame causality; visuals anchor emotion and "proof"; spatial placement (front page, above-the-fold, caption proximity) prioritizes institutional voices and guides reading paths. Together these modes work as a single system: text

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legitimizes, images intensify, and layout hierarchizes what matters (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

Linguistic Organization of the Modes of Communication in Contributing to the Overall Expression of the Philippine War on Drugs

Cohesion relies on tight referential chains (e.g., recurring institutional actors and events) that stabilize preferred interpretations. Thematic choices routinely place state actors or agencies in Theme position, with actions/evaluations in the Rheme, creating a steady spotlight on institutional initiative. Information structure follows a given new rhythm, often presenting official claims as "given" and controversies as "new," which subtly centers state authority while relegating counter-voices to secondary positions (Halliday; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

The Use of Multimodal Discourse to Present the Merits and Demerits on War on Drugs

Representationally, agency clusters around officials, operations, and statistics (merits: order, capacity), while victims and communities are less elaborated, which dilutes experiential detail of harms. Interpersonally, formal quotes and procedural language foster distance and rationality, even as images of raids and bodies invite ethical engagement.

Compositionally, headlines, photo salience, and strategic omissions amplify authority and compress dissent, producing a controlled field where both "success" and "cost" can be signaled but not equally elaborated (Machin & Mayr; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

Perspectives of the Filipino Readers on the Merits and Demerits of the War on Drugs as Presented in the Philippine Newspaper

Readers highlight perceived gains in public safety and order (quieter streets, fewer visible transactions), supported by frequent imagery of enforcement and statistics in headlines. Rehabilitation is recognized as a pathway to "second chances," yet described as underreported and unevenly supported in practice (Lasco & Yu, 2023).

Police effort is seen in transparency signals (e.g., body cameras, briefings) and non-violent operations that seldom reach the front page. Fear also functions as deterrent in readers' accounts, while strong, decisive leadership is credited for speed and direction of the campaign.

Human-rights risks dominate the harms: due-process deficits, extrajudicial killings, and thin accountability, often made palpable through recurring crime-scene visuals and grief iconography. Public fear—of being listed, misidentified, or caught in operations—pervades narratives and shapes behavior.

Perceived media bias (Metro Manila focus, negativity, burying positives) and class disparity (poor communities overrepresented as targets/victims) round out the demerits, with coverage patterns seen to reinforce social inequality (Lasco & Yu, 2023).

Ideological Appeals Depicted in the Newspaper Coverage of the Philippines 'War on Drugs'

Four appeals organize the discourse: law-and-order (police as guarantors of stability), sovereignty (resistance to foreign censure), social/human consequences (grief, trauma, community costs), and morality (ethical limits of state violence).

These appeals are multimodally assembled—lexis, images, and layout—to steer interpretation: authority and nationhood are frequently foregrounded, while human costs gain visibility mainly through powerful visuals and feature placements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

Implications for Educational Practice

Based on a review of how Philippine newspapers use various forms of communication to convey the advantages and disadvantages of the war on drugs, this study's multimodal critical discourse analysis offers insightful educational implications. The findings, which are based on the five study topics, show how these multimodalities influence public perception, encode ideological positions, and form narratives. These insights are especially pertinent to media and literacy education.

First, the study illustrates how newspaper coverage from the Philippines about the war on drugs utilizes multimodal approaches to create meaning by using multiple modes of communication including verbal, visual and spatial. By using these three modes, the intended message of a news article will be more emphatic and persuasive than only one mode. This points to the importance of media literacy instruction engages students to be aware of how these modes interact so that they are able to resist being one-dimensional or manipulative framings in news coverages.

Second, the study explores the linguistic organization of the texts, and shows that words, grammatical structures, and sequencing all directly impact how meaning is created. By recognizing that language is never neutral but a constitutive element that creates tone and perception, it becomes evident that classroom activities that teach students how to deconstruct how emotionally charged or persuasive accounts in media are constructed, and that expose the ideological positions in texts, are particularly important.

Third, the study examines how newspapers portray the merits and demerits of the war of drugs through its multimodal framework. Whereas verbally, language use highlight's themes of public safety or human rights violations, the visuals even either enhance or counter those claims, with emotionally charge images. However, it is notable that words and visuals do not only simply report an event, but tend frame public opinion, making some claims appear urgent or legitimate. Hence, media literacy lessons are crucial to point out how multimodal presentation can influence interpretation, and may even bring about a certain emotional response in the reader.

Fourth, the study reflects on the perspectives of Filipino readers, namely, how they respond to media portrayal of the drug war. It is revealed that the participant's perspectives are more situated within their individual circumstances, culture and politics, which will determine how those meanings are understood and enacted. This demonstrates that media discourse does not exist in a bubble, but is dependent on how a range of diverse audiences interpret and negotiate the what they read. Hence, it is vital to allow students to reflect on their own reading and examine how their values, lived experiences, and background inform their reading, can promote critical engagement with media and an inclusive approach.

Lastly, this study also identifies how the ideological appeals were incorporated into newspaper narratives through the combination of the different modes. These ideological appeals are weaved into discourse in a manner that legitimizes one position about the drug war, while supporting a bias against another. The biased coverage demonstrates that media, through their combination of language and visuals, often reinforces a specific political or moral point of view, while marginalizing other views. Given this, educators can respond by providing opportunities for students to analyze the ideological cues and rhetorical devices in media. In doing so, students are able to recognize the bias, question the assumptions of the media, and develop a balanced perspective of the news narratives.

In conclusion, the results demonstrate the need to use multimodal critical literacy in teaching. Teachers can promote critical thinking, media awareness, and civic involvement in the classroom by assisting students in reading and analyzing texts using verbal, visual, and spatial modes and considering reader viewpoints and ideological influences.

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