

‘Every Cloud has a Silver Lining’: Humour and Persuasiveness in Social Media Images During Lockdowns

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SUMMARY

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, images (memes, GIFs, pictures, etc.) were largely consumed via social media. The purpose of the study is to establish a relevant research model in order to contextualize images as transmedia communicative documents during lockdowns (March-June 2020). The research method is a visual semiotic analysis used to evaluate the data for inter-coded reliability. The corpus is comprised of 300 visual representations identified regarding the salient participants metaphorically represented as “real”. On the one hand, the semantic-sensory relationships between images and viewers rhetorically imply a proverbial frame ‘Every cloud has a silver lining’; on the other hand, the persuasive concept of humour is established by multimodal tools, which further shape the audience. The salient domains of ‘staying home’ and ‘going away’ point towards more specific variables, e.g. education or tourism. The results confirm the modality judgement of humorous construct as a valuable document regarding the pandemic situation. According to its unique rhetorical features produced by the image-message-receiver relationships, the consolidation of data sets the ground for strategies and signifiers, with the function of a) presenting the adaptation of norms and b) setting the ground for consequent studies. Conclusively, the survey was conducted at Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, which confirmed students’ positive attitudes about using images for visual literacy. New findings are juxtaposed with previous knowledge in order to en-

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force the proposed research as a model for further narrative cognition. One such example is the burning question of how the media shapes the general public opinion on the coronavirus vaccine.

Keywords: transmedia representations, multimodality, images, social media, humour, persuasion, media literacy

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show how images shared across different online platforms, such as social media, etc., may respond to our multimodal reality. The research depicts the two lockdown phases during the COVID-19 crisis in Croatia in 2020. On the one hand, the need for modality appreciation and visual understanding is put forward in order to establish the documentation of transmedia visual representations in the pandemic era. On the other hand, multimodal visual analysis shows the rhetorical function of images, thus providing a framework for a whole new cross-platform social interaction online.

In this paper, visual representations are associated with a semantic and sensory coding orientation of pleasure in respect to a) discursive (culturally shaped knowledge of the world) and b) idiosyncratic (clever, wry, amusing or witty) mental information processing. The research question is ‘What semiotic sources in the images are foregrounded and which particular narrative background concept is communicated to the viewer?’. The multimodal semiotics draws from the canonical studies of Barthes about metalanguage accounting for various connotative meanings (1980), as well as of Eco’s semiotic approach, which encompasses a wide range of empirical studies (1976). The method involves observation (what is there) and classification (when it is measurable), as well as outlines the assumptions, practices, limitations and advantages of explicit analysis of visual content: “Visual content analysis is a systematic, observational method used for testing hypotheses about the ways in which the media represent people, events, situations, and so on” (Bell, 2008: 13).

The study addresses the questions of salient (foregrounded) participants of multimodal content: how visible, frequent, large, etc. something and someone is or what different kinds of images, stories, events are represented (Bell, 2008: 14). In other words, the participants are depicted people in various metaphoric situations, as if represented in “reality” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 161). The agenda setting is a background narrative metaphoric concept, i.e. the implied proverb ‘Every cloud has a silver lining, which bears rhetorical persuasive significance on the image-message-receiver grounds (Goosens, 2003). Precisely, depicted images suffice for a comic and witty note in the visual documentations of the pandemic era.

The hypothetical grounds provide some useful insights regarding rhetorical implementations in media images, which encourage relevant semiotic processes: Humour as a persuasive tool shapes the audience; visual representations (memes, pictures, photos, GIFs, etc.) are shared through various social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, Viber, WhatsApp, etc.); both lockdown periods are contextualized as a record of time; decoded semiotic and semantic elements depict participants in the communicative activities according to the variable specification; persuasion as a stimuli-inducing cognitive concepts assists in the visual and media literacy of the audience.

The theoretical framework combines the appropriate visual corpus analysis and bears the following significance:

- Regarding behavioural activities and visual communication. Juxtaposition of semiotic and semantic relationships are applicable on different multimedia (Danesi, 2004; Stam, 1999; Hartley, 2002).
- Regarding cognitive and metaphoric visual persuasive elements. Narrative concepts create mediated frameworks (Lakoff and Johnson, 2015; Scott and Batra, 2003).
- Regarding multimodal visual representations and their qualitative and quantitative analysis. It allows quantification of samples of observable content classified into distinct categories, as well as the analysis of fields of visual representation by describing the constituents of one or more defined areas of representation, periods or types of images (Bell, 2008: 13; van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2003; Collier, 2003).
- Regarding cultural and behavioural representations of “reality”, which engages the viewer on the metaphorical conceptual level (Samovar et al., 2009; Lakoff and Johnson, 2015).
- Regarding previous studies in Croatia on media literacy. Conceptual narrative frames are analysed in media (Žanić and Borčić, 2016). In addition, a recent study has shown that media is used with children mostly for entertainment (Labaš and Marinčić, 2016). Furthermore, digital literacy requires both education and reinterpretation with students and parents alike (Ciboci and Labaš, 2019). Finally, this study fills the gap in Croatian social studies where visual literacy is missing.

The broader methodological framework allows the analysis to move beyond a generalisation of the image-making or editing since it embraces the multimodal approach in terms of practical development of method in order to show how the visual representations carry a specific construct. The research method is a visual semiotic analysis of 300 randomly chosen images online. Coding judgments are made regarding a) original variables/conceptual framework: *stay home* and *go away* and

b) specific variables/addressing specific coding (*remote work, education, staycation, social distancing and wearing masks*). The research was conducted in two phases: phase no. 1 (March/April 2020) provided for the hypothetical data (150 examples); phase no. 2 (May/June 2020) tested the inter-coded reliability of images (150 more examples). On the one hand, the results respond to the explicit hypothesis of humorous concept; on the other hand, the comparative hypothesis responded to modality (true value) judgement of the data. Images evoke mental imagery processing (MIP) (Paivio, 1986), therefore, the research model further assists in narrative cognition, according to its unique stylistic features produced by the image-message-receiver relationship. Phase no. 2 included students of Juraj Dobrila University of Pula (2020/21) in the observation and identification process, followed by the pilot survey regarding their attitudes about using visual images for education (i.e. media/visual literacy). The results show highly positive attitudes: a) 76% of students agree about using multimedia in language studies and b) 87% of students agree that images assist in learning new concepts.

The consolidation of data resulted in setting the ground for strategies and signifiers in the function of presenting the norms and setting the ground for further studies. The basis of this research is relevant not only to social semiotics, but also to aspiring post-ideological/constructivist narratives (Herman, 1999). One such example is the question of how images influence or shape the general public opinion about the coronavirus vaccine through media narratives.

Theoretical Framework

Idiosyncrasy of humour in visual representation

Contemporary views on visual processing are aware that human beings are good at learning how things are related to one another. Visual persuasion, mental imagery processing (MIP) and emotional experience are contributing factors resulting from, among other things, an individual's personal experience (Scott and Batra, 2003; Gossens, 2003). According to MacInnis and Price (1987), there are two different modes of information: a) discursive – visual/symbolic, linguistic or verbal and b) imagery processing. The former implies information processing as a result of reasoning and argument, while the latter involves perceptual representations and perceptions of external stimuli used in parallel by our working memory. When viewers engage in imagery, the sensory experiences are evoked so discursive and imagery processing and the contents of each become elaborately intertwined (Gossens, 2003: 130). This cognitive framework is based on Paivio's model of a verbal and image system (1986). This model of the abstract and representation plane later helped in the ability of a receiver to identify



Figure 1. Tele2 “Small Bill/Big Bill” campaign (shots no. 1–3)

Slika 1. Reklamna kampanja Tele2 „Small Bill/Big Bill“ (kadrovi 1–3)

Source: Boeriis and Nørgaard (2013)

Izvor: Boeriis i Nørgaard (2013)

stimuli quickly and to employ activities such as thinking, remembering and appraisal. For example, the image and verbal system in essence postulate “dual coding” (Hall, 1980) or encoding the world’s semantics that exist between a) sensory events and symbolic representations; b) verbal and imaginal representations; c) representations within the two symbolic systems (Goossens, 2003: 132).

By adopting the MIP studies, Goossens explains how humour subsides in a sort of prototype of the emotion-information network. Humour is “a literary figure closely related to happiness, which psychologically impacts one’s mood” (Škreb et al., 1984: 253). Such emotions are a result of a process of appraisals and stimulus for one’s well-being, i.e. the appraisal is determined as a feelgood emotion. In addition, it is said that a person has a sense of humour if capable of grasping the concept of comic as well as to convey it to others. In this way, the function of humorous representations (social actors, people) is both the representation of one’s character and the axes, which set the ideas in motion (Škreb et al., 1984: 122). Interestingly, from a multimodal perspective, the humour stems from possible tensions between different semiotic modes (visual and verbal), which demonstrate how their juxtaposition provides for meaning-making resources. Firstly, humour is both a multimodal construct of emotions, which evokes rational processes in a viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 64). Such processes are achieved in the interplay between represented participants and the viewers, while they convey human traits and ideas (Škreb et al., 1983: 122). Secondly, humour is a stylistic device for marking certain analytical communicative processes, which are transmitted through emotion, affect, feeling or mood (Nørgaard et al., 2010). What this means is that the visual representations are seen in the light of a construct-shaping discourse, which further impacts a viewer by evoking associations.

Boeriis and Nørgaard (2013) show how such a construal depicts participants in the commercials belonging to a campaign of the European phone company, Tele2 “Small Bill/Big Bill“. The use of humour is notable in an attempt to get new cus-



Photos 1–4. “After work party” vs. “Corona party”
Fotografije 1–4. “Afterwork party” vs. “Coronaparty”

tomers through stereotypes and cross-modal puns. Figure 1 shows how a viewer is presented with the images followed by the audio-verbal narrative: “A setup of contrast creates expectations of a payoff to do with the relative size of the two men, which are fulfilled in shot #3 where the two men are depicted next to each other, displaying the grotesque contrast between the two“ (Boeriis and Nørgaard, 2013: 4). In short, the first two shots construe spatial relations of Big Bill and Small Bill, while shot no. 3 confusingly presents the two participants in the opposite order, which establishes a comic effect.

In addition, Photos 1–4 show how the surprising element semantically works. Photos 1–3 show the “after work parties” in different cities in the pre-pandemic era: Sarajevo (2013), London (2015) and Copenhagen (2018). Surprisingly, photo no. 4 bears a resembling significance, however, it depicts the pandemic era in Naples (2020). The “after work party” is now called “corona party”, which reflects a rhetorical/stylistic construct regarding the global coronavirus crisis. In this way, the viewer is involved in the interpretation and cognition of a humorous narrative, which is culturally constructed by the same-yet-different images/visual representation. In conclusion, the clever effect stems from the same-yet-different modes and the humorous concept stems from the confusing, opposite order in the observed comparison of the “then“ and “now“ on the semantic and semiotic level.

Persuasive social media construct: ‘Every cloud has a silver lining’

The visual has massive impact on our society as we enter the field of images, perceptions, constructs and culture brought together. On the grounds of metaphors, different concepts reflect what is constructed through sense-making activities (Lakoff and Johnson, 2015). Furthermore, as shown by Žanić and Borčić (2016), the background activity of newspapers as media may be metaphorically deconstructed in political speeches. Based on the analysis, a conceptual nature of produced narratives and coded messages of journalists suggest linguistic activities, which include a mental entity concept and a relevant conceptual framework within a culturally conditioned cognitive structure – our knowledge of the world. Similarly, in this paper, media representations in general and foregrounded images in particular construct a certain narrative: the persuasive proverbial concept “Every cloud has a silver lining” metaphorically implies the concept brought to the audience through humorous representations regarding the coronavirus situation.

Images may and may not be naturalistic in that they simply record what is out there in the world (Machin, 2007: 45). It is our perception that is the means by which we make sense of our physical and social world (Samovar et al., 2010: 185). The conceptual relations between the viewer and the image is even more so participatory as the relationship is established through sharing on different online platforms, such as Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, WhatsApp, Viber, Pinterest, etc. As such, they represent our reality. How exactly does the social media images become “real”?

Firstly, *culturally*. One explanation offers that our perception is determined by exposing a large group of people to similar experience. Culture generates similar meanings and behaviours based on the mutual background (Samovar et al., 2010: 186-187). Perception is therefore selective as our perceptual patterns are learnt through experiences. In addition, Machin provides the inventory of the meaning

potentials for the cultural representations of participants in the image according to cultural and personal (identity) aspects: the visual representation of people is either culturally realized through the standard attributes of dress, hairstyle, etc., biological categorisation is achieved through stereotyped physical characteristics, whereas both categories may be used to evoke either positive or negative connotations (2007: 118–119). In the view of social semiotics, such inventory is metaphorical as it looks into the visual grammar of actions for analysing what people do or may not do in the images and reality (2007: 128).

Secondly, *semiotically*. Through signs and symbols, we recognise how the realistic style of representation actually reflects a culturally shaped code. The concept of image persuasiveness draws from Barthes's paradigmatic study in 1964 and largely relies on the two main hypotheses: first, that there is no neutral documentation and second, that denotation is only the first level of meaning (of a photograph, for example). Accordingly, we need to first know something about what we are looking at in order to be able to understand the image. As for the social functioning, the signification, communication and culture were brought together by Eco's "doctrine of the sign and communication" (1976). The sign production tends to communicate something and, as such, the concept has been adopted in different research fields, e.g. media and communication (Danesi, 2004) or film semiotics (Stam, 1999). Over time, certain methods of production within a medium become naturalized or content becomes accepted as a reflection of reality. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) provide examples of cases depicted from advertising, social media, video games, film, etc. For the authors, the use of so-called "invisible editing" represents a widespread set of conventions that viewers accept. The reason for that is the foregrounded "content" rather than the "form" (design, frame, interface, etc.), which has come to seem "natural" to most viewers. In other words, the effect of an image on viewers is a function of the experience of processing rather than any formal property of the image itself.

Thirdly, *cognitively*. The state of knowledge about persuasiveness ascribes that visual influence of the image is an extensive one. Our visual fluency relies upon certain conditions that make images more or less easy to process (Scott and Batra, 2003). A pleasant experience may occur as a result of repeated exposures, which may cause viewers to prefer familiar images rather than new ones (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). However, our repeated exposure to certain images would eventually call for our visual literacy in respect to processes and narratives carried by image-related interaction and followed by patterns of response.

Anyone who has had an attempt to communicate cross-modally should be familiar with the limitations of simply not being aware of visual persuasive and influence tactics. What used to be a question of mere cognitive functioning, in the digital age now belongs to the sphere of critical functioning in a so-called new normal. The

participative mediated “reality” has the persuasive power over viewer and his or her engagement on the metaphorical level, depending on different degrees and means of visual expressions. Such pictorial expressions are described by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 256) and van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2008: 30) as follows:

- Pictorial expression – each of the chosen dimensions can be seen as a scale, running from the absence of any rendition of participants (non-representation) to their maximal representation.
- Pictorial dimension – for what could be called “standard naturalism” to the degree that the use of a dimension is reduced, it becomes, at least in one respect, more abstract, “less than real”; to the degree that is amplified, it becomes “more than real” in the process of association;
- Sensory coding orientation – an emphasis on sensory pleasure (or displeasure, as in the case of “more than real” e.g. horror images), and an attempt to come as close as possible to a representation that involves all the senses.

After all, visual representations are brought into close connection with metaphors in respect to how something is *represented* and not to actual *reality*. Accordingly, for this research project, the image variables are represented participants (e.g. people and places), while the depicted roles in the images consists of the same options class or type (e.g. stay home and go away). Since it is the representations – the content - that are analysed, all the variables are precisely those which particularly differ from one another (Bell, 2008: 16). Figure 2 shows the variable judgements of this corpus analysis. The original variable (foregrounded domain) states that during the lockdowns people either stay home or go away. Accordingly, more specific variables are: remote work, education, staycation, social distancing and wearing masks.

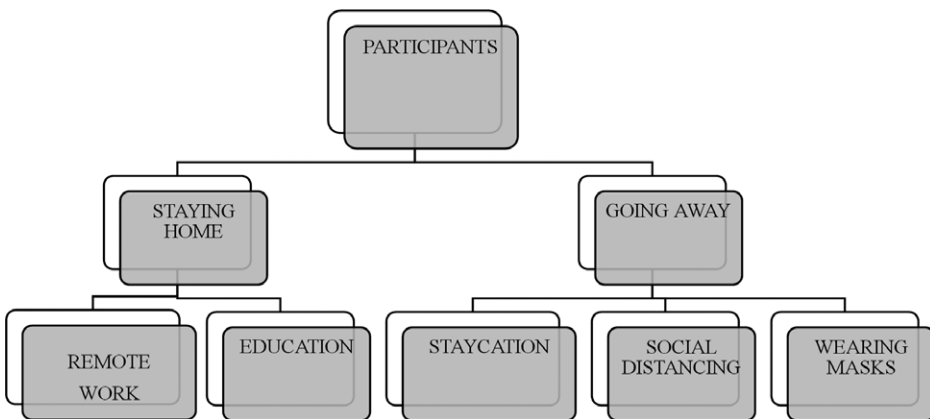


Figure 2. The coding of corpus in relation to participants and variable judgements
Slika 2. Kodiranje sudionika i određivanje varijabli istraživačkog korpusa

Modality judgement according to participants in images

Images are produced to serve as recorded evidence of reality, people, places, things and their relations. In making sense of an image, it is said that coders/interpreters make modality judgements drawing on their knowledge of the world and of the medium. Therefore, the modality judgement (coding) results with the choice of the maximum pictorial expression to the “real” representations of people and places. The representations may differ from one another in dimensions or qualities. The most common are:

- Represented participants (male/female; adult/child).
- A number of alternative settings (rooms, street, automobile, shop, etc.).

The method of visual analysis may provide a wide range of defined features, which further connect them to specific meanings and particular communicative functions or effects regarding cultural interaction and personal recognition of people (Machin, 2007: 119). What we recognize as realistic representation actually reflects a culturally shaped code. Thereby, over time, certain methods of production within a medium and a genre become naturalized or accepted as a reflection of reality. In making sense of images, its interpreters make modality judgements (identification of depicted images). Bearing in mind that image inventory is metaphorical/conceptual, viewers depict what participants in the image may or may not do in “reality”. Meaningful objects of text content analysis or text information are broken down into its constituent elements. However, the “texts” are called that whether or not they are verbal. For example, “a display advertisement is a visual text, a news item (on television) is also a text because it has a clear frame or boundary within which the various elements of sound and image ‘cohere’, ‘make sense’ or are cohesive. Texts, then, are defined within the context of a particular research question and within the theoretical categories of the medium on which the research focuses” (Bell, 2008: 14–15). Clearly, the extent to which the text may be perceived as “real” depends in part on the medium employed.

In this study images depicted *represented* participants (people, places, things), as well as the *relations* between represented participants (where they are, what they are doing). In addition, in this analytical approach, there are also *interactive* participants – the coders. They make sense of images in the social context, which shapes and regulates, to different degrees and in different ways, what may be “said” with images, how it should be perceived and interpreted (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 114). This is how the meaning potential of modality is gained in the images (Machin, 2007: 110–111). Such modality judgement begins from a precise hypothesis (expectation) and includes well-defined variables:

- (Randomly chosen) types of visual representations, i.e. images shared online, which may or may not be juxtaposed with the actual verbal text.

	1. STAY HOME	
1.1	Remote work	
1.2	Online classes	
	<p>Skipping school in 2019: Skipping school in 2020: </p>	
	2. GO AWAY	
2.1	Staycation	
		<p>What I want... What I can... </p>
2.2	Social distancing	
2.3	Wearing masks	
	<p>If I can't see coronavirus, the coronavirus can't see me</p>	

Figure 3. Structuring the data according to the modality judgement
 Slika 3. Strukturiranje podataka u odnosu na modalne prosudbe

- (Defined) representations of participants and communication, i.e. action-driven people and settings (stay, go, wear, work, etc.).
- (Coded) depicted context variables and their follow-up values.

For van Leeuwen and Jewitt, the modality judgement stage is an empirical (observational) and objective procedure for quantifying recorded reliable, explicitly defined independent variables (2008: 15). As for the coding, Collier suggests trusting one's feelings and impressions, making a careful note of them, thus identifying the images that they are a response to (2008: 39). The method combines, yet distinguishes visual from semiotic analysis. The visual analysis usually isolates framed images (in publications) or sequences of representation (scenes or shots in television or film), whereas the semiotic analysis classifies all the texts on specified dimensions (variables) to describe the field or totality (van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2008: 15). Bearing in mind the prescribed semiotic and rhetoric regulations, this study depicts participants (*people* and *places*), their spatial relations (*home* and *away*), contrasts (*then* – pre-pandemic and *now* – lockdowns) and cross modal puns (juxtaposed *visual* and *verbal* language). Figure 3 provides an example of the analytical processes.

Methodology

Method: visual and semiotic content analysis

The purpose of the study is to present a model of the persuasive concept shared through images on different social media platforms. The literature is put in practice in relation to visual representations on the restricted and randomly chosen corpus. For this reason, modality (true value) of data is measured for reliability so that the study may provide for the documented model of specific times (COVID-19 lockdowns in Croatia, 2020). The aim is to measure the reliability of data in respect to selected participants and according to the modality criteria. The applied method is quantitative visual content analysis, with a focus on identification and observation of original variables leading to the more specific ones.

The process requires:

- Hypothetical data (period no. 1; 150 examples).
- Modality agreement data (period no. 2; 150 examples).
- Measuring reliability of data by comparison of results (intra-coding).

As imposed in the theoretical part of the paper, the idiosyncrasy of humour in visual representation relies on the discursive – visual/symbolic, linguistic or verbal and imagery processing (MacInnis and Price, 1987). Such perceptions of external stim-

uli provided by the chose images are used in parallel by a working memory and evoked sensory experiences of the viewers engaged in processing and the contents (Gossens, 2003: 130). The representation plane of images is identified by coders and further encoded as sensory events (witty and humorous images coded for *home* and *away* variables). Moreover, the salient representations (people and places in the images) construct the “silver lining” metaphor, which encompasses the images in both research phases within the two symbolic systems – staying at home and going away. It further impacts the viewer by evoking emotions (stimulating humour) and calling for cognitive constructs (background humorous narrative in the lockdown period).

Corpus, aims and hypotheses

The corpus comprises of 300 randomly chosen texts: screenshots, cartoons, pictures, GIFs, photos, etc. Images were extracted and coded from online social media: Facebook, Viber, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, etc. In the process, multiple identities are presented simultaneously on different personal accounts. Therefore, the validity of identity is impossible to establish. However, it is common knowledge that images are shared across/trans media - on different platforms, personal accounts etc., thus the process of documented mentions the sources liable to retrieving. In addition, corpus-related online sources are addressed not only for extracting the visuals but also for setting the general informative study ground according to media references to lockdowns (Appendix 2). To measure intra-coder reliability, i.e. the true value of data on all relevant variables, the range of 50–100 classified examples is recommended (Bell, 2008: 22). The selected images form a corpus of 300 examples, 150 different images in each phase, however, due to the limitations of this paper, the prescribed minimum of 50 examples is enclosed as matched research data (Appendix 1). The analysis comprises of two phases. First, the first lockdown in March/April 2020, and second, a week later, a repeated procedure in the consecutive period in May/June 2020. The two sets are compared to achieve the aims and purpose as to test the data for intra-coded reliability according to the implied proverbial conceptual structure ‘Every cloud has a silver lining’. The aims are as follows:

- A1. To look for original and specific variables by comparing and contrasting the images according to the domains.
- A2. To judge modality by testing the reliability in order to create the communicative tools for visual analysis.
- A3. To create a documented model for visual content analysis of images (from general to specific purposes).

A4. To conduct a follow up survey regarding students' attitudes about images in media and visual literacy, i.e. the cognitive rather than merely entertaining responses.

The *explicit* hypothesis is established; the backgrounded concept of humour is the rhetoric tool of persuasion, which shapes the audience. Once the hypothesis is formulated, the two relevant (original) variables and more specific ones are established. In the study process, the gender-related variable is excluded because the focus of this paper is humorous activity rather than politics of identity.

The *comparative* hypothesis is established as the kinds of hypotheses that content analysis usually evaluates according to the established variables and regarding the depicted images from one period being more or less in relation to the other. Because it is comparative, a hypothesis might specify two or more periods (van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2008: 13).

In conclusion, the research agenda relies on the following hypotheses:

H1. The conceptual relations between the viewer and the image is participatory (message-receiver) and sensory.

H2. Social media texts respond to behavioural activities regarding multimodal (semiotic and semantic) communicative construct.

H3. Cognitive modality judgements bear a) foregrounded juxtaposed semiotic and semantic relationships (visual and verbal); b) the background rhetoric concept (humour).

H4. Contextualized images in media-related cognition brought to the audiences constitute the documented model of the specific period.

Procedure

Research phases are outlined in approaching the data in a process of structuring a multi-stage model (Collier, 2008: 39–40):

First stage. Identification: the images are identified by observing the data as a whole in order to discover its connecting contrasting patterns.

Second stage. Corpus inventory: the making an inventory of the texts is analysed as the cohesive unit framed within the social media. Therefore, the original domains are established.

Third stage. Structuring: the method of structuring is visual and semiotic content analysis.

Fourth stage. Establishing the specific domains: the approach to the data is such that details from structured analysis can be placed in a context that defines their significance.

The research then returns to the complete visual record and reads it as a persuasive narrative, which has an amusing *effect* that *affects* the audience.

The participants in the images conceptually belong to independent physical settings, which constitute variables: no less than 4 images should be of the same value i.e. same logical kind. The values are classified according to a prescribed semiotic analysis. Firstly, randomly chosen images, with action-driven visuals of people as salient and symbolic representatives of “reality” (Machin, 2007: 110–111). Secondly, this approach invites interactivity among participants. In other words, the viewers are coders who make further semantic and cultural sense of the images according to humorous context instructions (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Thirdly, coded variables are defined and depicted, whereas their follow-up values are created according to the modality observational (empirical) judgement in the procedure (van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2008).

Such development of ideas proves that the humorous concept relies on the capability of coders, in this case, students, to grasp salient representations, which reciprocally shape the coders. Precisely, the concept of “silver lining” bears a multimodal narrative construct of emotions; humour is achieved through the interplay between represented participants and the viewers; the decoded concepts bear persuasive significance as they convey modal traits and evoke processes in viewers (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 64; Škreb et al., 1983: 122). Such transmedia processes are communicative and perceived as marking stylistic concepts analysed on the basis of transmitted feelings or moods, i.e. humour, which semantically and semiotically work as a concept/model of representation (Nørgaard et al., 2010).

As the classification and quantification uses coding, which means judging, it is important to avoid subjective variables (those that require subjective judgement). To achieve the required high levels of reliability, the procedure demands clear definitions and criteria of the variables and values. The preliminary research hypothesis and original variable allow an unambiguous measure in coding and classifying the corpus, as well as in the intra-coding reliability. Table 1 shows the criteria of original and specific variable judgments: *stay home* and *go away*; *remote work*, *education*, *staycation*, *social distancing* and *wearing masks*.

The intra-coding study is prescribed no sooner than a week later, with 150 more examples investigated according to the same criteria of the hypothetical data. It is typical of data by more than one variable to undergo the comparative cross-tabulations as reliability can be demonstrated by assessing the judgements of the same sample of relevant items made by the coder on different occasions (Bell, 2008: 1–23). This judgement is also resistant to subjective judgement as coding is strictly specified. What follows is the comparison of correlated results as powerful tools for maintaining good contextual annotation of a visual image collection (Collier, 2008:

Table 1. Variables and values according to represented participants
Tablica 1. Vrijednosne varijable u odnosu na predstavljene sudionike

		VARIABLES*	
		Stay Home Remote work	Go Away Staycation
VALUES	Participants		
		Education	Social distancing
			Wearing masks
Total	2	2	3

* These values are indicative, however, there are likely to be many more values for this variable

51). According to a participative and symbolic transmedia reality, the humorous persuasive power engages the viewer on the metaphorical level through visual representations (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 256). This means that the received model responds to a visual impact, which reflects the metaphoric construct of humour through sense-making activities (Lakoff and Johnson, 2015), as well as classifies the construct as a background activity deconstructed in the process (Žanić and Borčić, 2016). In order to explain how a basic new paradigm has been delivered, students from Juraj Dobrila University of Pula are included in the intra-coding study process. The assessment of the equal number of relevant items (the sample or the corpus) is done by students-as-coders. As suggested by Bell, the time frame was a different occasion a week later, with the same number of examples investigated according to the same criteria of the hypothetical data (2008: 1–23). Since it has been shown that the cognitive modality judgements bear both foregrounded juxtaposed semiotic and semantic relationships and the background rhetoric concept, the participatory conceptual relations between the viewer and the image are contextualized as a documented model for a specific period (H3 and H4). The conceptual relations between the viewer and the image is proven to be participatory and sensory, while the social media texts respond to behavioural activities regarding multimodal (semiotic and semantic) communicative construct (H1 and H2). Finally, the tools to demonstrate the model have been provided in the process, thus all four hypotheses are tested and confirmed.

Results and discussion

The results have confirmed that the explicit and comparative hypotheses bear the significance of rhetorical tools on the grounds that the humorous concept confirms the humorous activity and involves persuasion, i.e. shapes the audience. According

to the established variables and the research question “What semiotic sources in the images are foregrounded and which particular narrative background concept is communicated to the viewer?”, the images depicted from one period are in relation to the other specific period. The modality of images in both periods is compared; variables in both periods are closely frequented, with the wearing of masks and education of the highest values; the compared agenda produces, defines and communicates the humorous narrative.

Phase no. 1. The hypothetical data. Table 2 represents the results in phase no. 1 (March/April 2020) of the procedure (N=150). The number of images is as follows: remote work 19, education 30, staycation 30, social distancing 19 and wearing masks 52 images. The data in Table 2 are not comparative, however, it becomes so if shown with relevant comparison tables showing how other visual representations prioritized the same respective agendas.

Table 2. Hypothetical data research results (N=150)

Tablica 2. Rezultati hipotetskog dijela istraživanja (N=150)

		March/April 2020
1. Stay home	1.1. Remote work	19
	1.2. Education	30
2. Go away	2.1. Staycation	30
	2.2. Social distancing	19
	2.3. Wearing masks	52
		150

Phase no. 2. The modality agreement data. Table 3 represent the results in phase no. 2 (May/June 2020) of the procedure (N=150) for the purpose of reliability. The valid number of the data is based on defined values of modality according to hypothetical data criteria. The number of images is as follows: remote work 18, educa-

Table 3. Modality agreement data (N=150)

Tablica 3. Modalitet (N=150)

		May/June 2020
1. Stay home	1.1. Remote work	18
	1.2. Education	40
2. Go away	2.1. Staycation	22
	2.2. Social distancing	20
	2.3. Wearing masks	50
		150

tion 40, staycation 22, social distancing 20 and wearing masks 50 images. In this way, these examples illustrate more succinctly references to visual modality.

Phase no. 3. Intra-coded reliability. Table 4 shows the data tested in the two periods of time. In terms of cross-tabulation, reliability refers to the image representation consistency shown by evaluating the content according to defined criteria. In both periods, wearing masks is most frequently represented (35%; 33%), followed by education (20%; 27%), staycation (20%; 15%), social distancing (13%; 13%) and remote work (13%; 12%). Modality here refers to the truth-value or credibility of verbally or visually realized statements in visual images in both periods. The compared agenda of different online resources defines variables in both periods closely frequented, with the wearing masks and education of the highest values. The masks are probably most frequently represented due to the extraordinary new thing in human lives, whereas the reason for education could be that the biggest coding population were students. Staycation, social distancing and remote work are closely frequented. As the modality has been established, the the hypotheses are confirmed and the aims achieved. The research question has been answered as the study presents the documented model of time, with humour being semiotically and semantically constructed through the visual representations of the lockdowns during 2020.

Table 4. Intra-coded reliability results

Tablica 4. Rezultati intrakodiranja

		March-April 2020	May-June 2020
1. Stay home	1.1. Remote work	19 13% (0.13)	18 12% (0.12)
	1.2. Education	30 20% (0.2)	40 27% (0.27)
2. Go away	2.1. Staycation	30 20% (0.2)	22 15% (0.15)
	2.2. Social distancing	19 13% (0.13)	20 13% (0.13)
	2.3 Wearing masks	52 35% (0.35)	50 33% (0.33)

The results show that the hypotheses are confirmed. As shown in phase no. 2, visual and verbal elements in images create certain constructs. Since the students have successfully been included in phase no. 2 (observing and collecting data), the conceptual relations between the viewer and the image is proven as participatory and sensory (H1). Furthermore, the hypothetical data and modality data tested in two periods of time reflect the social media visual texts, which responds to behavioural activities regarding multimodal (semiotic and semantic) communicative construct. Furthermore, the data show that foregrounded juxtaposed semiotic and semantic relationships bear the relevant significance of a background humorous rhetorical concept (H2 and H3). In the end, on the basis of the explicit and comparative hypotheses, the images are contextualized in transmedia cognition brought to the audi-

ences, which constitutes the documented model of the specific period in the focus of this study. Moreover, different variants and the underlying asset provide the specific model upon which we hope to explain how a basic new paradigm has been delivered. Finally, this model may assist in the new prospects of transmedia narrative analysis regarding the participatory cultural phenomenon in general (Herman, 1999). Even the fashion system introduces online images, which may be further explored for interpersonal communication. In addition, multimodality reflects in the decision-making processes due to different variants of target and distractor features (Hall, 1980), such as persuasive concepts of texts regarding motivation shared via social media (Figure 6). Another example might be the burning question of vaccinating for COVID-19. Critically, the application of multimodality in its variety has successfully proposed the original research method, which has been accomplished in order to use, understand, evaluate, but also create rich, rhetorical texts. Therefore, H4 has been additionally confirmed, as the contextualized images in media-related cognition brought to the audiences constitute the documented model of a chosen specific period.



Figure 4. Social media texts
Slika 4. Tekst s društvenih mreža

Weaknesses

From the point of view of social semiotics, the absolute truth or untruth of visual representations cannot be claimed to have been established. However, this model is valid for representations that can only show whether a given proposition is represented as a documented construct of semiosis. As such, it is the truth of a particular time, social group and its values. In other words, the variables may overlap in their values, for example, remote work and staycation, or education and social distancing. For this reason, the further evaluation should look into the more specific details, such as the formal properties of images. Valuables should be questioned for bias, as

well as for cultural and/or historical changes in modes of representation, such as gender, occupational, class, or ethically codified images.

Conclusion: going beyond data

Education has been affected by the stay-at-home situation, therefore, the discussion further points towards the relevance of visual and media literacy for educators and practitioners. Precisely, multimodal representations may be perceived as study inducing material. Bearing this in mind, the study refers to phase no. 1 results of this paper. In addition, altogether, 101 students from Juraj Dobrila University of Pula were included in phase no. 2 (observing and collecting data). The students were 84 female and 17 male; 80 undergraduates and 21 graduates; age 19–34 (Table 5). Phase no. 2 was conducted within the English Language Study Programme at the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Italian and Cultural Studies (June 2020).

Table 5. Respondents 2020/21 (N=101)
Tablica 5. Anketni sudionici 2020/21 (N=101)

	Number	Percentage
Female	84	83%
Male	17	17%
Undergraduate	80	79%
Graduate	21	21%

There are two relevant studies in Croatia about media literacy for students. One is the study that surveyed primary school students on the question “How many children use the media for informational, educational and entertainment purposes?” (Labaš and Marinčić, 2016: 19). The results show that, with children, media is largely used for entertainment (63.40%), and very rarely for educational purposes (2.70%). The other study discusses visiting social network sites, sharing photos, videos etc. in the realm of digital media literacy regarding the child – parent relationship from the earliest age (Ciboci and Labaš, 2019). According to the results, only every fifth parent thinks that media education should start as early as in kindergarten (2019: 96–97). In conclusion, the study highly recommends the parent-child discussion about different media content. Hereby, our research structures the previous knowledge in order to put forward a possible model due to all sorts of (social) media visual-verbal “texts”. Duly, the follow-up pilot survey was conducted:

- For the purpose of addressing participants about the investigated concept of persuasive images in the English Study Programme.
- For the purpose of visual literacy in Croatia as a valuable supplement to media/digital education in general.

Students were shown the preliminary results of this research in order to gather some particular information for general communicative purposes. The aim was to set the trail to map out the meaning potential of visual analysis on the academic level. The survey was conducted to test students' opinions within the range: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 2=disagree and 1=strongly disagree. The survey statements are:

Statement 1. English courses at the academic level should explore and include the usage of multimedia in the study programme (e.g. images, films, social media, etc.).

Statement 2. Visual and verbal elements in images help grasp new concepts through pictures.

The results are as follows: For the first statement, 46% of students strongly agree, 30% agree, 15% are indecisive, 7% disagree and 3% strongly disagree. Reasons for indecisiveness and/or disagreement could be many, from lack of background information to reduced motivation due to being overwhelmed with the stay-at-home online education. However, what is accountable is the very positive result of agreement (76%), which shows the generally positive attitude towards images. For the second statement, as much as 87% of students expressed positive attitudes: 61% strongly agree and 26% agree that visual and verbal modality assists in grasping conceptual frameworks in images. Thirteen percent of students neither agreed nor disagreed. For this reason, it is necessary to expand the research area to more images with less pre-test input, as well as with the focus on the post-test results on the individual level. This may provide more accurate data on how concepts in visual texts are both grasped and perceived.

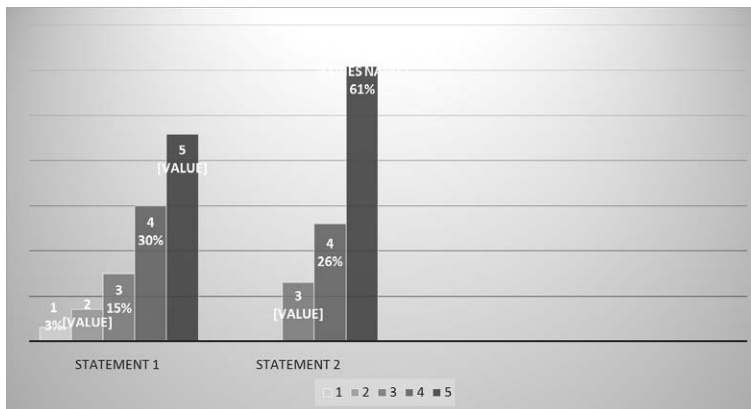


Figure 5. Survey results (N=101)

Slika 5. Rezultati ankete (N=101)

Source: Authors

Images depicted in this study represent participants – people, places and their symbolic relations. The results presented in this paper have confirmed the hypotheses, drawing from the aims and according to the appropriate visual corpus and its significance. Furthermore, the observable data classification presents the distinct categories, which represent, describe and constitute a model of documented visual representations in the times of COVID-19. Moreover, by describing the specific areas and periods of representations, this methodological framework embraces the multimodal approach to coding judgments in terms of developing the method for media and digital literacy. As such, it fills the gap in Croatian transmedia studies by juxtaposing semiotic and semantic relationships of multimodal representations. Regarding multimodality, the approach presupposes cultural and/or behavioural symbolic reality, as well as the viewer's engagement. As a matter of fact, metaphoric visual persuasive elements create rhetorical humorous concepts presented in phases 1 and 2 of the analysis. Therefore, the conceptual relations between the viewer and the image are participatory on both the semiotic and cognitive level.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. The data (N=50); Phases no. 1 and 2
 Dodatak 1. Korpus (N=50); Faze 1 i 2

	STAY HOME		GO AWAY		
#	Remote work	Education	Staycation	Social distance	Wearing masks
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

'Every Cloud has a Silver Lining': Humour and Persuasiveness...

6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

Appendix 2. 'Silver Lining' Visual Representations Sources (March-June, 2020)

Dodatak 2. *Izvori vizualnih reprezentacija 'u svakom zlu ima nešto dobra'*
(ožujak-lipanj, 2020)

		DATA SOURCES: 'There is a silver lining in every cloud'
STAY HOME	Remote work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I like working from home (Retrieved from https://me.me/i/i-like-working-from-home-its-a-lot-more-comfortable-18799811) 2. Expectations vs. reality (Personal account) 3. Working from home (Retrieved from https://me.me/i/working-from-home-omemegenerator-net-working-from-home-sleeping-couch-871cad9e58b24f1399254ff43871e78b) 4. Woman sleeping on a sofa (Retrieved from Woman Sleeping On Sofa While Working At Home Breda Brabant Netherlands High-Res Stock Photo - Getty Images) 5. Oprah, everybody work from home (Retrieved from https://gulfnnews.com/photos/lifestyle/memes-to-kick-up-happiness-cells-in-your-brain-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-1.1584433475074) 6. You work from home? (Retrieved from https://www.actioned.com/best-work-from-home-memes/) 7. Young business working from home (Retrieved from Parent Interrupts By Her Daughter While Working In The Office Stock Photo - Image of office, home: 149032102) 8. Interpersonal relationships online (Personal account) 9. Interpersonal relationships online (Personal account) 10. Me and the boys ready for Zoom (Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/memesupremeofficial/posts/d41d8cd9/1366815280180403)
	Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The children back at school (Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/themomrant/?hl=hr) 2. Skipping school in 2019 and 2020 (Retrieved from https://memezila.com/Skipping-school-in-march-2019-vs-skipping-school-in-march-2020-meme-1253) 3. Class 2020 graduation via Sims (Personal account) 4. 8 AM online classes at home (Retrieved from https://memezila.com/8:00-am.-classes-at-university-vs-8:00-am-at-online-classes-meme-1003) 5. Online lecture be like (Retrieved from https://memezila.com/Online-lecture-be-like-meme-2063) 6. Usmeno odgvaranje online/Oral exam online (Personal account) 7. Late for my online lecture (Retrieved from https://hr-hr.facebook.com/studentski.hr/photos/pb.210627425725812.-2207520000..t2777923832329479/?type=3&theater) 8. During online classes, my professor and me (Retrieved from https://www.reddit.com/r/gmu/comments/fjwse3/during_online_class/) 9. Online class e-learning (Personal account) 10. Online class: I just can't (Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/StudentProblems/photos/a.319744201485653/3904117906381580/?type=3&thater)

Appendix 2. Continued
 Dodatak 2. Nastavak

GO AWAY	Staycation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What I want, what I can (Retrieved from https://perfectdaytoplay.com/travel-meme-covid/) 2. Just back from holiday in Italy (Retrieved from https://perfectdaytoplay.com/travel-meme-covid/) 3. How much is coronavirus costing the world tourism (Personal account) 4. It ain't much but it's an honest work (Retrieved from https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/but-its-honest-work) 5. When you still want to travel (Retrieved from https://perfectdaytoplay.com/travel-meme-covid/) 6. Travel influencer in the times of COVID (Retrieved from https://perfectdaytoplay.com/travel-meme-covid/) 7. Dogs can't get virus so they can travel (Retrieved from https://www.escape.com.au/news/the-funniest-travel-memes-to-brighten-life-in-lockdown/news-story/290b9debb11528c4b101e7be2913249c) 8. Me at 3AM figuring out where to travel (Personal account) 9. Feel cute, drop off tourists (Retrieved from https://www.victoriabuzz.com/2019/04/this-hilarious-new-meme-account-pokes-fun-at-tourists-in-victoria/) 10. This is your pilot speaking (Retrieved from https://gulfnnews.com/photos/lifestyle/memes-to-kick-up-happiness-cells-in-your-brain-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-1.1584433475074)
	Social distancing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sorry the Earth is closed today (Retrieved from https://imgflip.com/i/3sfw5b) 2. Please avoid mass gatherings (Retrieved from http://coronalol.com/meme/grocery-store-at-the-simpsons) 3. Social distancing 6ft under (Personal account) 4. The good thing about having a social life like mine (Retrieved from https://meme.xyz/meme/57180/the-good-thing-about-having-a-social-life-like-mine-is-that-you-dont-even-notice-that-you-are-in-quarantine.html) 5. They are never going back to school (Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php) 6. Relationships these days (Retrieved from https://twitter.com/9gag/status/1263379512500387840) 7. The elbow greeting (Personal account) 8. Social wearing (Personal account) 9. Kissing masks (Retrieved from https://medium.com) 10. Sitting together on a sofa (Retrieved from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu)
	Wearing masks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Only Masks Available On-Line (Retrieved from https://www.boredpanda.com/funny-coronavirus-masks-protection) 2. When My Daughter Has No Face Mask (Retrieved from https://www.boredpanda.com/funny-coronavirus-masks-protection)

Appendix 2. Continued

Dodatak 2. Nastavak

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. March into bank wearing mask (Retrieved from https://www.comedycard.co.uk/products/funny-lockdown-card-march-into-bank-wearing-mask)4. Improvise, Adapt And Overcome (Retrieved from https://www.boredpanda.com/funny-coronavirus-masks-protection)5. Corona Protection (Retrieved from https://www.boredpanda.com/funny-coronavirus-masks-protection)6. This Guy Didn't Have A Mask (Retrieved from https://www.boredpanda.com/funny-coronavirus-masks-protection)7. This man is a genius (Retrieved from https://thefunnybeaver.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/funny-face-mask-meme-invention.jpg)8. Facemasks that show you've got face (Retrieved from https://images.hive.blog/640x0/https://i.imgur.com/xRlzGK9.png)9. A plastic jug will do (Retrieved from https://images.hive.blog/640x0/https://i.imgur.com/TY3YQmH.png)10. Wu-hound wearing mask (Retrieved from https://thefunnybeaver.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/funny-face-mask-wuhound.jpg)
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„Svako zlo za neko dobro“: humor i persuazija u slikama s društvenih mreža tijekom *lockdowna*

Sunčana Tuksar

Danijel Labaš

SAŽETAK

Tijekom lockdowna uslijed pandemije bolesti COVID-19, putem društvenih mreža uvelike su se konzumirale slike (memovi, GIF-ovi, fotografije itd.). Svrha je istraživanja uspostaviti relevantan transmedijski komunikološki istraživački model kojim se pomoću slika kontekstualno dokumentira određeni period (ožujak – lipanj 2020.). Metoda je vizualna semiotička analiza, kojom se ispituju pouzdanosti kodiranja između slika. Korpus čini 300 vizualnih reprezentacija odabranih prema njihovim istaknutim sudionicima metaforički zastupljenima u odnosu na „stvarnost“. S jedne strane, semantičko-osjetilna veza između slike i promatrača retorički se implicira poslovicom „Svako zlo za neko dobro“. S druge strane, multimodalni alati uspostavljaju humorni persuazivni koncept koji oblikuje publiku. Istaknute domene „ostati doma“ i „izići“ upućuju na određene varijable, npr. obrazovanje ili turizam. Rezultati potvrđuju modalne prosudbe vezane uz konstrukt humora kao valjanog dokumenta pandemijske situacije. S obzirom na jedinstvena obilježja proizvedena u odnosu slika – poruka – primatelj, konsolidacija podataka predstavlja uporište za strategije i označitelje u funkciji a) predstavljanja i adaptiranja normi te b) postavljanja temelja za buduća istraživanja. Shodno tome, na Sveučilištu Jurja Dobrile u Puli provedena je anketa kojom se potvrđuju pozitivni stavovi studenata za korištenje slika u svrhu medijske edukacije. Strukturiranjem prethodnih spoznaja i novih rezultata, ovo istraživanje postaje modelom za daljnje narativne spoznaje. Jedan je primjer važno pitanje kako mediji utječu na oblikovanje stavova javnosti u vezi cijepjenja protiv koronavirusa.

Ključne riječi: transmedijske reprezentacije, multimodalnost, slike, društvene mreže, humor, persuazija, lockdown, medijska pismenost