

# DECODING SOCIO-COGNITIVE ELEMENTS IN INDONESIAN ONLINE NEWS: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** This study explores the representation of socio-cognitive components in Indonesian political multimodal news text using the framework of Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA). With the increasing prominence of multimedia in contemporary news production, understanding how socio-cognitive aspects are conveyed through multiple modes becomes essential. Drawing on SF-MDA, which combines systemic functional linguistics and multimodal analysis, the study examines how Indonesian political news texts incorporate social and cognitive elements to shape meaning and influence audience perceptions. This study was undertaken qualitatively involving three online news published by Indonesia's publishers as the data. The result reveals that the visual and verbal modes merged in the news tend to highlight the good image of the political figures. It means that the meanings of visual and verbal components of the news persuasively work together to create the good impressions among readers to the human actor in the news. As the implication, multimodal resources are strategically employed to shape public opinion and promote specific political ideologies. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the development of critical media literacy and foster a more nuanced understanding of the socio-political dynamics in contemporary Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Socio-Cognitive Components; Socio-Political Dynamics; Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA).*

## INTRODUCTION

Digital news has become a popular alternative for readers to stay updated with current events. The accessibility of digital news allows people to easily obtain information without requiring a significant amount of time (Tampubolon, 2022). In Indonesia, many readers choose digital news as a source of insight and perspectives on various phenomena or issues (Tampubolon, 2022). The availability of diverse news sources also enables readers to access balanced information from multiple perspectives. Additionally, the incorporation of multimodal texts, which combine texts and images, enhances readers' understanding as meaning can be conveyed through different modes (van Dijk, 2018).

However, the rapid pace of news production poses challenges for readers. Many readers struggle with determining which news to believe, which to ignore, and identifying misinformation (Schulz *et al.*, 2022). Studies have shown that images in digital news often fail to effectively convey the intended message (Scacco & Muddiman, 2020). News producers often prioritize eye-catching layouts and capturing readers' attention rather than focusing on the relevance, interaction, and meaningful contribution across modes in news content (Prasidya Hidayati, 2021).

In response to these challenges, Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse (SF-MDA) emphasizes the power of images in conveying

meaning, similar to the role of text (Lim, 2019). This aligns with the theory proposed by Kress and Leeuwen, highlighting that multimodal texts enhance readers' cognitive abilities and promote sensitivity and critical thinking in processing information (Kress & Leeuwen, 2021). The visual appeal of multimodal sources also contributes to activating and developing readers' prior knowledge, transforming it into valuable short-term memory information (O'Halloran *et al.*, 2021).

In summary, digital news offers accessibility and variety for readers, but challenges arise in terms of evaluating credibility and effectively conveying messages through images. SF-MDA and the understanding of multimodal texts provide valuable insights into the role of images and their impact on readers' cognitive processes and prior knowledge development.

In details, multimodal research using SF-MDA focuses on the integration of systemic functional and cognitive techniques to multimodal discourse analysis has been conducted (Liu, 2022). They notice that the SFL perspective is concerned with the relationship between the semantic and lexicogrammatical configurations of the text's verbal and nonverbal elements. It enables the analysis of structural elements of atypical nonverbal messages as well as spoken and written verbal texts, requiring the assistance of epistemological evidence from the realm of inquiry or cognitive aspects. Thus, SF-MDA is an alternative to see the process of sociocognition based on semantic, lexicogrammar, and epistemology aspects. Thus, this can be explored using the SF-MDA lens which emphasizes aspects of multimodal data through the experiential, interpersonal, and textual domains as in Kress & van Leeuwen's Theory (O' Halloran *et al.*, 2021). Below is the table of how image and text work together in shaping meanings.

Table 1. *Shaping meanings*

	Image	Text
Interpersonal	Orientation + Ambience	Interpersonl Semantics
Ideotional	Representation	Ideational Semantics
Textual	Presemtation	Textual Semantics

The table indicates that SF-MDA covers the semiotic resources coming from images and texts as the metafunction systems, system choices, and inter-semiotic relations in multimodal texts (Lim 2021a). This theory against the common claim

that images is decorative tools or elements which solely functions to attract or entertain readers/ audiences (Fajriah, Hamdani, *et al.* 2021).

The topic of meaning-making between images and texts have been discussed by scholars. Some of studies focused on the meaning relation among those modes in teaching and learning process (Lim, 2021; Lim, 2019; Yuliasri & Mulatsih, 2021), books (Unsworth *et al.*, 2020; Yanuar *et al.*, 2021), cartoons (Abdullah *et al.*, 2020), websites (Isti'anah, 2022). The taxonomy of image-text has also been discussed under a corpus study. Peculiarly, a more detailed study about this similar topic was conducted by Martinec & Salway's centering on how logic-semantics relations are defined in the scope of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The result of the study indicates that the notion of text-image relation could be employed to gesture-speech-relations. Another investigation of meanings among modes involving language, symbols, and images was in mathematical discourse (O' Halloran *et al.*, 2021), also in theme of film sector (Man & Li, 2022). More than that, the meaning interaction among images and texts also became the research interest among scholars (Khusna *et al.* 2022). The general evidence of the studies emphasizes that images role prominent in conveying meanings.

From the report of previous studies above, it is seen that the discussion of images is more on how images and texts interact to shape ideas or messages. It means that the inclusion of image-text analysis using SF-MDA theory to capture the sociocognitive elements in news is few to investigate. Hence, in filling the gap, this study is an endeavour to identify the components of sociocognitive in the multimodal news texts seeb from SF-MDA analysis.

**METHOD**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the socio-cognitive aspects of political news in digital media. To achieve this objective, a descriptive analytic design was employed. The descriptive analysis in multimodal research aims to understand the phenomenon experienced by research subjects (Figueira *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Halverson *et al.* (2015) assert that descriptive analysis is a suitable method for systematically characterizing the meaning of words, phrases, or sentences in a language, categorizing them according to specific patterns, and examining them.

For this study, the primary data consists of six digital newspapers selected based on their web

traffic statistics from Alexa, including *tribunnews.com*, *liputan6.com*, and *kompas.com*. The choice of these newspapers was determined by their popularity among the general audience, with *tribunnews.com* being the most accessed digital newspaper according to web traffic data. Three articles were sampled from a pool of 32 digital news readers who provided feedback on which articles they found most fascinating, interesting, or uninteresting.

In summary, this study utilizes a descriptive analytic design to analyze the socio-cognitive

aspects of political news in digital media. The data collected include articles from popular digital newspapers, and the analysis aims to uncover patterns and meanings within the selected articles.

The table 2 describes that the popular issues read by the readers involve the political issues of Russia with Ukraine, the presidential election in Indonesia, and the oil hoarding case in the North Sumatra. From the title of news, the relevant participant of each issue is apparently mentioned by the authors; *Putin, Giring, and Edy*.

Table 2. *Data sources*

No.	Newspaper	News title	Scope	Publication date	Category
1.	<i>detik.com</i>	<i>Rusia Dibanjiri Sanksi AS-Eropa, Putin Balik Melawan</i>	<i>Luar Negeri</i>	<i>24 Feb 2022 10:16 WIB</i>	<i>Paling menarik untuk dibaca</i>
2.	<i>detik.com</i>	<i>Mundur Pencapresan, Giring PSI Bakal 'Survei' 9 Nama Ini untuk 2024</i>	<i>Dalam Negeri</i>	<i>24 Feb 2022 10:12 WIB</i>	<i>Menarik untuk dibaca</i>
3.	<i>kompas.com</i>	<i>Klarifikasi Gubernur Edy dan Polda Sumut, Grup Salim Tak Timbun 1,1 Juta Minyak Goreng di Gudang Deli Serdang</i>	<i>Dalam Negeri</i>	<i>24/02/2022, 07:00 WIB</i>	<i>Tidak menarik</i>

The data were analyzed using Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) framework. This tool is utilized to identify the socio-cognitive structure consisting of social representations, attitudes, and ideologies of social actors, as well as the connection between discourse structures and societal structures, in the context of interpretation. Lined up with this respect, it is noted that the socio-cognitive level in the the text is attributed to the text by the author's mind rather than being 'in' the text (van Dijk, 2018) As a result, this approach focuses not only on mental models and knowledge, but also on discourse and social components that are described vocally and nonverbally.

To summarize, the data analysis of this present research lead to give a depiction of how images and texts contribute to developing meanings of the news.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part elaborates the data findings regarding the analysis of socio-cognitive components through representation, orientation and presentation.

### *Representation*

The focused components of representation analysis are the narrative representation seen from participants and gazing vector, the circumstances and the process types.

First, in the part of narrative representation, the human participant is mostly used in the frame. It is strongly displayed in the foreground of the image, with very crisp outlines, pointing out that the participants shown through the images is an important clue to identify. This evidence is consistent with the issues discussed in the news; that is about political issues, where the focus is on figures/people.



Figure 1. *The figure participant is in the frame #sample A#*

Seen from the route analysis, the gazing vector is obviously found in each image. It demonstrates that the actor's picture has a strong representational meaning. On the contrary, the representation is categorized low if images place human actors and other objects in the same portion in terms of frame, size, and lighting. Then, the facial expression also indicates the extent of political issues the actors are experiencing. Peculiarly, the line is noticeable due to the appearance of frown lines and facial lines.

As an example, two images below show the different level of problems faced by the human actors of the news.



Figure 1. *The facial line of the participants 1*



Figure 2: *The facial line of the participants 2*

From the figure above, it is seen that the descending facial line indicates that somebody has a big problem in political affairs. Put differently, compared to Giring and other political actors in the other news, Putin has the biggest political issue. The visual representation is also powered by the text analysis showing that mental processes are chosen to verbalize the images. Even, the use of gesture by putting the finger near to Putin's eye also highlights that he has a serious matter.



Figure 3. *Flag of Russia*



Figure 3: *The warehouse*

Then, Figure 3 expresses the circumstances which specify 1) the participant is positioned differently, one is at the middle position of image and the other is at the very front of the image, 2) the left image does not give any clue of emphasis; meanwhile, the participant (the right side) is made as a focus that is firm while other objects are made less focused, 3) the color of the participant (the Putin's picture) is made stronger with a desaturated color that tends to black and white with a background that tends to gray, and 4) the colors of the participants are made brighter and bolder (see also figure 3 on the right part). That is, the writers attempted to create setting aspects in order to enrich the story substance.

Below is the sample of the text to clarify the meanings of images.

As an example:

*Sederet negara memberikan sanksi ke Rusia di tengah memanasnya konflik dengan Ukraina”.*

# Some countries put sanctions to Rusia in the hot phase of War with Ukraine#

Another example:

*"Kami juga menyediakan sarana kepada rakyat untuk berpartisipasi melalui rembuk rakyat online."*

#We also provided the facility to the society to participate through 'online society discussion forum'##

The above-mentioned examples show that the author underlined the activity done by the participants during the political activities. Another sample also displays that the participant in the news is mostly categorized as the actor (doing something) such as: *Putin, Giring, Kami*). In details, the authors attempt to highpoint the efforts done by the participants in tackling the political issues; they are, Putin faces the world political issue regarding the Europe sanction to Rusia for the conflict with Ukraine; Giring gives his voice on the political election in Indonesia; and Edy talks about the issue of hoarding the cooking oil.

In addition, the second sample shows that direct quotation is used, aiming to convince the readers. It is also followed by the verbal process. As an instance; *Namun, belakangan, Edy mengklarifikasi pernyataannya* # *Nevertheless, Edy has already clarified his statement.* # The use of direct quotation and the verbal processes is found in the three news. It means that the media tries to directly connect and convey the voices of the important figures to the audiences. Put simply, there is an attempt to deliver the accuracy of information from the source of information.



From the evidence above, the cognitive component of the multimodal news exists through the use of narrative structure which is mostly represented by human participant in the images, supporting by negative eye-gaze and the existence of material, verbal and relational processes. In details, human participant as the focused figure visualized in the news is in line with the aim of the news; that is to persuade readers (Doerr, 2023) to consider the positive attitudes of the participants in the context of politics. O'Halloran (2008)'s study also confirms that the combination of image and text brings out the ideological interpretation.

Moreover, negative eye-gaze chosen by the news authors show that the readers are invited to observe what the news is talking about, meaning that the represented participant of the news is not directed to talk to the audiences. Meanwhile, the foremost choice of using material, verbal, and relational processes in the news is harmony to what news naturally aims, that is, to persuade readers to put an interest to the discussed topic packaged by the series of information. Furthermore, the visual-verbal analysis, the author accentuates that the participant is the human actor, the most activity-exchange used is material process and mental process, and the circumstance is on the political identity, country's label, and also the incident setting. Put differently, the majority of the articles focus on transmitting the physical activities carried out by political actors in relation to various political matters. The records were parallel to a previous study's result (Khusna *et al.* 2022) that for persuasion purpose, material process is very fundamental to show the activities.

From the discussion above, it is safe to say that the type of image and text relation in showing the cognitive portion through the representation is an un equal one; particularly texts subordinate the images (Fajriah *et al.*, 2021). This inference is due to the use of merely one image in every news analyzed in this study. Hence, the verbal texts have far more portion in presenting the information. This conclusion strengthened that images contribute to adding the cognition and engagement in the meaning transfer of a discourse (Clough & Duff, 2020).

#### *Orientation*

As has been discussed, the analysis of orientation part is actually aimed to analyze the socio-cognitive aspects involving the elements of eye gaze, distance, power, involvement and the others

for the visual clues and the mood structures for the verbal text.

First, the negative eye-gazes (as has been discussed at the point of representation) of the participant are more likely to be in an observing position with a conversational context that necessitates deliberate consideration, rather than as a party who invited to engage in discourse with the represented participant. In other words, the participants carry out the cognitive processes of looking for and remembering information or events. From all samples, there is no direct/positive gaze shown in the image, confirming that the participants in the text are not demanding the readers to do something but position the readers as the information giver.



Figure 3: *The Negative eye-contact (sample 3)*

Next, the aspect of affect is mostly in an uncertain situation. It does not particularly show the presence of pleased or sad reactions on the participants' faces when they notice something beyond the frame. Therefore, the detailed description of how the participants react to each political issue is highlighted by the verbal explanations (texts). In figure 3, the image is taken in a long shot mode, causing readers could not identify the emotion/ feelings among interactants. Meanwhile, in figure one, the participant wears the facial mask; hence, the expression/ affect is hard to analyze. Except, in figure 2, there is a strong viewing angle of Putin when he is staring at the outside of the frame. This might be taken as the positive aspect of perceiving something or thinking about the matter he is tackling.

Another category is involvement. The involvement of participants and readers is linked by visuals that appear to be exclusion. This is visible in the feature of eye contact, which is not always in the same center as the reader. In other words, the reader is not a part of the problem that the participant is seeing or thinking about. It is strengthened by the gaze appearing in the visuals where the readers are merely placed as the observers.

In addition, the category of social distance between participants and the readers is intimate, meaning that readers and the participants of the text have the close relation. This conclusion is seen from the frame which slices the upper section of the participant's body, moving from the chest to the top. In terms of power, the relationship between participants and readers is equal or equally powerful. Of course, the goal is to reduce the power disparity between depicted participants and readers such that the ideas transmitted are acceptable.

Moving to the verbal aspect, the declarative form is the most common usage of the mood structure, as demonstrated by the emergence of the subject and finite in each sentence at the same time.

For examples:

*Uni Eropa misalnya mendapat 40 % pasokan gas alamnya dari Rusia dan Inggris*

# European Union got 40 % gas supply from Rusia and England#

*Namun selain nama Jokowi, dia menyebut ada 9 nama lainnya yang menurut rakyat paling tepat untuk pimpin Indonesia.#*

A part from Jokowi, he mentioned other nine names who are claimed eligible to be the president in Indonesia#

Referring to the sample above, 97% declarative sentences indicate that the majority of political news texts use statement to give an informative element in delivering information.

Specifically, the subject placement that is frequently employed is the noun phrase in the form of a proper name. This format is used to include political leaders who are seen to be particularly essential in communicating news. In relation to the nonverbal findings, the usage of subjects such as Governor Edy, Putin, and Giring demonstrates a resemblance in social meaning, including power, between the participant subject and the reader. There is no use of diction that prioritizes the participant topics, such as 'Mr. Governor Edy' or 'Mr. Putin' in the news text. Furthermore, the lack of pronouns like 'he' reinforces the sense of equality between the subject participant and the reader. This is added to the aspect of closeness between the participant subject and the reader who mentions the name of the participant subject directly.

To infer, seen from orientation, the role of images and the verbal texts is supporting one to another (Zheng *et al.*, 2021) in emphasizing that the participants of the texts are quite familiar with the audiences. The data are reflected from the

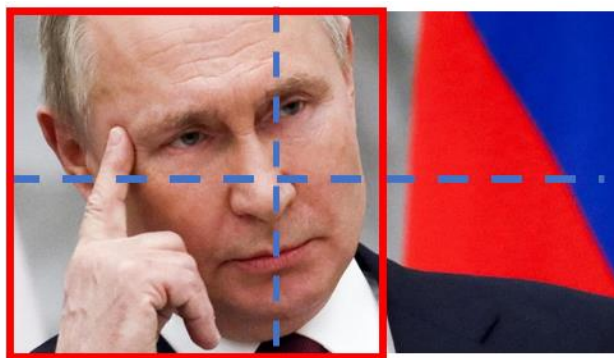
choice to treat readers as those who have the equal position with the participants. The dominant statements used also reflects that this news is aimed to deliver information and locate the audiences as the information giver, confirmed by the eye-gaze which is categorized as the negative one; Therefore, the relation of image and text in this topic is synonymy (Fajriah, Hamied, and Gunawan, 2021; Zheng *et al.*, 2021). The data also are hand in hand with the notion that messages will be more easily accepted if the relation between the information giver and the receivers is not far.

As response to the findings above, in the interpersonal landscape, the author attempts to make close relation between the represented participants and the audiences in both visual and verbal modes. It confirms the aim of that news; that is to persuade readers to have the same perspective with the idea in that news (Danielson & Hedling, 2022). The use of declarative mood shown by the arrangement of Subject - Finite also signifies that conveying the information by combining the visual and verbal texts is also hand in hand that in socio-cognitive eye, news is functioned to deliver information as packaged by the declarative mood (Nasriati *et al.*, 2019). This analysis is used to see the power relation among participants (Green & Johns, 2019). This notion is seen from the visual and verbal analysis on the aspect of orientation by placing the political participants in the news as the figures who are familiar with the audiences. More than that, framing the human-actor with the relevant label (such as the color of party and flags) is that articulating the power could be displayed by putting the symbols or ornaments either in foregrounded or backgrounded mode (Danielson & Hedling, 2022). This study also confirms Kabingting's study (2020) signing that interpersonal analysis (realized in Orientation) role very prominent in conveying the subjectivity of the ideas in news genre.

#### *Presentation*

This fragment expounds the stage of presentation covering the visual aspects (saliency, information values, and framing) and the text analysis.

Seen from the Saliency, the sort of participants in the focused news are human. They are mostly as the political figure; such as, Putin (the President of Russia, Giring as the political figure in one of Indonesia's Party).



Presentation	
Salience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharpness of focus</li> <li>• Foreground/background</li> <li>• Human Participant</li> </ul>
Information value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given/new</li> <li>• Ideal/real</li> </ul>
Framing	Weaker framing (participant)

Figure 4. *The analysis of presentation*

The above-shown image points out that the participant is a controversial political figure in this globe. He is not only positioned as the foreground but also emphasized as the focus point by getting the clearest lighting and completed by the formal wear. In the information value, the participant is placed in Left-Right position (see also figure 1) and also Ideal Real showing that this figure has a big power as the decision maker towards the discussed issue in his country (shown by the existence of Russia's flag). This conclusion is also supported by the framing which balance the position of the political figure with the flag. Not only that, the flag is also placed on the Putin's back showing that the individual participant is the person in charge in making any decision. In harmony with this finding, another news also acmes the usage of white and red color on the participant to show the identity of the party; that is, Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (see figure 1). Different from these two images, the topic talking about the hoarding issue of cooking oil is not supported by any clear attributes which could sound the voices of the target participants, *Edy and Kapolda Sumatera Utara*.

In the verbal aspect, the analysis focuses on theme and thematic progression. In three news, most of theme type is topical and textual. Unmarked topical theme is evidenced by the use of nominal common noun such as Giring, Kami, DPP, PSI, and Rakyat. The examples of textual theme are conjunctions such as *Namun, Meski Begitu, Lebih Lanjut*.

*Namun selain nama Jokowi, dia menyebut ada 9 nama lainnya yang menurut rakyat paling tepat untuk pimpin Indonesia. (Sample 2)*

#Apart from Jokowi's name, he said there were 9 other names that the people thought were the most appropriate to lead Indonesia.#

*Meski begitu sepertinya Rusia tidak akan terpengaruh dengan adanya sanksi tersebut (Sample 3)*

#Even so, it seems that Russia will not be affected by these sanctions#

In the category of thematic progression, the most pattern used in these samples is zigzag. This pattern is indicated by the use of object in the first clause is placed to be the subject in the second one.

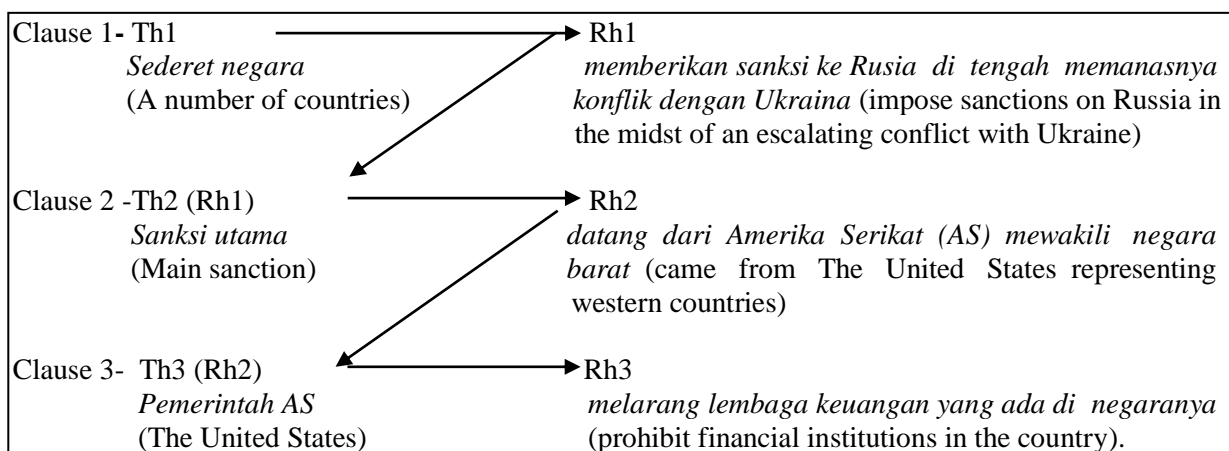


Figure 5. *Thematic progression analysis: Zigzag pattern sample (text 1)*

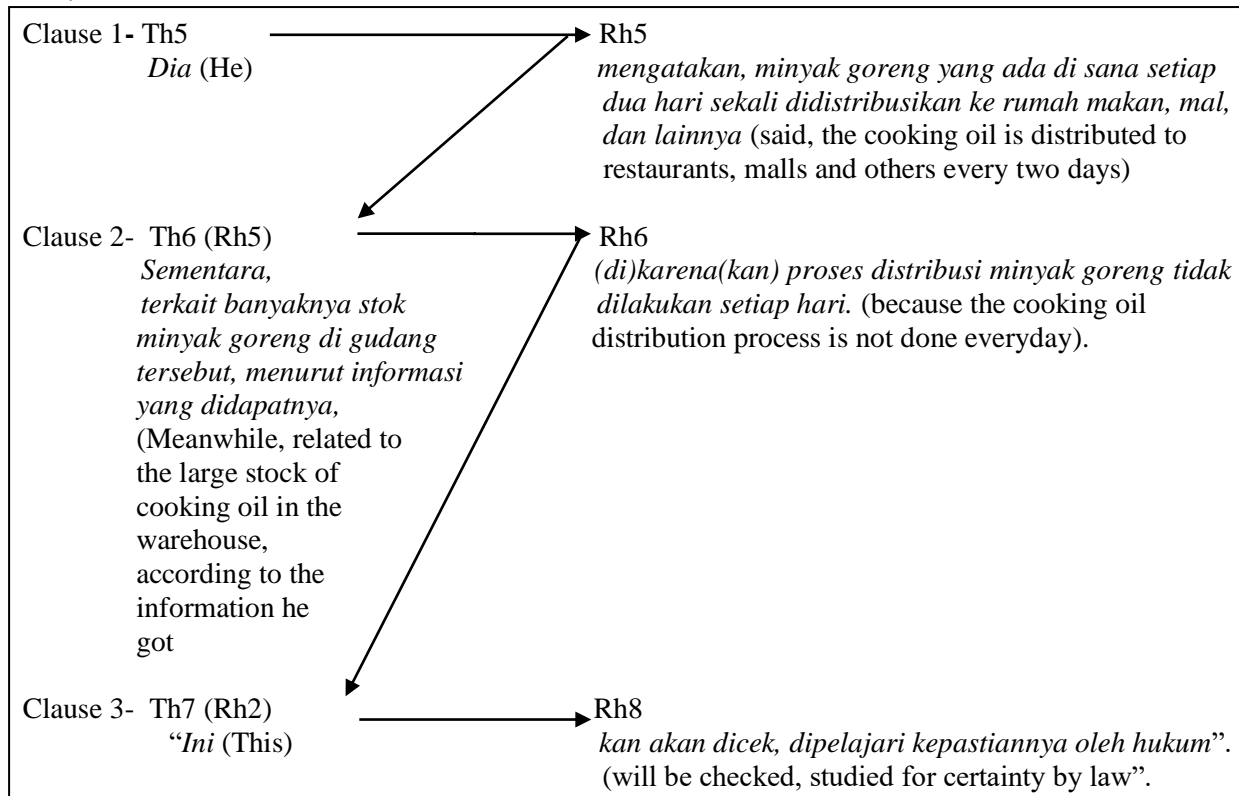


Figure 6. *Thematic progression analysis: Zigzag pattern sample (text 3)*

In addition, reiteration is also used in the subject in the preceding clause in the second discourse. This shape is shown by repeating the clause.

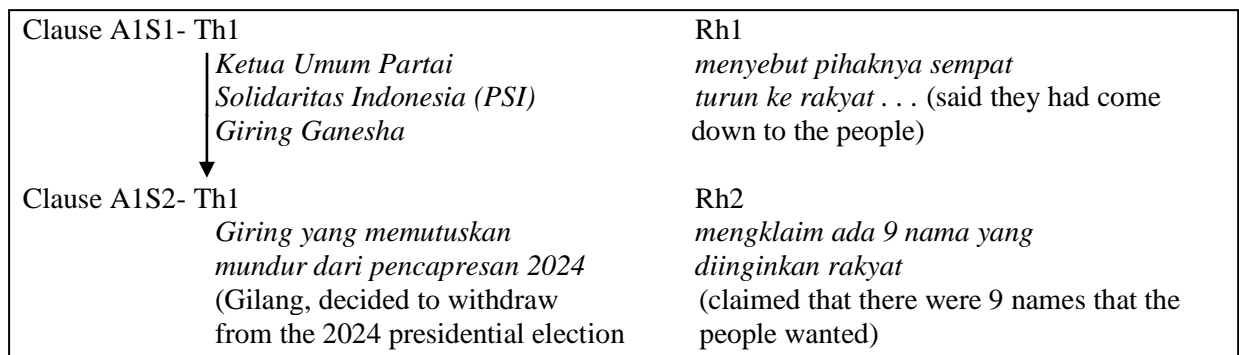


Figure 7. *Thematic progression analysis: Reiteration pattern sample (text 2)*

This sample illustrates that the author emphasizes the main participant in the news (Putin, Giring, Gubernur Edy). It means that the focus point of the story is the political figure and also parallel to the representation and orientation analysis result that the major discussion of the news are the human figures not the activities, conflicts, or phenomenon.

As the inference, the blend of visual and verbal elements in the presentation aspect demonstrates that the key point of the news is not the event/ activities or the tragedy, yet the political figures. This evidence is shown by the presence of human participant in the image, supporting by the theme used is mostly in the form of human, strengthened

by the thematic pattern which addresses to the political figure (Giring, Putin, or a like). Simply put, though the issues in the news are about the incidents or ‘what happens around’ yet the key point which is displayed in the news delivery is about the related participants/ figures. This result is in line with the root of textual metafunction that What is placed as the theme, usually in the form of Subject is the important element to discuss (Himphinit & Astia, 2023). The result of this focus analysis also extends the study conducted by (Degaf, Wijana, and Poedjosoedarmo 2019) who merely scrutinize the textual analysis seen from the verbal/ text analysis.



All in all, the inference is that though the verbal texts dominate the meanings of images in all analyzed news, the authors have an endeavor to visualize the position of the participants in the topic issues through the representation, orientation and presentation. Another conclusion is that images and texts have the same purpose; that is, to highlight the participants of the texts as the ideal political figures who need to be taken into consideration by the readers. The outcome of this analysis also confirms that the suitable pattern of images and the verbal text encourages the readability and the accuracy of the information delivery to the audiences (Lim 2021a). Last, the concept of multimodality is confirmed that any modes including verbal and non-verbal forms are potential to create meanings (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006; Lim 2019). Emphasizing that sticking on *mono-mode* in interpreting messages is not effective since a lot of readers now are digital natives who need to be equipped with the visual literacy (Matusiak *et al.* 2019). Unless, readers will have lost capacity in grasping messages and have no any filter in accepting the information.

## CONCLUSION

As the socio-cognitive features through SF-MDA has been analysed, the news published in Indonesia Online newspapers shown the positive perspective on the focused political figures. It is evidenced from the use of human participant in the images, as drawn to attention by the foregrounded mode and the contribution of some attributes/ symbols supporting the good image of the participants. Moreover, the positive image as promoted in the visual modes is also reinforced by the verbal modes. It is grasped from the activity mood structure, activity exchange as well as theme type and patterns, claiming that the human actors in the news have the positively significant role in overwhelming the political concerns. Put differently, In spite of small portion of images as the meaning sources in the news analysed in this study, there is a synergic relation between visual and verbal modes in transmitting the socio-cognitive features of the news' messages in order to persuade audiences/ readers to take the political figures into account regarding the controversially political topics discussed around.

As the implication of this present study, readers are expected to have sufficient knowledge and interpretation in paying attention on the image-text relation in the news reading. In details,

the display of image structures involving the eye-gaze, attributes, position, shot, and frame are the points to be learnt as the source of meanings, not as the ornaments.

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