

Between Marvel’s Cinematic Universe and Instagram Narratives: Multimodal Argumentation in Arab Netizens’ Perlocutionary Acts Towards *Captain America 4*

Inas Hussein Hassan¹ & Sarah ElMansy

*College of Language and Communication (CLC), Alexandria
Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Egypt*

Abstract: During the past two decades, the main focus in the fast-growing field of multimodality has been the inter-semiotic relationships between different modes. However, due attention has recently been paid to one element which is lacking in multimodal texts: the argumentative element. This is referred to in the literature as multimodal argumentation in the belief that an argument is neither verbal nor visual and, in analyzing argumentative discourse, attention is to be paid to both verbal and visual modes with no need for a priori division. This research attempts to provide further study in this direction, thus adding to the current interest in giving a new perspective to the analysis of argumentative discourse. This research aims to explore how Instagram posts, viewed as representing perlocutionary acts, operate as instances of multimodal argumentation. The study is structured within the Contemporary Theoretical Framework of the Speech Act theory (Harris et al., 2018) and Multimodal Argumentation (Tseronis, 2018, 2020). Data for the study are images from *The Incredible Hulk* Comic Book (1980) and Instagram spoof posts (photos and captions) by Arab Netizens on 11th to 13th November (2022) towards the first trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order* (2024), which were in response to Marvel Studios’ announcement in September 2022. A descriptive qualitative approach has been adopted as it describes a particular perspective qualitatively. Findings have revealed that spoof Instagram posts operating as a perlocutionary act are potential instances of multimodal argumentation. The research might add to the domain of speech acts and the literature on multimodal argumentation.

Keywords: *Captain America 4: New World Order*, Instagram posts, multimodal argumentation, Speech Act theory.

Instagram Narratives as Perlocutionary Force

Social media platforms, especially Instagram, have been a vital source for assimilating people from a diverse range of cultures and geographies into a mono-unifying space. Human communication has always depended on storytelling. Moreover, it has long been suggested that people cast their own identity in different forms of narrative. These narrative forms can be

¹ Corresponding Author: An Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and currently Vice Dean for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, College of Language and Communication (CLC) - Alexandria, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Egypt. E-Mail: inas.hussein@aast.edu

conveyed through conversations, paintings, books, movies or comic books. Comic books are usually used as original works in the filmmaking industry to provide the worldview and background settings of the whole story to construct the world. All media on Instagram have storylines or storylines with a certain advantage that brings in academic engagement. This development of Instagram culture can be viewed in tandem with the transformation of the global culture – Instagram narratives have evolved to engage in critical debates with observable issues and recurrent themes in modern society.

Thanks to digital effects and high-resolution graphics - as they have become mainstream-, the film world and the social media world have become remarkably similar as they are reusing the digital resources of the film world. Under the trend of adaptation between graphic novels and films, they have become two engines worthy of recognition in the transmedia storytelling convergence trend of the entertainment industry. As is known to all, the first trailer of *Captain America 4: New World Order* movie, which premiered on September 13, 2022, has received exceptional criticism from Arab netizens on Instagram. A significant number of spoof posts have been published and recycled virally on the Instagram platform.

Online spoofing is a kind of parody which is usually associated with advertisements on social platforms. Generally, it aims at discouraging consumers from using or buying certain products. It is a piece of creative art which mimics the original work so the public can easily recognize it. One of the key features of spoof posts on social platforms is ridiculing the original work to convince the audience to denounce it by shocking or triggering a reaction from them. It is worth noting that spoofs may borrow copyrighted material without any permission or authorization. Most importantly, spoof advertisements - also known as subvertisements - appear almost identical to their originals; however, some aspects of the message such as visuals or captions are added to create an ascertain twist to create a subversive effect (Muralidharan, 2016). In other words, spoofing can be viewed as a perlocutionary force towards the original mimicked work.

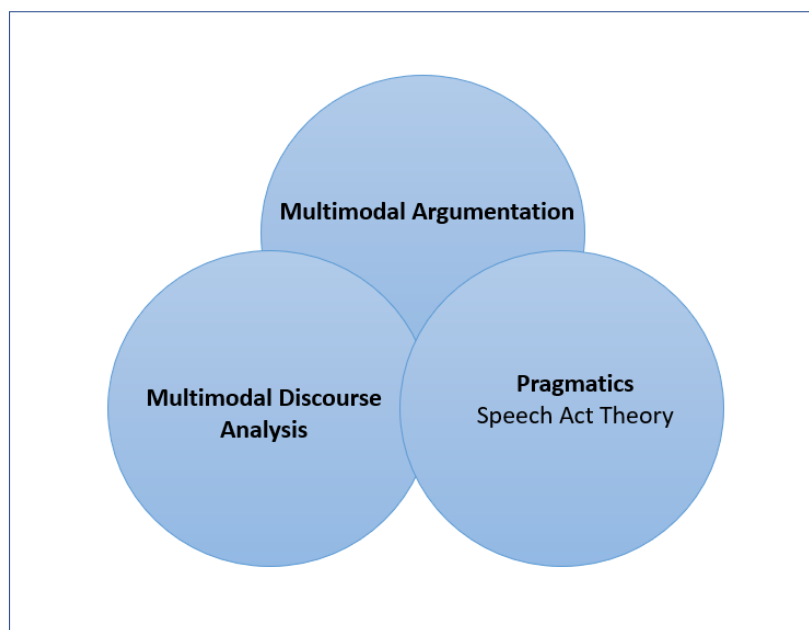
The literature review has yielded several studies on analyzing speech acts on social media platforms. Arielli (2018) conducted a study on how different speech acts can be performed on social media; e.g., status updates could be assertive, a “like” is an expressive speech act, and a friendship request is a directive speech act. The study focused on how sharing or “retweeting” lacks a fixed illocutive status. The study described some dominant interpretations of the act of sharing. Moreover, the study showed a specific illocutive structure of the act of sharing, which not only consists of asserting the “share worthiness” or the relevance of content but is primarily comparable to an “attention-orienting” directive. Pebrianto, et al. (2018) aimed to identify the types of speech acts used in Instagram comments by netizens on a photo published by Ellen DeGeneres, one of the most famous American lesbian artists and comedians. The study further aimed to give reasons for using particular types of speech acts. J.L. Austin’s theory on speech acts was used as the framework of the study. Comments were collected and analyzed by the researchers. The findings have shown that the most common types of speech acts were representative and directive. These were particularly used since the netizens wanted to state their points of view and express their feelings towards the character in question. Tseronis and Forceville (2017a) discussed argumentation in subvertisements. The authors maintained that there is a vivid exploitation of the verbal and visual features, or the visual features solely, in the genre of subvertisements. Moreover, they argued that this exploitation could be viewed as an act of opposing or ‘rebutting’, and they explored these circumstances in their paper. They assured that to study some images created by the anti-consumerist organization Adbusters, the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of communication should be considered while paying close attention to the interaction of semiotic modes. The study revealed that there are four potential ways that image-text relationships or just the visuals themselves can

suggest a discrepancy between the message of the original advertisement and the message of its subvertisement, causing the latter to serve as an objection or refutation of the assertion made by the original message.

Reaching this point, this present research adopts the Speech Act theory as an integrated conversation. It analyses the perlocutionary acts of Arab Instagram netizens' spoof posts towards Marvel's *Captain America 4: New World Order* Trailer. More importantly, the study synthesizes speech acts and multimodal discourse analysis with multimodal argumentation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Interdisciplinary Frameworks for Analyzing Instagram Spoof Posts



Note. The figure shows the integration of the meaning-making system (multimodal discourse analysis) and pragmatics (particularly speech acts) in decoding multimodal argumentative messages.

Motivated by this trend and the need to address the gap in studies on speech acts on Instagram, the researchers attempted to examine Instagram spoofed posts about Marvel's announcement during a panel at Disney's D23 Expo. The announcement stated that an Israeli actress will play the comic book character Sabra in the upcoming *Captain America 4: New World Order* (2024) movie. Thus, the study analyzed the perlocutionary acts used by Arab netizens' reactions. These posts were direct reactions (effects) posted in response to Marvel's announcement. Thus, the significance of this study lies in exploring how far the multimodal posts used by Arab netizens are viewed as perlocutionary acts and how far these posts are regarded as a social communicative activity, in which more than one mode (visual and written language) play a role in showing a standpoint that has been put opposed to Marvel's announcement.

The array of possibilities that the multimodal medium of speech acts can provide remains relatively unexplored. This paper seeks to delve deeper into the multimodal argumentation in Instagram spoof posts, especially located in a virtual space, that has been largely excluded from the corpus of research of pragmatics literature.

Aim of the Study

Instagram is a well-known social networking site with active users daily worldwide. This social mobile application is primarily used to share photos, live videos, and reels and apply digital filters through the development of virtual networks and communities. One of the virtues of Instagram is providing its users with quick electronic communication of any content. Nowadays Instagram provides many different types of content including reels- short videos, live videos, single photo posts, stories, and guides. Instagram netizens engage by sharing multimodal posts uploaded as photos on critical social issues. Some of them are photos, videos, and posters as a means of expression towards the trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order* in September 2022. In this article, the researchers argue that Instagram posts represent a specific category of visual phenomena and propose that the characteristics and ways in which these posts communicate can be understood by applying the concepts of multimodal argumentation and Speech Act theory. The research targeted the analysis of Instagram posts by Arab Netizens on the first trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order* (2024). The study purports to answer these questions:

1. How do Instagram posts operate as instances of multimodal arguments?
2. What is the perlocutionary force that results from the Instagram spoof posts by Arab Netizens towards the first trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order* (2024)?

The theoretical framework of the research has dwelled upon two perspectives: the Contemporary Theoretical Framework of the Speech Act theory (Harris et al., 2018) and Multimodal Argumentation (Tseronis, 2018, 2020). The researchers consider this study a novel attempt to explore how Instagram posts can function as instances of multimodal arguments via analyzing the inherent verbal and visual components of Instagram posts and how these can be figured out as perlocutionary speech acts both verbally and non-verbally.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The relationship between speech acts and genre in relation to multimodality is well-established. Generally, genre is usually used to describe multimodal phenomena and their features. For instance, according to Tan (2010), genre is used to describe a wide variety of multimodal occurrences, from certain page kinds within an artifact—such as a magazine cover—to specific types of digital media such as websites. Intriguingly, Kress and van Leeuwen (2010) differentiated between the “how” versus the “what” of multimodal communication. The main aim of the social semiotic theory is “sign-making rather than sign use” (Kress, 2010, p. 54). As a result, social semiotics accounts for the “available choices of signs” in order to comprehend how people utilize them within a given social context to convey ideas and attitudes (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Furthermore, Kress and van Leeuwen (2010) drew a key point of Speech Act theory, which is both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, and applied it to advertisements. Moreover, Leeuwen maintained that an advertisement might aim to persuade consumers to buy the product (illocutionary act), and if the consumer is convinced by the advertisement and buys the product, this is the effect of the perlocutionary act. Taking this as a departure point, the study analyses the spoof multimodal posts of Arab netizens on Instagram (perlocutionary acts) towards the first trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order* (2024).

Advances in visual communication have been marked by diverse philosophical traditions and methodological approaches. One of the advances that have long been under-explored, however recently researched, is that the Speech Acts theories can be extended to identify the communicative meaning inherent in pictures and other visual phenomena such as paintings, drawings, etc. (Batori, 2014). Though it has been observed by several scholars that non-verbal speech act markers can be employed in certain ways so that they would accomplish the speech acts themselves, this area of visual/ multimodal pragmatics is still in its infancy (Abdel-Raheem, 2023). The Speech Act theory can be applied to both still and moving images. In accordance with the tenets of this theory, it can be claimed that visual phenomena function as locutionary acts and thus have illocutionary force depending on the context, and these, in turn, would result in perlocutionary acts (Batori, 2014).

Speech Acts: Contemporary Theoretical Framework

Speech acts are actions performed via utterances where the speaker expects that his communicative intention will be recognized by the addressee (Yule, 2000). In *Speech Acts: The Contemporary Theoretical Landscape*, Harris et al. (2018) clustered Speech Act theories into five families, explained the context and conversational score, and illustrated how speech act theory can be viewed as “integrated conversation.”

The Five Families of Speech Acts

The central tenet of the Speech Act theory, which has become essential in philosophy and social and cognitive sciences due to the significant role that speech plays in communication, is that language functions as a medium for various actions. Austin (1962, 1970) traditionally categorized speech acts into three basic types: *locutionary* speech acts, defined as mere utterances of meaningful expressions, *illocutionary* acts, which are singled out for theoretical attention and uncontroversially include cases such as promising, asserting, questioning, pronouncing marriage, etc., and *perlocutionary* acts distinguished as acts producing certain effects that result from *illocutionary* acts. However, the central issue that has continually arisen is: What makes an utterance constitute an illocutionary act of a certain kind? Therefore, in an attempt to answer this complex question and within the contemporary theoretical framework of the Speech Act theory, Harris et al. (2018) proposed that Speech Act theories can be clustered into five families distinguished from each other based on the ingredients of the *illocutionary* act. These are convention, intention, expression, function, and norm. In relation to this classification, the authors have posed several questions: Are speech acts determined by convention or intention? Alternatively, should we consider speech acts in terms of the psychological states they convey, the outcomes they are likely to generate, or the norms that govern them?

Conventionalism and Intentionalism are two classical speech-act theories. The central claim of Conventionalism, which was originated by Austin, is that an illocutionary act is a “conventional procedure” that is performed in accordance with “felicity conditions” and the violation of some of these conditions would subsequently result in an infelicitous act. Though conventionalism accounts for institutionalized and ritualized acts, it does not account for illocutionary acts such as asserting, making requests, or asking questions, which are part of our basic communicative repertoire. This led some conventionalists to base the performance of communicative illocutionary acts on linguistic rather than social conventions. Intentionalism is the other conventional speech act theory developed by Paul Grice in parallel to Austin’s work. Its central claim is that producing a communicative illocutionary act involves producing an utterance with some sort of intention, often

referred to as “communicative intention” or “meaning intention.” According to this view, three success conditions for speech acts can be identified: *performing* an illocutionary act successfully means producing an utterance with some communicative intention with nothing required by the addressee, *communicating* an illocutionary act successfully means that the addressee would recognize the kind of response intended by the addresser and *producing* such response is successful production of a perlocutionary act. Thus, intentionalists argue that cultural or institutional background is unnecessary for performing communicative illocutionary acts.

An alternative to Intentionalism is the cluster of views referred to as Functionalism. Both view a speech act in terms of the effect it produces. One theorist belonging to this family is Millikan (1998), who argues that it is the purpose that defines a speech act, and this purpose derives either from the intention or the convention, that is, function, behind it. Thus, many theorists have attempted to integrate both intentionalist and functionalist models of communication, with the former accounting for simple acts of communication and the latter for more complex, cognitively demanding acts of communication. In the contemporary theoretical framework of speech acts, an alternative to Intentionalism is a set of perspectives known as Expressionism. Such theories are based on the premise that speech acts are a matter of expressing the speaker’s mental state. While intentionalists categorize speech acts in terms of the responses that they *produce* in addressees, speech acts are categorized by expressionists in terms of the speakers’ different states of mind.

A final group of theories holds that all speech acts are *normative* phenomena. The act of assertion is considered normative since at least what makes it an act of asserting is the fact that the act is ruled by a specific epistemic norm.

Discourse Context and Conversational Score

Harris et al. (2018) have asserted that recent work on speech acts is based on the idea that “conversations are organized around contexts” (p. 16). Following Lewis (1979), it has been common to discuss the context in terms of the metaphor of “conversational score:” plays in a baseball game function to change the score; similarly, speech acts - representing moves in a language game - function to change the state of the context. They maintain that context and conversational scores are interpreted differently to be compatible with theories of the five families they referred to in their seminal work on speech acts. They refer to Stalnaker (1978) who views the context of a conversation as the shared propositional attitudes of its participants and, accordingly, performing a speech act is doing something with the intention of changing such shared attitudes. Following Stalnaker, the authors maintain that Roberts (2017) articulated a detailed theory that accounts for assertions, questions, and directives: assertions aim at adding their content to the common ground, while questions and directives aim to alter other components of the context, each reflecting the participants’ publicly shared goal. For a functionalist, what makes a speech act is that utterances functionally change the context in a particular way. Such influential views presuppose psychologism about context: context is grounded in the mental lives of the participants in a conversation.

Speech Act Theory as an Integrated Conversation

Speech-act theory has frequently developed as a series of distinct conversations, with one focusing on fundamental questions about the nature of communication and illocutionary force, another on scientific and empirical concerns with the semantics of non-declarative clauses, and a third on social, moral, and political concerns with speech that is normatively significant or

problematic. It is thought that for any of these dialogues to be successful, they must each be taken to be strands of a larger conversation about the nature and functions of speech actions. The applied speech-act theory is deprived of fresh resources and data points if it is not based on recent technical, empirical, and foundational advancements. Work on the semantics of non-declaratives that float without both theoretical support and real-world applications runs the risk of being shallow.

Multimodal Argumentation

In providing an overview of Multimodal Communication as part of the basics of Pragmatics, Clark (2022) argued that the notion of Multimodality refers to “the idea that we can communicate in more than one mode” (p. 155). In a social semiotic approach rooted in Halliday’s functional approach to language, forms and functions are inseparable. Clark (2022) maintained that work on Multimodality basically aims to create an “integrated account” considering how different modes and semiotic resources interact in communicative acts, thus moving away from approaches that focus only on linguistic communication. This aligns with recent trends in Pragmatics where theorists take account of all aspects involved in producing and responding to communicative acts. In order to explain a particular communicative act, we need to consider how verbal and non-verbal forms interact, thus leading to some potential interpretations.

According to Tseronis (2015), multimodal texts have been researched extensively in discourse analysis during the last two decades. The fast-growing field of multimodality has focused on the meaning-making potential of non-verbal modes (Bateman, 2014; Jewitt, 2014; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Despite the variety in the theoretical and practical approaches of the scholars working on multimodal analysis of texts, Tseronis (2015) maintained there is some agreement about several issues: language is not the sole semiotic mode for meaning-making; different modes combine differently depending on the communicative activity and the social and historical context; meaning is analyzed in relation to three aspects: what it represents; how it positions the reader/viewer, and how it contributes to the organization of the text as a whole. Tseronis (2015) further argued that in analyzing multimodal texts, the focus has been on modes’ denotational and connotational meanings and the inter-semiotic relationships between them. However, there is one element which is lacking: the argumentative element. This is referred to as “multimodal argumentation” in the belief that an argument is neither verbal nor visual and, in analyzing argumentative discourse, attention is to be paid to both the verbal and visual modes with no need for a priori division.

Similarly, Tseronis and Forceville (2017b) maintained that filmmakers skillfully utilize image, sound, montage and editing strategies to present an argument. The scholars concentrated on those situations when different semiotic modes interact and whose meaning can be explained in terms of ‘antithesis’. They defined antithesis as a conceptual figure displaying a stark contrast between two things or concepts that can be communicated either monomodally or multimodally.

Tseronis (2018) argued that many of the theoretical studies on argumentation developed so far marginalized the role other modes of communication, other than the verbal mode, play in the production and interpretation of an argument, which led to the dichotomy between the verbal and the non-verbal mode with the former being considered an explicit or rational form of communication versus the latter regarded as an implicit, irrational or affective one. Accordingly, due to these shortcomings, Tseronis (2018) has proposed a new perspective on argumentative discourse analysis. In his view, we cannot consider an argument as a purely verbal phenomenon nor should a visual argument be merely juxtaposed to the verbal; instead, attention should be given to both the verbal and the visual mode with no a priori division between the two modes. He

acknowledged the difficulty of conceiving an argument as having more than the syntax, semantics or pragmatics of verbal utterances due to the plethora of approaches that have been developed by argumentation theorists for the analysis of arguments.

Tseronis (2018) acknowledged that the visual turn by argumentation scholars during the past twenty years had been motivated by the role of images and other semiotic modes in constructing arguments. Tseronis (2018) defined multimodal argumentation as a “communicative activity” in which “more than one mode other than the verbal (be it spoken or written) plays a role in the procedure of testing the acceptability of a standpoint” (p. 823). He maintained that in multimodal discourses, the semiotic modes employed to convince an audience include written language, spoken language, static images, moving images, music, non-verbal sound, gestures, gaze, and posture. Tseronis (2018) highlighted the inherent multimodality of communicative practices; hence, the great value of the research conducted in multimodal discourse analysis in terms of the affordances of the different modes and the ways these interact to produce meaning to the field of argumentation. In accordance with the multimodal nature of communication, argumentation theorists need to pay attention not only to the form and content of each of the modes and the ways these combine, but they also need to pay attention to the context in its three layers: argumentative situation, genre, and audience.

Tseronis (2020) further developed multimodal argumentation research by incorporating the concept of an “argumentation scheme.” Argumentation schemes can broadly be defined as “forms of argument (structures of inference) that represent structures of common types of arguments” (p. 580), which can be used in everyday discourse and in different contexts like the scientific or legal ones. Though there are a variety of typologies of argumentation schemes in the literature in terms of types and sub-types, the author maintained that they are useful tools for both analyzing and evaluating multimodal arguments. An argumentation scheme can provide the analyst with a tool for locating key elements in the discourse under study and a checklist of critical questions for evaluating an argument.

Data, Discourse Context and Theoretical Framework

The data for the research have been derived from *The Incredible Hulk* comic book as a multimodal text, while the six spoof posts selected for analysis in the current study are considered, in light of the aforementioned in the preceding section, perlocutionary multimodal argumentative texts. A multimodal text is defined as a semiotic association formed with the combination of any sign system (pictures, images, or music) and the sign system of the language (written, oral, or printed). Since a multimodal text is a consequence of the process of the combination of different semiotic systems in a complex way, an eclectic approach has been adopted to decode the complexity of the selected data. This section starts with data selection and discourse context and then is followed by the adopted framework of the study.

Data Selection

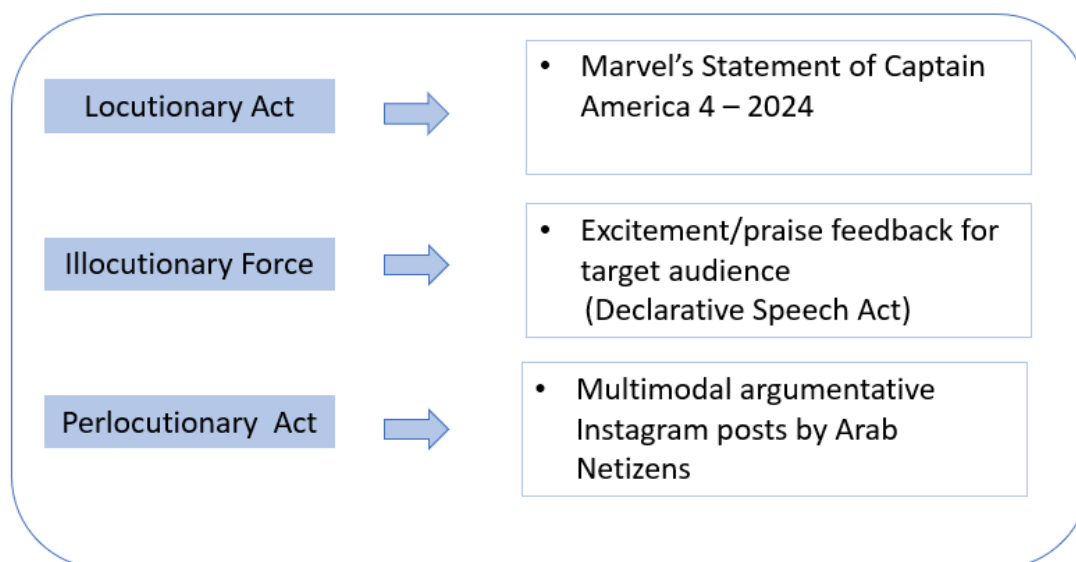
The data used in this research are of total nine images: three images have been taken from *The Incredible Hulk* Comic Book #250; two images (announcement of the trailer on Twitter); and six spoof posts on Instagram (See Appendix A). The images taken from the comic book that was published by Marvel Comic Group in 1980 have been selected because they have been recycled and recontextualized by some Arab netizens to express their disapproval upon Disney and Marvel Studios’ announcement at the D23 Expo that the Israeli celebrity Emmy nominee Shira Haas is

joining the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) as the superhero Sabra in the upcoming fourth *Captain America: New World Order* movie, officially titled *Captain America: New World Order*. It is worth mentioning that multimodal argumentation in the selected spoof posts can be easily inferred and identified, following Godden and Walton (2007), by comparing the argument schemes/standpoint in their original messages.

In addition, six spoof posts have been selected from Instagram as data for this study. These spoof posts are regarded as perlocutionary acts to the trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order*. Putting this into context, *The Incredible Hulk* Comic Book and the anti-marvel Instagram spoof posts in response to Marvel’s official trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order* constitute an integrated conversation; i.e., the selected spoof posts are considered perlocutionary acts to MCU’s declarative statement of featuring the Israeli actress in *Captain America 4: New World Order* movie (2024) as illustrated in the diagram below.

Figure 2

Speech Act Theory as an Integrated Conversation in Relation to Marvel’s Announcement of the Trailer for Captain America 4



The study has adopted a qualitative descriptive method. Data used for this research are multimodal Instagram-based spoof posts published by Arab Netizens (See Appendix B) collected in October 2023 using the hashtag #sabra marvel.

Discourse Context: The Incredible Hulk Comic Book and Sabra’s Background

According to Wikipedia², Sabra is a fictional character featured in the American Comic Books released by Marvel Comics. It was firstly appeared in *Incredible Hulk* #250³ in 1980. Sabra is a controversial character because of her appearance and how she represents Arabs as principally terrorists. The character appeared as a superhero with a blue cape wearing a white bodysuit and a

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabra_\(character\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabra_(character))

³ <https://peerlesspower.blogspot.com/2015/01/no-peace-in-promised-land.html>

tiara with a blue Star of David. Although the costume seemed unremarkable, most readers regarded it as a deliberate neglect for Arab Palestinians and their tragic history⁴.

Towards a Framework for the Argumentative Structure of Multimodal Instagram-Based Spoof Posts

This study provides an overarching framework representing the relationship between multimodal studies and pragmatics. Thus, the study adopts an integrative approach: the Harris et al. (2018) Contemporary Theoretical Framework of the Speech Act theory and Tseronis's (2018, 2020) multimodal argumentation.

Austin's perlocutionary act is the process of affecting the audiences' attitudes and actions by using words in a specific context. Moreover, Austin (1962) distinguished two crucial effects that the perlocutionary effect may cause: achieving a perlocutionary object on the one hand and producing a perlocutionary result or 'sequel' on the other hand. According to Yule (2006), a perlocutionary act is defined as a speech uttered by someone that can influence the listener. Later, Musyafir (2015) maintained that perlocutionary acts are speech acts that can affect the speech partner. In the same vein, Istiqomah (2017) classified perlocutionary acts into eight types: perlocutionary acts of (1) persuading, (2) deceiving, (3) encouraging, (4) irritating, (5) frightening, (6) embarrassing, (7) attracting attention and (8) amusing. Notably, these perlocutionary acts can be communicated verbally, non-verbally, and multimodally.

According to Clark (2022), the main objective of research on multimodal communication is to create an "integrated" account that takes into consideration all the many "modes" and "semiotic resources" that are involved in communication and how they interact with one another during communicative acts. He reaffirmed that this is consistent with a broader tendency in pragmatics that tends to move away from simplistic accounts that focus on just one factor and to take into consideration everything that contributes to the creation and reception of communicative acts.

Wrapping it up, perlocutionary acts are acts related to other people's words concerning attitudes and behavior. These perlocutionary acts can be verbal, non-verbal or multimodal. This study analyses how meaning is made in the perlocutionary act of spoof multimodal posts on Instagram towards Marvel's release of the trailer for *Captain America 4: A New World Order*.

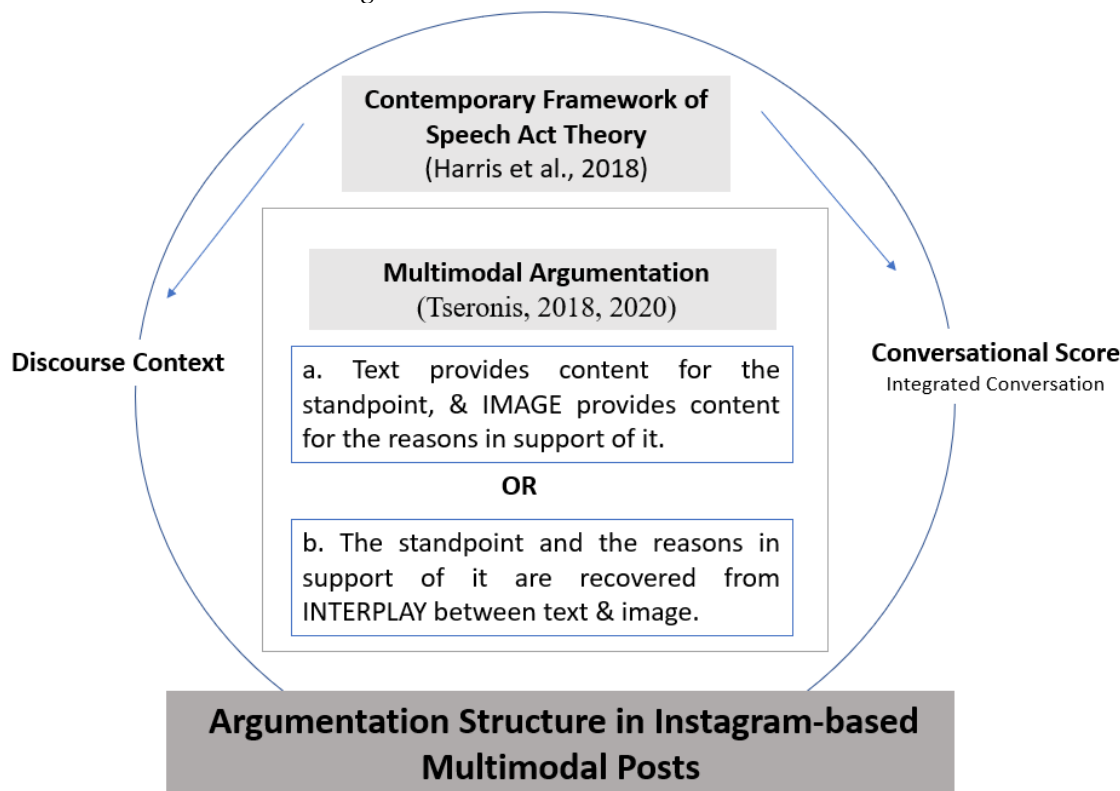
In light of the above, Tseronis' (2018, 2020) multimodal argumentation has been adopted because he has bridged the gap between argumentation theory and social semiotics. To elaborate, Tseronis (2018) has maintained that multimodal argumentative meanings are constructed based on socio-cultural and contextual aspects, a point endorsed by the researchers in this paper. Tseronis' (2018, 2020) multimodal argumentation is a "social communicative activity" where visual, non-verbal and multimodal modes are intertwined to present a standpoint/claim proposed by another party. Moreover, Tseronis' (2018) explained that multimodal analysis is skillfully utilized and exploited to form multimodal argumentative messages. Most importantly, the author identified two ways to recover an entire argument: (i) either the text that offers content for the standpoint, and the image provides content or a rationale to validate it, or (ii) the standpoint and the reasons in support of it are recovered from the interaction between text and image.

⁴ The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes back to the late nineteenth century, when attempts to found a Jewish homeland in Palestinian territory sparked tensions between Jews and Arab Palestinians, leading to an ongoing, complex war with significant losses on both sides.

In view of the above, the study attempts to analyze the arguments in the perlocutionary acts of Instagram netizens by paying attention to the modes in which it is realized in their given context, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Argumentation Structure in Instagram-based Multimodal Posts



Note. The diagram represents the adopted theoretical framework represented graphically as a systemic network.

Analyzing *The Incredible Hulk* Images and Spoof Posts

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of three images taken from *The Incredible Hulk* (Figures 4a, 5a and 6a), two images representing the announcement of the trailer (Figures 7a and 8a) in addition to six spoof posts taken from Instagram (Figures 4b, 5b, 6b, 7b, 8b and 8c).

Spoofing the original *Incredible Hulk* Comic Book was the perlocutionary acts that Arab netizens took to express their disapproval of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) announcement of its upcoming *Captain America: New World order* (2024). The image of Sabra has defined *The Incredible Hulk* #250, the American comic book published by Marvel Comics in 1980. Figure 4a shows the comic book cover page with an image of fighting the *Incredible Hulk* under the title “POWER AND THE PERIL IN THE PROMISED LAND”. She was portrayed as a self-conscious Israeli echo of *Captain America*. Her first public act as Sabra, the mutant and proud agent of Mossad, was a battle with the *Hulk*, whom she falsely believed was working with a group of Arab terrorists. Bravely, Sabra attacked the *Hulk* and robbed his voice. In Figure 4a, the image of Sabra is foregrounded as a superheroine beating the *Hulk* with her powers to save the poor boy. The vertical angle through which Sabra has been portrayed expresses power and involvement. To

elaborate, the vertical angel showing how Sabra is seen from above looking down towards the *Hulk* shows the imaginary symbolic power over him. The colors of Sabra’s costumes reinforce the association with the Israeli flag. From up close, the image shows Sabra hovering above the *Hulk* and launching sharp metal quills at him. He is on the defense, whereas she is on the offense. Moreover, Sabra’s facial expression denotes anger, mercilessness, and strength.

Paying attention to the semiotics of the verbal and visual text in light of the above-sketched background information, the illocutionary force in Figure 4a can construct the argument as follows: Sabra is a superhero/savior because she is associated with positive attributes /experiencing of fighting the *Incredible Hulk* / defending the boy. This reconstruction adheres to the scheme of argument from positive values as maintained by Walton et al. (2008), where the exact content of the values is derived from the connotations carried by the imagery and the positive associations that the viewers can infer while viewing these images.

Figure 4

Image from The Incredible Hulk Versus Instagram Spoof Post



Figure 4a



Figure 4b

In Figure 4b, the scared *Hulk* image from the original comic book has been replaced by an Arab woman- identified by her white scarf- holding a child who looks terrified by *Sabra*. Again, involvement and power are portrayed using the same vertical angle. However, the argument has been constructed multimodally through the text addition on the top at the left side: “Approved ZIONIST PROPAGANDA”, while on the right “AIPAC⁵ CODE OK” on the one hand, and the fire coming out from cars, the Palestinian flag at the top of the houses at the back of the image on the other hand. The red color in the background symbolizes anger, aggression, blood, violence and war. In a nutshell, the visual and verbal elements emphasize the negativity of the experience.

⁵ [1] American Israel Public Affairs Committee

Figures 4b and 5b are concrete examples of spoof posts. As mentioned earlier, a spoof post can be produced by manipulating any of the three constitutive elements of the original comic book: the name of the comic book, the text, the image used in it, or all of the above.

Figure 5

Image from The Incredible Hulk Versus Instagram Spoof Post



Figure 5a



Figure 5b

Figure 5a depicts a young Palestinian boy who was fatally caught in the crossfire, which forced Sabra to reconsider, for the first time, the bullish, ethnic militarism around which she has built her superhero career, as seen in Figure 5a. The image foregrounds the feelings of sympathy exemplified in the body of a Palestinian boy sprawled on the ground, and Sabra bent on her knees, showing sympathy with the dead Arab boy. Both Sabra and the boy leveled out. The lexical choice of the adjective “dead” instead of “killed” and the semantic role of Sabra as “a patient” in “IT HAS TAKEN THE HULK TO MAKE HER SEEN THE DEAD BOY AS A HUMAN BEING” reflects how Sabra is not the main reason of the boy’s death. In both cases, the images foreground the experience and positive feelings arising from Sabra’s view, which accentuates the idea that she is a heroine.

Figure 5b foregrounds the original iconic image of Sabra capturing a young kid against his free will. The argument is constructed verbally by the textual addition of “THE ETHNIC CLEANSER,” and visually by the image of the military dark green tanks in the background. Moreover, the argument is accentuated and emphasized by using the horizontal angle where Sabra looks horizontally at the viewer as if she is inviting the viewers to engage more in the violent events. This has created a relationship between the viewer and the character as it secures a total involvement with the character and, accordingly, a potential sharing of emotions of anger and resentment.

As for Figure 6a, the cartoon figures of Sabra and American celebrity Anthony Mackie, who portrayed Sam Wilson, are centralized and accompanied by caption additions such as “MCU introduces First Ever Israeli Superhero in Captain America 4”. On the contrary, the spoof post in Figure 6b has the caption “BOYCOTT,” “This is a call to boycott Marvel for their pro-Israeli propaganda,” and “The introduction of the character drew backlash as the Israeli occupation commits crimes against humanity in occupied Palestine on a daily basis.”

Figure 6

Image from The Incredible Hulk Versus Instagram Spoof Post



MCU Introduces First Ever Israeli Superhero In Captain America 4

Figure 6a



Figure 6b

As can be seen, it is the image that establishes the echoic reference to the original post. At the same time, the text has been added to evoke negative associations as exemplified in the directive speech act “BOYCOTT” and the other negative lexis “backlash,” “Israeli occupation,” “against humanity,” and “occupied Palestine.” This negative experience is emphasized graphologically by the red font capital letters. Moreover, the font and size of the letters mimic those of the Marvel logo in the background. Notably, the photo would still be identified as one if the text were missing.

Figure 7

Image for the Announcement of the Trailer Versus Instagram Spoof Post



Figure 7a



Figure 7b

In Figure 7a, the image is taken from the original issue comic book whereas in Figure 7b, the iconic figure of Sabra is accompanied by a different text such as “SAY NO TO MARVEL’S ISRAELI MOSSAD AGENT SUPERHERO”. Sabra appears in the image as if she is fighting or attacking someone. It is worth mentioning that “MARVEL STUDIOS” appears at the top left of the image, whereas ‘AMP’ is centralized in the image and stands for I am Palestinian. The image is divided into two parts: the upper part features Sabra, while the second lower part foregrounds the image captions, which again evoke negative associations. Obviously, the argument is constructed in Figure 7b verbally by the text addition by using the directive speech acts in “SAY NO TO MARVEL’S ISRAELI’S MOSSAD AGENT SUPERHERO,” “LET MARVEL STUDIOS KNOW THAT WHITEWASHING ISRAELI APARTHEID IS NOT OK,” and “TAKE ACTION TODAY.”

It is worth mentioning that the captions in Figure 7b have been foregrounded graphologically using capital letters. These verbal elements have central symbolic value in this composition. Moreover, the bright tone of the white color of these captions is another visual means of making the argumentative message of the post salient.

On another note, the perlocutionary acts of disapproval and the arguments are recovered by the interaction of the visual and verbal modes and the specific genre in Figures 8b and 8c. Alluringly, for the reconstruction of the argumentation, attention is paid not so much to what was depicted but rather to how. In these figures both backgrounds have been replaced, keeping the original superheroine agent Sabra at the front who works with the Mossad in the Marvel comics. In addition, the arguments are accentuated in Figures 8b and 8c by the captain’s “wave of anger and criticism” in Figure 8b and “Sabra and Shatila massacre” in Figure 8c.

Figure 8

Image for the Announcement of the Trailer Versus Instagram Spoof Posts



Figure 8a



Figure 8b



Figure 8c

To elaborate, Figures 8a, 8b, and 8c depict the image of the superheroine Sabra, who served as an agent for the Israeli service- Mossad, standing dressed in her usual suit with her hands leaning over her waist and her facial expressions conveying pride and strength. Next to Sabra is a young woman dressed elegantly as the actress in the Marvel film. The close distance between the two characters denotes some point of resemblance in the three figures. Moreover, they have the same stance and gaze horizontally at the viewer in an invitation to engage with them in both figures. Nevertheless, the arguments are constructed multimodally in Figures 8b and 8c. To illustrate, the background in Figure 8c has revealed the image of dead victims in coffins covered with Palestinian flags surrounded by crowds of people, which could be interpreted by the viewer as representing the Sabra and Shatila massacre that resulted in the death of thousands, mostly Palestinian refugees and Lebanese civilians by Israeli-backed militia. In Figure 8c, the verbal part of the spoof post includes the phrase: “Marvel to introduce Israeli superheroine named after Sabra and Shatila massacre,” representing a declarative speech act in the form of an announcement.

Similarly, the original image has been replaced by the image of a grieving woman in black and white, depicting the iconic Sabra and the beautiful actress in her white blazer in Figure 7b. The image of Sabra and the celebrity has acquired a new meaning when combined with the black and white background, emphasizing a gloomy, negative experience altogether. In Figures 8b and 8c, the argument of the spoof post maker has been constructed multimodally. The visual and the textual parts include three elements: Sabra, Marvel/ the film actress, and the Sabra and Shatila massacre. In this way, the two modes interact and support each other. The point of view here is that the Israeli superheroine Sabra is meant to be associated negatively with the name of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, one of the most harrowing massacres in the Lebanese civil war, thus denoting cruelty, brutality, and death of innocent people. In this case, the standpoint has been retrieved by the interplay between the text and the image, and manipulation is realized in both the image, as reflected in the background, and the textual part, which adds negative connotations to the film by associating it with a massacre.

On a general note, there is an antithesis between the character of Sabra, represented as a conceptual figure of heroism and patriotism in Marvel's Comic book (see Figures 4a, 5a, 6a, 7a, and 8a), and the way it has been portrayed in all the spoof Instagram posts where the manipulation of the image (as in Figures 4b, 5b, 8b and 8c) and the textual elements (as in Figures 6b and 7b) have reflected Arab netizens' feelings of anger and resentment towards Marvel's announcement. Thus, Instagram narratives exemplified by the netizens' spoof posts have shown the contrastive relation between the concept of heroism and patriotism on the one hand and the concept of cruelty/subversion and apathy multimodally on the other hand.

Finally, in comparing our study with the results of Tseronis and Forceville's (2017) previous study on subvertisements, we found several similarities and differences. Both studies investigated how visuals can be used either alone, with verbal elements, or in combination in a creative way to depict counterclaims. Second, both studies explored the various strategies employed by visual and multimodal discourses to leverage customary codes that can be used to argue against something (either a product/topic or concept), and how multimodal discourses of genre in a communicative environment marked by dialogical disagreement, with the aim of contesting or counter-arguing an assertion previously posited. However, unlike Tseronis and Forceville's study, our study showed that the manipulation of the verbal and the visual elements or of the visual elements alone in the genre of Instagram posts can be considered as an act of objecting or rebutting in an explicit argumentative discussion as in Figures 6b, 7b, unlike Tseroni's and Forceville's study who emphasized that manipulation occurs implicitly.

As for perlocutionary acts, Istiqomah's study (2017) on the film "Story of Kale: When Someone's in Love" has corroborated that perlocutionary acts can be categorized into a taxonomy of eight distinct types such as persuasion, deception, encouragement, provocation, intimidation, embarrassing, attracting attention and amusing. In addition to Istiqomah's taxonomy, our study has added the ninth type, which is disapproval in three different ways: visually, verbally, and multimodally.

Conclusion

With regard to our hypothesis that Instagram posts operate as instances of multimodal argument addressed in this study, the research findings have revealed that Instagram-based posts; more specifically, Instagram spoof posts as analyzed in this study, can operate as instances of multimodal argumentation. In each of the posts under analysis (Figures 5b, 6b, 7b, 8b, and 8c), the standpoint of the Instagram posts' makers, and the reasons in support of it, have been expressed via the interplay between textual and visual elements. As seen, the arguments have been constructed multimodally: multimodal affordances contribute to the construction of the standpoint of Arab netizens towards the trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order* (2024). Moreover, one can maintain that all the selected spoof posts include antitheses that vitally contribute arguments to the evaluative stance the spoof posts have adopted towards the MCU's announcement. Accordingly, in terms of the framework of Multimodal argumentation proposed by Tseronis (2018, 2020) and previously outlined in this paper, the researchers assert that an Instagram-based post represents a communicative activity where modes interact to convey a certain point of view to the viewer. Furthermore, understanding the context of the Instagram posts is a prerequisite for understanding the standpoint presented via the spoof posts.

Regarding the perlocutionary force that results from the selected Instagram spoof posts, the analysis has shown that Arab netizens disapprove of the trailer for *Captain America 4: New World Order*. To clarify, Marvel's announcement of the movie constitutes a declarative act (*illocutionary*

act) that has resulted in Instagram posts (*perlocutionary act*). The researchers claim that the perlocutionary force (*standpoint*) is ‘disapproving’ of the first trailer of the movie, which has been inferred visually (*by providing images that support the standpoint*) and verbally (*by providing text to support the standpoint*) either by directive speech acts as in ‘boycott’, ‘say No’ or declarative speech acts in their spoof posts to as in “This is a call to ...” watching the movie. In broad terms, in light of the Contemporary framework of Speech Act theory (2018) adopted in this study, the researchers view the sequence above of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts as a potential “integrated conversation” that accords with the view that “conversations are organized around contexts”: the target of the perlocutionary force by Arab netizens on Instagram in the form of spoof posts has been to change the attitude of the participants, represented by Marvel Studios’ announcement, in this particular context.

In this way, this research study has attempted to synthesize multimodal argumentation with some aspects of the contemporary framework of the Speech Act theory. It has proposed a model for the representation of the argumentative structure of multimodal Instagram-based spoof posts, which carry the function of a particular perlocutionary act (Figure 2). The analysis of six spoof posts that were originated by Arab netizens on Instagram in response to the first trailer of *Captain America 4: New World Order* (2024) has revealed that an argument can be constructed multimodally through modal coherence- the interplay between textual and visual modes in order to convey the standpoint of the spoof posts’ makers. Furthermore, the research has brought to the foreground the subversive, rather than the humorous, effect of spoof Instagram posts, with the latter being the salient effect in most previous studies yielded by reviewing the literature. Spoofing was done by manipulating the image or the textual elements or both in the Instagram-based posts under study.

Though the research findings cannot be generalizable due to the limited amount of data, the research provides useful insights into the domain of multimodal argumentation on the one hand and speech act theory on the other hand. With regard to the former, it might add to the fast-growing interest in multimodality and the plethora of studies on the analysis of multimodal texts where verbal and visual modes integrate in constructing an argument, that is, testing the acceptability of a viewpoint (Tseronis, 2018). Concerning the latter, the research might add to the research on perlocutionary acts communicated multimodally and, additionally, yields a further category to the existing classification of perlocutionary acts as proposed by Istiqomah (2017) previously referred to in this paper, which is ‘disapproving.’

This study has assured that visuals can depict disapproval; the researchers have shown that there are creative ways to use visuals, solely or in combination with text, to pose a claim or counterclaim. In order to analyze the content and to reconstruct the argumentative structure in spoof posts, we have defined these posts as multimodal texts that invite the viewers to decode their multimodal composition to retrieve arguments that are advanced to represent the reactions and attitudes (perlocutionary force) of these spoof posts’ makers.

Lastly, it can be argued that the research targets the fundamental goal of multimodal research: how various ‘modes’ and ‘semiotic resources’ interact to create meaning, which is compatible with recent trends in pragmatics: taking account of all aspects related to producing and responding to communicative acts in order to arrive at an overall interpretation (Clark, 2022). Hence, the researchers claim that this research is likely to inspire other researchers to investigate further the synthesis between multimodal argumentation and recent work on speech act theory in other communicative activities, an area of research that is still underexplored.

Since the selected Instagram spoof posts towards the release of *Captain America 4: New World Order* trailer are characterized by an integrated conversation and the interplay of semiotic modes, which constantly raises questions about the discourse context, exploring the multimodal argumentation of the trailer itself and the movie is worthy for further consideration.

Eventually, having provided an overview of the theoretical and analytical considerations that have been addressed thus far in the study of multimodal argumentation in Instagram posts, we now proceed to delineate several potential avenues that could be explored in future research endeavors. A recommendation for future research could be directed towards a computational approach with a combined semantic-pragmatic and argumentation theoretical perspective that could identify argumentative patterns in a wide array of communication genres. This approach will aid in assessing and evaluating viewers' decoding inferential process of the argumentative structures in different communication genres.

One of the salient recommendations arising from this study involves the implementation of surveys and questionnaires designed to elicit the responses of the audience with regard to the arguments presented in the reconstructed Instagram posts. For instance, a potential study would explore how different speech acts are used to convey specific types of information or elicit particular responses from viewers and investigate the ways in which these speech acts interact with other multimodal elements in the post. Additionally, future studies could explore how the use of speech acts in social media contexts may differ from their use in traditional advertising contexts and investigate the potential implications of these differences for the construction and reception of persuasive messages. This approach would enable a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which argumentative messages are being received and interpreted by viewers and would serve to enrich our comprehension of the mechanisms underpinning the effectiveness of multimodal argumentation strategies in online contexts.

Another promising area of research is investigating how different auditory elements, along with visual and textual elements, can interact with one another in the construction of argumentative messages. This could involve investigating the different ways in which these modalities are combined to create alluring narratives, as well as examining the relative effectiveness of different modalities in different contexts. Also, future research studies could be conducted on the ways in which multimodal argumentation is adapted in response to different cultural contexts. This could involve investigating the ways in which cultural norms and values are reflected in the use of different modalities. Moreover, it may be fruitful to explore the potential applications of multimodal argumentation beyond online contexts. For example, multimodal argumentation strategies could be applied in educational settings to improve student engagement and learning. Overall, synthesizing speech acts into the study of multimodal argumentation in different contexts represents a promising direction for future research, with potential applications across a broad range of domains.

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Notes on Contributors

Inas Hussein Hassan is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and currently the Vice Dean for Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research at the College of Language & Communication (CLC) - Alexandria, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Egypt. Her research interests are in Discourse Analysis, Multimodality, Pragmatics and Education studies.

Sara Yahya ElMansy is a lecturer of Applied Linguistics and currently the Head of Humanities Department at the College of Language & Communication (CLC) - Alexandria, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Egypt. She is interested in a wide array of interdisciplinary research in Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Multimodality, Cognitive Linguistics and Translation studies.

ORCID

Inas Hussein Hassan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9903-3969>

Sara Yahya ElMansy, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4618-1006>

Appendix A

(1) List of Figures (Data of the study)

Figure No.	Link
4a	https://www.instagram.com/p/CmPDyMXJn51/
4b	https://www.instagram.com/p/CiiNgpMqzho/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==
5a	https://mepc.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/SabraHulk.jpg hulk256_22b.jpg (612×268) (bp.blogspot.com)
5b	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cie_SGkJdzS/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D
6a	https://wikiofnerds.com/mcu-introduces-first-ever-israeli-superhero-in-captain-america-4/
6b	https://www.instagram.com/p/CiaVY8JKx9U/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==
7a	https://www.instagram.com/p/CiV598bPCMo/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==
7b	https://wikiofnerds.com/mcu-introduces-first-ever-israeli-superhero-in-captain-america-4/
8a	https://twitter.com/hamza_kiza/status/1608052010385051653/photo/1
8b	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cifdl5mst56/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D
8c	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cibg_cmgbzV/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D

Appendix B

(2) Instagram Accounts

Figure No.	Link
1	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cibg_cmgbzV/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
2	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cifdl5mst56/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
3	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cig7LIPs_D-/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MmJiY2I4NDBkZg==
4	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cie_SGkJdzS/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MmJiY2I4NDBkZg==
5	https://www.instagram.com/p/CiiknklNva_/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MmJiY2I4NDBkZg==
6	https://www.instagram.com/p/CibHhb1JNLK/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
7	https://www.instagram.com/p/CifHkmRtsbf/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
8	https://www.instagram.com/p/CPF_YcvhUgz/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
9	https://www.instagram.com/p/CicywqsLTNB/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
10	https://www.instagram.com/p/CiuldV_s-eP/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

	https://www.instagram.com/p/CiuldV_s-eP/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MmJiY2I4NDBkZg==
11	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cic7YFPtLj6/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
12	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cie-LdMMdCk/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
13	https://www.instagram.com/p/Co5ZhNssyhg/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
14	https://www.instagram.com/p/CiaVY8JKx9U/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
15	https://www.instagram.com/p/CidCXNMBqsS/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
16	https://www.instagram.com/p/Cih8uRpIC1R/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
17	https://www.instagram.com/p/CjEZMtmuHhC/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=
18	https://www.instagram.com/p/CjEZMtmuHhC/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=